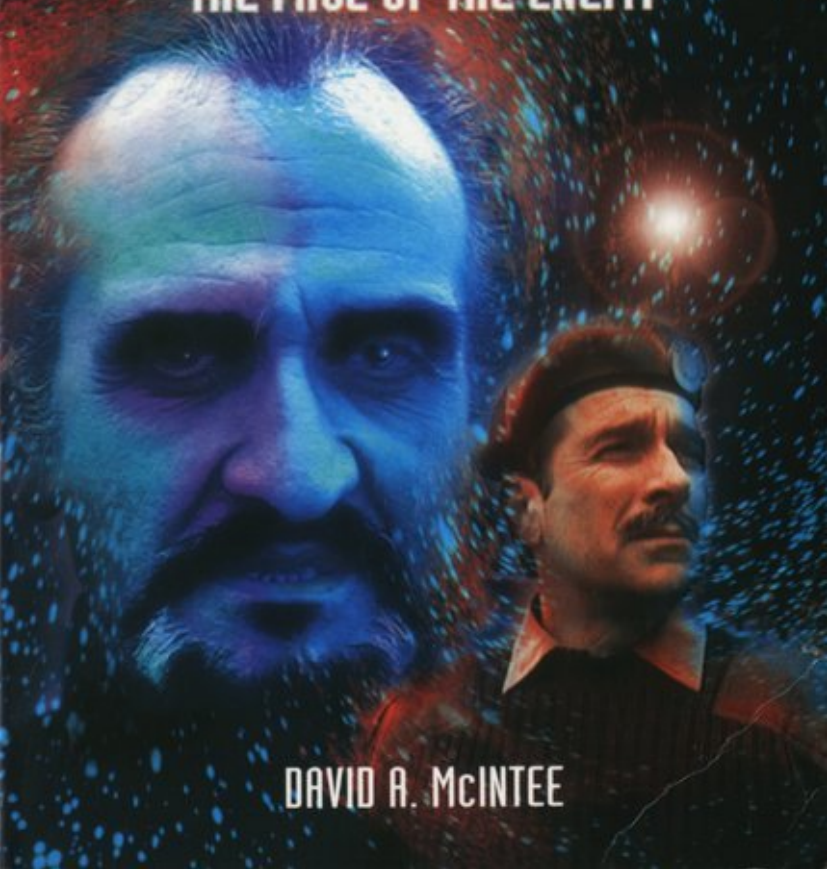


BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE FACE OF THE ENEMY



DAVID A. MCINTEE

The Doctor and Jo have gone off in the TARDIS, leaving the Brigadier and UNIT facing a deadly mystery – and a moral dilemma. . .

Robbery and murder are on the increase in Britain as disputes between underworld gangs escalate into open warfare on the streets. The Master seems inextricably linked to the chaos – despite the fact he is safely under lock and key.

Meanwhile UNIT is called in when a plane missing in strange circumstances is rediscovered – contaminated with radiation and particle damage that cannot possibly have occurred on Earth.

As the mystery deepens, what little light they can shed on the matter leads the Brigadier to believe that with the Doctor away, Earth's only hope may lie with its greatest enemy. . .

Featuring the Master and UNIT, plus Ian and Barbara, this adventure takes place between the tv stories THE DAY OF THE DALEKS and THE SEA DEVILS, and is concurrent with THE CURSE OF PELADON.

DOCTOR WHO

THE FACE OF THE ENEMY
DAVID A. MCINTEE

BBC

No dedication this time – I've learned my lesson.

‘Never did I imagine such wrath and fury,
even in the demons of the pit.’

Dracula

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HABITUAL BIT OF WAFFLE AT THE START...

When I saw Gary Russell at the launch party for this series of books he said, 'But you got up on stage in LA and said you weren't doing any more.' Not to mention hinting as much last time.

I lied.

Well, actually, at the time, the information I'd had about the Beeb's terms and plans was wrong. So once he set me right, I changed my mind. So now you know who to thank/blame (delete as applicable, and I look forward to watching the fur fly on RADW). Besides, the appeal of completing a themed Master triptych was just too strong.

Apart from Gary, thanks this time go to Stephen Cole at the Beeb, Roger Clark again, Keith Topping and Martin Day, and Steve Lyons.

I've become known for trying to get the period details right in my books, however this is a UNIT story. Therefore, in the interests of keeping the timescale infuriatingly vague, I've introduced a few deliberate anachronisms (e.g. the navy's IDPF set-up was only introduced a few years ago, and certainly not in the 1970s). But then, I'm still waiting for all those manned spaceflights launched from Britain. . . For what it's worth, though, my personal feeling is that the story is set in 1976, since *The Mind of Evil* predates Chairman Mao's death in that year, and *Zygons* is no earlier than 1979 (Maggie. . .). The Brig's retirement from Mawdryn openly contradicts *Pyramids of Mars*, when Sarah claims to come from 1980 (which fits with *Zygons* being 1979). *Day of the Daleks* and *The Time Monster* are both set in late September, which would make them at least a year apart. So *Mind of Evil* is either late 1975 or early 1976, *The Daemons* is May 1976, *Day*. . . September 1976 and *Time Monster* September 1977.

That contradicts *Mawdryn Undead*, of course, but I've always felt that, since the Doctor had to slip the TARDIS sideways in that story to escape the warp ellipse, the Earth-based sections of that story were set in some parallel universe.

Now if William Russell had been available to reprise Ian as originally planned, we wouldn't have to wonder about these things. . .

PROLOGUE

The British field headquarters of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce at Denham didn't look any different from any other well-maintained stately home in the Home Counties. Not to any overflights by aircraft or satellites, at least.

Up close, there was a permanently manned gatepost and various subtle fences and alarm systems concealed in the surrounding hedgerows. All the security was very low key, though, in contrast to the sort of bristling fortresses that were built around such facilities elsewhere in the world.

The only person on duty at the front desk at this hour was Sergeant John Benton. He was relaxing behind the desk, reading a battered Badger paperback, when Jo Grant breezed in through the door, her slight frame wrapped in a pink and lilac floral-print dress and high-heeled boots.

'Special occasion, Miss?' he asked.

She nodded proudly. 'Mike Yates is taking me to see the new Woody Allen film.'

'Rather you two than me,' Benton replied. He'd always preferred something more in the Carry On line himself when it came to comedy.

Jo smiled. 'I know what you mean – he's not really that funny, is he? But I've already seen the other film that's on. Is Mike off yet?'

'He's around somewhere... D'you want me to put out a call for him, let him know you're here?'

She shook her head. 'Just tell him when he comes in.'

'Right you are.'

Jo had known she was a little early, but it didn't bother her. In any case, the extra time would give her a chance to see how the Doctor was getting on with his newest experiment. She didn't understand more than one word in ten of what he said about the TARDIS, but he was her friend and so she cared about how he was getting on. Yesterday he had said he was sure the TARDIS was working now, but he had made that claim before, and somewhere inside she wanted to check that he hadn't been disappointed again.

The Doctor was busy at the TARDIS console when she arrived in the laboratory. Although the wide six-sided electronic toadstool belonged inside the TARDIS, the Doctor had recently removed it for ease of getting at the tools

in the lab while working. Though internally a very sophisticated space-time vessel, the TARDIS had the appearance of an old police box.

He looked up as she entered, his lined face – which still somehow seemed youthful – forming into a beatific smile under his personal cloud of white hair.

‘Hello, Jo. I thought this was your night off.’

She smiled back; it was infectious somehow. ‘It is, but I couldn’t stay away. Besides, I’m waiting for Captain Yates.’

‘He was in just a minute ago.’

Jo hesitated before asking, sure that the Doctor would have an explanation, then brought up something that had been preying on her mind for some time. ‘Doctor, how are you going to get the console through the TARDIS door?’

He grinned. ‘I just altered the TARDIS’s architectural configuration software to place the console outside at the end of a link.’

‘You mean the TARDIS can put parts of it outside itself.’

The Doctor gave her a look that suggested she was naive even to have to think that. ‘Of course. You can stick your tongue out, can’t you? This isn’t much different.’

Cheekily, she did just that, knowing he wouldn’t be offended. The Doctor made some sort of adjustment to a circuit on the console and stepped back. The console obligingly wavered and slowly vanished. The Doctor nodded to himself and went into the TARDIS.

Jo followed cautiously. The last time she had followed him into the TARDIS, it had whisked her off 500 years into the future. Inside, she found the central console back in its proper place and the Doctor openly admiring his handiwork.

‘There we are, Jo; good as new.’

‘You really mean the TARDIS is working again?’ Jo didn’t want to sound doubtful, but the Doctor had made this claim before.

‘Yes, of course. I’ve run all the tests and diagnostic cycles on the console and everything worked perfectly. Now all that’s needed is a quick shakedown flight, just to iron out any bumps.’ He looked at her, and she immediately knew he was going to invite her along. ‘Look, Jo, why don’t you co-’

‘Come with you?’ She was tempted to laugh. ‘Well, Mike will be along in a minute...’

The Doctor scratched his nose. ‘Yes, well, we’ll be back by then. This’ll just be a short trip – round the Moon, say – and we’ll be back the instant we left, like on our trip to Exarius.’

‘Not entirely like that trip, I hope,’ Jo said with feeling. On that occasion, they had been caught between thuggish industrialists and hostile aliens, with the addition of the Master to complicate things.

‘No, of course not.’

The Doctor's expression was almost – not quite, but almost – pleading. He reminded Jo of a puppy desperately eager to show off a new trick.

'All right, then.' She could never disappoint a puppy. 'But just so long as we're back instantly.'

The Doctor grinned and started operating the controls.

Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart could hear the strange electronic howling sound in his office just round the corner from the lab. It was a sound he'd heard only a few times before, but he knew instantly what it meant. He was out of his chair and through the lab door in moments, just in time to see the TARDIS fade away into thin air.

'Oh no,' he muttered irritably, 'not again.'

Static blared from the ceiling-mounted speakers in RAF West Drayton's control tower. A bespectacled flight-lieutenant adjusted some dials on the panel below it. The weakness of the transmission surprised him; he should have been able to see the Jetstream by now, if the radar track was to be believed. Outside, however, was only the autumn-tinted countryside.

'Say again, Victor six-zero.'

'West Drayton, this is Victor six-zero,' the pilot's voice came over the speakers. 'Is there any other traffic below 5,000?'

The lieutenant glanced at the nearest radar scope. 'No known traffic.'

'Drayton, I'm . . .' there was a brief hesitation. 'There seems to be a large aircraft below 5,000.'

'Victor six-zero, what type of aircraft?'

There shouldn't be any RAF or civilian planes on this flight path, but the Russians had a habit of sending Bear reconnaissance planes over the North Sea to look around until they were escorted away, usually by the Navy's F4Ks.

'I can't confirm. . . It's just a dark shape.' There was a muffled gasp from the distant pilot. 'Drayton, this is Victor six-zero. The unknown has just passed over me, less than than 1,000 above.'

The lieutenant was surprised. That was highly illegal for any plane from the UK on this flight path. 'Roger, and it is a large aircraft? Confirm.' He bent down to the flight-sergeant at the senior radar operator's station. 'It might be a Bear. See if you can find him.'

'Ah, unknown – it's going too fast to tell. Is there any RAF traffic in the vicinity?'

'Victor six-zero, only yourselves. Can you confirm your actual level?'

'Drayton, my level is 3,500; three-five-zero-zero.'

'And will you confirm that you cannot identify the aircraft?'

The lieutenant was beginning to relax. Such sightings were relatively common and got filed in a dusty box somewhere down at Air Secretariat 2a in Whitehall.

'Affirmative. It...'

There was another pause. When the pilot's voice returned, the strain in it chilled the lieutenant. Whatever was up there, he was glad he hadn't seen it. 'It's not an aircraft! It is –'

There was a sudden jarring burst of static.

'Victor six-zero,' the lieutenant snapped, more than a little spooked. 'Can you identify the aircraft?'

The static clicked off. 'Drayton, it's metallic. Crescent-shaped. It just vanished.'

'Vanished?'

'Drayton, it accelerated away so fast... I couldn't even guess the speed. How deep is the cloud cover?'

The lieutenant exchanged baffled looks with the radar technicians. The day outside was a little cloudy, but there was plenty of blue showing in the sky.

'Victor six-zero, there is broken cloud at around 8,000 only.'

'Drayton, are you sure? I'm flying through soup here.' There was a brief pause. 'I must be off course, but all my instruments read green. Can you give me a position fix?'

The lieutenant glanced over one of the radar operators' shoulder. The operator pointed out the Jetstream for his superior.

'Victor six-zero, you are bearing one-four-eight degrees, at a distance of three-five miles.' That position put him somewhere over Clapham.

There was only a strange metallic ringing sound from the speakers. Before the lieutenant could wonder what had caused it, a flight-sergeant called him over. 'Sir, it's gone!'

The lieutenant felt a little sick at the thought. 'Gone? You mean down?' He looked at the scope, searching for Victor six-zero's transponder ID.

'No, sir,' the radar operator said, a little uncertainly. 'It just... vanished from the scope.'

Now the lieutenant really began to feel sick at heart. He went back to the radio. 'Victor six-zero, this is West Drayton.'

There was only the sound of an open microphone line in reply. 'Victor six-zero, this is West Drayton. Do you read?'

Still nothing. Hoping against hope that he wouldn't be going on record as having lost an aircraft, the lieutenant turned back to the radar consoles. 'Anything?'

The operators consulted among themselves and the flight-sergeant shook his head. 'No sign, sir.'

‘Keep looking.’ The lieutenant beckoned another non-com over. ‘Keep trying them on the radio.’ The non-com nodded and then the lieutenant picked up the phone on his desk at the centre of the room. ‘Get me the duty officer at Brampton. . . No,’ he corrected himself, ‘on second thoughts get me the DI55 duty officer at Rudloe Manor instead. We have a problem here. One of the. . . special sort.’

CHAPTER 1

DI George Boucher shifted his wiry body, trying to get as comfortable as was possible in the back seat of a Granada in the wee small hours. Being on duty, he knew he should technically stay in the passenger seat, but the prospect of being positioned like an overturned woodlouse just didn't appeal to him.

However, even stretched out along the back seat, sleep didn't seem to be an option.

'Any sign of them yet?' he asked.

DC Rob Thorpe turned round in the driver's seat, brushing the shaggy blonde hair from in front of his eyes. 'Afraid not.'

Boucher wasn't surprised. He'd told the Super that nothing would come of any tip from 'Mutton' Jeff Sully; the man was just an alky trying to get some booze money now that his dole had run out. Boucher wouldn't mind some of that booze himself, now that he thought about it. Something to warm the drizzly morning a bit. . .

'Any sign of anything interesting happening at all?'

Thorpe shrugged. 'A postie chucked his fag end out his van's window – technically that's littering.'

'We're desperate, but not that desperate.'

Giving up on any hope of relaxing, Boucher straightened. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and shuddered. Bags under the eyes didn't go well with his lean face and hawkish nose. It could be worse, he supposed; at least he didn't have any hair to get mussed.

'Get on the blower, then. See if any of the others have seen any sign that this job's going on. A tenner says they haven't,' he added as an afterthought.

Ray and Bill didn't even bother to watch their flickery little monitors any more. The monochrome screens had been churning out pictures of a drab concrete parking lot for the whole three years they had been employed here in the Magnum Bank's cramped security office.

Bill had spent most of that time complaining about how dull his job was, but Ray prided himself on having some imagination. Many's the time he'd enhanced his job description a little to impress some girl he had picked up. If he really wanted to go the whole hog, he'd even sneak them in during his shift for a little, pretending that he was an investment executive working late

– or early. Of course, that meant doing a quick change into his uniform once the girl had gone and he was on a promise.

It wasn't a problem today. Ray had had to leave his usual haunt in a hurry last time, when his target's boyfriend made his displeasure clear. So this morning he was stuck with Bill, a second-hand coffee-maker and a deck of fifty-one playing cards.

'Hey,' Bill said, startling Ray out of his Solitaire game. He turned to see that Bill was – unusually – actually looking at one of the monitors.

'What?'

'There's a van just come in, post office.'

Ray was unimpressed. Admittedly, it was a little early for the post, but maybe there was a lighter load today and the driver had made his round quicker.

'He must be getting home early, then. Lucky him.'

'You reckon?'

Bill tried to be suspicious of everyone while on duty, but since they rarely saw anybody, Ray felt he tended to get a bit desperate.

'What else could it be?' Ray waved him away. 'Go on, then. There might be something that needs to be signed for.'

'I suppose,' Bill sighed as he left.

Now Ray could get back to his game of Solitaire. . .

Bill shuffled down the stairwell to the staff car park. He had suddenly worked out what was bothering him about the van – it was in the staff car park. The post always came to the front door. He wouldn't be surprised, though, if it was something in plain wrappers being delivered for that lecher Ray.

He unlocked the double doors and opened them on to the car park. The last thing he saw was a totally black figure lowering its arm from pointing ceilingwards.

In the time it took Bill to realise that the figure had been aiming a gun at the security camera above the door, two bullets had crashed through his heart.

Ray caught a vague flicker out of the corner of his eye and looked round at the monitors. The one for the car park was showing a total whiteout. Muttering to himself, he went over to the desk in front of the monitors and pressed the radio switch.

'Bill, take a butcher's at the camera, will you? It's gone west again.'

When there was no answer, Ray was surprised. Bill was nothing if not dutiful. He pressed the radio switch again, peering up at the dead monitor.

'Bill, are you there?'

He was just beginning to think about going down to the car park himself when heard a footstep at the door. Within an instant a large portion of Ray's forebrain was spread across the screens.

Ray's killer gave the security office a cursory glance, then switched off all the monitors. He took a walkie-talkie from the military-style webbing which he wore over a black jumpsuit and body armour.

'Point security, check,' he said in his Eastern European accent.

'Proceed,' a precise female voice replied.

The killer immediately drew a strong-bladed combat knife and used it to cut all the wires he could find, blacking out the security cameras and their recordings.

Next, going out to the main foyer, he drew a Claymore antipersonnel mine from a pouch. He positioned it by the doorframe, concave side facing across the doorway, and ran a tripwire across to the other side.

Out in the car park, five more men in identical paramilitary combat gear emerged from the GPO van. All were masked and carried Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles. A slightly shorter figure joined them and ushered them through the door into the building. This one wore the same clothes, but carried only a pistol. Even through the depersonalising combat gear, her feminine curves were easily discernible.

Meeting the first man outside the security office, the intruders moved up the stairwell at the double. Ray's killer set up a second Claymore at the foot of the stairs before he went.

The chief clerk of the bank always came in a few hours early. Partly it was devotion to duty and partly it was because he hated being in his flat on his own. Not through fear or anything; just boredom. At least at work he could keep his mind occupied.

Heaving his portly frame out of the creaking leather chair in which he worked, he went out into the main part of the clerks' office. It was a large L-shaped room, with partitions and desks for a dozen different staff. In the middle of the longest wall, there was a small cubbyhole that held a small sink with a tea urn and coffee-making facilities. He wondered if the staff had left any digestives in the tin last night, to go with his morning coffee.

He searched around, coming up with a couple of rich tea biscuits. As he exited the cubbyhole, he froze. A man in dark coveralls was standing at the door, swinging an automatic rifle in his direction. With a burst of speed he hadn't even imagined was possible for the last twenty years, the chief clerk

bolted back round the corner. If he could reach the alarm button under his desk. . .

He could almost feel the bullets pass his back and he subconsciously realised that the gunman had underestimated his agility almost as much as he had himself.

Moving with what felt like too much inertia to shake as much as he wanted to, the bulky chief clerk stumbled back into his little office space and fumbled for the button under his desk. His meaty hand hit it repeatedly, terrified that it wasn't working. Part of him knew it was a silent alarm, but he still felt instinctively that he should hear sirens and bells.

Instead, he heard only the shots that killed him.

The ringing telephone almost startled Ross Grant clear out of bed. His heart-beat had settled by the time he found the receiver in the pitch blackness, but he still wondered why they couldn't put volume controls on the damned things.

'Have you any idea what time –'

'Hey, I'm sorry,' the voice on the other end said hurriedly. 'I just got woken up myself. The silent alarm at the bank has gone off.'

Grant blinked the sleep out of his eyes and ruffled a hand through his neatly trimmed dark hair to try to wake himself up.

'What? Somebody's doing a job on us?'

It was always theoretically possible, but Grant couldn't conceive of anybody being brave enough – or, come to that, daft enough.

'Yes.'

The boss was going to go spare when he heard about this, but Grant knew the ins and outs of the business enough to minimise the problems before they got too big.

'Call the police. Tell them as much as you can.'

There was a stunned silence from the other end. Grant wasn't surprised – Joseph Barron had never been the brains in this firm.

'Are you serious? I mean, what if they find out who we bank for?'

'The silent alarm is linked to them anyway. If we don't call to report it, they'll be even more suspicious. Now just do it, right?'

The security guards on the third floor had discarded their truncheons and drawn their concealed – and illegally held – automatic pistols as soon as they heard the shooting downstairs. The lifts were in a corner of the clean little atrium that provided a comfortable setting for the bank's customers to hand over their valuables to the staff, but one was already on its way up by the time the guards congregated around it.

Exchanging nervous glances, each man trying to seem less worried than his comrades, the four guards took up target-shooting stances, aiming at the lift doors.

After a few seconds, there was a gentle chime and the doors opened.

The lift was empty.

Relaxing only very slightly, the guards edged forward. One of them looked up, just in case, but was too late. A hand grenade dropped through the maintenance hatch in the lift's ceiling and clanged on to the metal floor. The panic-stricken guards leapt backwards, but it went off immediately. One man died instantly. The others, partly shielded by his body, were merely blown away from the lift.

Before they could recover themselves, the doors to the other lift slid open and an armed intruder swung out from where he had climbed up the lift cables.

Three brief bursts of fire sent the remaining guards' shattered bodies to the floor.

Boucher thought about killing 'Mutton' Jeff Sully. Drown him in a vat of gin, maybe. It seemed a fitting punishment for the false tip; and Boucher now knew in his heart that this was a wild goose chase. Any firm worth their salt would have got on with it by now.

To think that he'd got out of a perfectly good bed just for the joy of watching a November dawn in the City. Even the cracks in his bedroom ceiling were more inspiring than that.

Thorpe tried to suppress a yawn. He was a good lad that way, devoted to duty above and beyond the call of common sense. Boucher rummaged in his wallet for a ten-pound note and handed it over to Thorpe. Enough was enough. 'Here you go, Rob.' No doubt the money would help add something to the beer-gut that was slowly developing on Thorpe's burly torso.

Thorpe took the note with a cheeky grin. 'Told you.'

Boucher tried not to think about it. 'Don't get too cocky – you're writing the report on this one.'

'Me?' Thorpe twisted round in the seat. 'But I got a date –'

'And I've got a migraine. You do the report.'

Besides, Thorpe's typing was a damn sight better than his own. At least the report would be legible. There again, considering their failure, maybe he should just do it himself and hope the Super would find it too confusing to haul him over the carpet.

'Four-five,' the radio sputtered. 'Four-five.'

Thorpe grabbed the handset. 'Four-five responding, over.'

'Silent alarm triggered at the Magnum Bank. ARV units en route –'

Boucher didn't catch the rest of the message, as Thorpe let out an exclamation.

'That's two streets down from here!'

Boucher sat bolt upright. 'Get moving and give me that.' He took the radio handset. 'All units, this is Boucher – get down to the Magnum Bank, pronto. Silent alarm triggered. ARVs are on the way just in case.' He looked round at Thorpe. 'Looks like I won after all.'

Thorpe didn't take his eyes off the road as they hurtled towards the corner. 'Come off it, guv. This is a totally different job.'

'We don't know that – it's only two streets away. That's close enough to qualify as a success where 'Mutton' Jeff's concerned.'

'I don't see that. Look, maybe it's just a void bet. I'll give you your tenner back.'

The intruders who had killed the Magnum Bank's security guards didn't even bother to drag the bodies out of the way. Their leader had briefed them on the precise schedule they were to keep to, and none of them was going to disappoint her.

The leader looked at a detailed chronometer on her wrist as they swept the third floor's main corridor. It amused her to wonder how comfortable any customers would be if they could see the blood on the soft chairs or the bullet hits in the soothing pastel walls. Some people were probably stupid enough not to be put off by such things.

A pair of bronzed double-doors were set against the cleanest wall, flanked by watercolour landscapes and potted palms. One of her team scurried forward and attached a small coil of blasting cord to the metal bar that stretched across the doors at chest height. She stepped aside and he set off the charge. A small thud, and the halves of the bar dropped heavily to the floor.

The woman kicked them aside and turned her attention to the two combination locks that were now revealed. She could sense the nervousness around her now that her troops had essentially played their part. They were undoubtedly worrying about the possibility that she might fail to open the doors. She knew better, of course, and was perfectly calm.

With total confidence and certainty, she twisted first one combination lock, then the other. Smiling under her mask, she grabbed one door and pulled it open. One of her men rushed forward to tug on the other door.

Inside was a narrow corridor of sorts, lined with polished metal. The corridor didn't have walls as such, but was bordered by dozens upon dozens of rectangular drawer fronts. Safety deposit boxes, all full of valuables. Most she could do without, but some were rather more interesting.

She indicated two of her men. ‘You two, with me. The rest of you, secure the upper floor and roof. There should be no one there.’

Holstering her pistol, she consulted a small notepad before moving deeper into the safety deposit room.

One of the other cars had reached the Magnum Bank first, Boucher saw; Shaw and Collins. They were already at the door as Thorpe pulled up at the side of the road.

Shaw had somehow managed to open the front door – he’d probably woken up the security guards – and the pair were just entering.

Before Boucher could do more than open the car door, he saw Shaw and Collins going into the foyer of the bank. There was an immediate sharp crack and an explosion sent them both flying.

Boucher and Thorpe ducked instinctively. ‘Get the bomb squad!’ Boucher snapped, but Thorpe was already speaking into the radio, doing just that.

The woman who led the robbers checked her watch at the sound of the blast. The police had responded more efficiently than she had expected, but even that possibility had been accounted for in her planning. She tipped the contents of the last targeted safety deposit box into a sack held by one of her men.

‘Time’s up. Move out.’

Boucher unlocked the firearms locker in the car. He and Thorpe were also trained in firearms use by SO19, the Metropolitan Police’s armed response unit, and their car was technically an ARV, or armed response vehicle.

He handed one of the Smith and Wesson .38 revolvers to Thorpe and checked the other himself.

Thorpe, looking a little pale, cleared his throat. ‘Are the shooters really necessary, guv?’

‘I hope not, but if they’ve planted bombs, they’re not going to be too bothered about carrying shooters of their own.’

By this time, the rest of Boucher’s squad had arrived, and one of the younger detective constables had reached him.

‘Powell, you keep everybody out of there until the bomb squad and SO19 get here. Rob and me’ll see if there’s another way in through the car park.’

Powell nodded, doubt written all over his face. Boucher then looked at Thorpe with a ghost of a smile. ‘Come on, then, lad. There’s villains to catch.’

Keeping low, they darted across the road and slipped down the car-park ramp. The car park was a concrete arena filled with hiding places for any

number of criminals. There was no one there, but Boucher wasn't sure if that was a good sign or not.

Two empty cars were parked, but they probably belonged to staff or security. Boucher would make sure the bomb squad checked them out anyway. More interesting was the GPO van sitting near the staff entrance. Its doors were open and it looked quite abandoned. Noticing a few cartridge cases scattered on the floor, Boucher wondered what they had been shooting at.

Thorpe appeared from the other side of the van. 'Guv, you'd better see this.' His tone was grim and Boucher could guess what he'd found.

A uniformed security guard was lying on the concrete floor, spattered with drying blood. Quite an old bloke too, Boucher noted – probably not far off his pension. Few things shocked or depressed Boucher these days, but this did both.

'There's another one inside,' Thorpe added, 'young geezer. And all the cameras are wrecked.'

'Now you know why I brought the shooters.'

Boucher had hoped he was overreacting. It wasn't as if he was a good enough shot to be Dirty Harry anyway. He went into the little security office and winced at the sight. Thorpe, meanwhile, went through the interior door to the stairwell. Upon hearing the door open, Boucher spun round and hurried to pull Thorpe back.

'Are you daft? If they booby-trapped one door, they'd have to be pretty stupid not to do the other one.'

'Unless they plan on coming out this way.'

Boucher tried to think a good put-down, but couldn't. Thorpe had a point. He eased the door open gently and looked up the stairwell that led to the first floor. A tiny glint near the fourth step caught his eye and he knelt very carefully to examine it.

'I win this one,' he told Thorpe and pointed. It was a tripwire connected to a small curved metal box. 'Guess what?'

Carefully so as not to break or pull the wire, he tied his handkerchief round it. Even the Super would be able to spot it, if he ever got out from behind his desk.

He stepped over the wire and led Thorpe up to the first floor. The door at the top opened on to a small cloakroom. Beyond that was an L-shaped communal office. Their quarry had clearly been here, since there was a dead man lying on one desk, and several of the partitions were torn and pitted from bullet hits. Boucher noticed that the wounds on the corpse's expansive torso were grouped quite close together, which suggested rapid fire. Whoever was here was carrying at least one automatic weapon. He considered pulling out,

but decided otherwise. Someone had killed Shaw and Collins, and he wanted to know who and why.

There was a pair of lifts outside the open-plan office, but both were jammed on the third floor. Boucher didn't mind – the lifts would be detected coming up and at least he now knew where the enemy was. Or had been, since there was nothing to suggest that they were still here.

It took only a few moments of searching to find a fire door that led to a set of emergency staircases linking all the floors. They briefly looked in on the second floor, but that was empty.

The third floor seemed empty too, though even from the staircase Boucher could see the open doors to the safety deposit room across the atrium. Four more bloodstained guards were crumpled on the floor, one in a little ornamental pool which was now tinted red. Making sure there was no one in sight, he went across to the doors and looked in. Many of the safety deposit boxes had been opened.

He was distracted from his inspection by the crunch of boot on fallen plaster. It had come from the direction of the lifts. Boucher saw a dark figure – black fatigues and a balaclava – half turned away from them. He was just about to signal to Thorpe, when he heard the DS's voice call out across the corridor: 'Armed police! Halt and put your hands up.'

The figure turned, and for a moment Boucher thought they were going to get away with having lost the element of surprise. Then he saw the AK-47 in the intruder's hands and knew that Thorpe had just given up his life. Boucher tried to save that life, fighting down the rising horror he felt so as to get a clear shot at the gunman before the gun fired.

A harsh crackle filled the air and Boucher flung himself headlong at Thorpe, hoping to shove him out of the line of fire and behind the meagre cover offered by the drinks machine.

Thorpe's blood sprayed into Boucher's eyes, momentarily blinding as well as shocking him. When their bodies collided, Thorpe crumpled in a broken heap, rather than flying sideways. Boucher forced himself to keep going and pressed himself into the shadow of the drinks machine. He could now smell Thorpe's blood all over his jacket and shirt and wondered if he was going to throw up. That wouldn't be much of a way to go when the intruder came for him.

He listened out for the sounds of the robber's approach, certain that he was about to be killed, just like Thorpe – Thorpe, who had never even known what hit him. Boucher pressed himself away, perhaps trying to hide from Thorpe's accusing body, from the smell of his blood. But how was he supposed to hide from the memories? Moments later he heard the lift doors close.

Boucher was surprised. He wanted to risk looking round to see if the guy

had really gone. Then he decided that may be exactly what the killer wanted. Well, he wasn't going to be so obliging, not for this one.

After a few seconds, during which Boucher could almost feel his ulcer grow with worry, there was still no more sound. He couldn't stay curled up behind the drinks machine for ever, so it seemed that the decision had been made for him.

Boucher peered round the machine, aiming his revolver at the space where he remembered the killer being. No one was there; so he had gone up in the lift after all. Boucher didn't know whether to be relieved or distraught. True, he was alive, but the killer had got away while he had been hiding behind a Coke machine.

All the time, he was still listening, praying for some sign that he could still catch up to them. It would mean leaving Thorpe's body, but he felt Thorpe wouldn't mind. He almost didn't notice the noise when it started, but that was only because it was so unexpected he thought he must be imagining it. There was a helicopter somewhere up above.

The woman who had led the assault on the bank was gratified to see the lights of the approaching grey and green Lynx helicopter against the wintry morning sky. There was a JetRanger hovering nearby as well – the local police, no doubt – but she wasn't worried about it. The security forces here weren't armed as a matter of course, so there was no danger to her from the other helicopter.

One of her men fired a warning burst at the police chopper. At that distance it was in no real danger from the gunfire, but the pilot clearly understood the message and backed off.

Her own transport ignored the altercation and descended towards the flat roof of the bank. There was no purpose-built helipad, but it was open enough and strong enough to land on. She swung herself into the front seat of the Lynx, next to the pilot, while her men clambered into the passenger section behind. All had gone as planned.

Boucher had stepped through the door and out on to the roof before his brain had time to remind him that these criminals wouldn't hesitate to blow a hole in him. The last of them was just climbing aboard what looked like an army helicopter whose rotors were still whirring madly. Obviously it wasn't planning to stay.

He considered giving the standard warning, but doubted he would be heard over the rotors. And it hadn't done Rob Thorpe much good either. 'Sod it,' he muttered, and started shooting at the last man boarding the helicopter.

He could see the sparks where his shots hit the helicopter's door, and the last man tumbled into the passenger section. One of those already on board leaned forward slightly, returning fire with his Kalashnikov. Boucher ducked behind a nest of chimneys. When he risked looking round again, the helicopter had lifted off and turned away, and was now heading in the direction of Battersea. The Met's own chopper was following, but somehow he doubted it would do any good. Not that he was an expert, just jinxed – or so he felt.

They had got away from right under his nose. He didn't even know who they were, though the combination of balaclavas and AK-47s screamed out 'IRA' in his mind. He had just about managed to fight back the tears of shame when the first uniformed members of SO19 found him.

CHAPTER 2

Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart was beginning to get rather annoyed with his errant special scientific adviser. It was now several days since the TARDIS had vanished from the Doctor's laboratory at Denham and there had been no sign of it since.

The last time the Doctor had vanished, the Time Lords had returned him immediately, and something similar had happened when he took Axos away from Earth. However, the Brigadier was beginning to think more in terms of the four-year gap between his battles with the Yeti and the Cybermen; or the two years after that when he had turned up just as those Nestene things launched their first attack.

Perhaps the Doctor had indeed got the TARDIS free from the Time Lords' control, but he should have notified the Brigadier before leaving. And as for abducting Miss Grant. . . What was he supposed to tell her uncle at the UN, if he started to wonder where she was? He could hardly tell Britain's Ambassador to the UN that his niece was probably on the other side of the galaxy by now.

It could be worse, of course. As Doris had told him, at least things were quiet for the moment (touch wood). Trust Doris to try to cheer him up, and thank heavens she didn't know what he really did at UNIT. He had just got used to the idea of being with someone again and didn't want worries about his job to jeopardise things. He wasn't sure he could take that again, not so soon. She knew he was in security, of course, but seemed to think it was some sort of anti-terrorist posting, trying to foil the IRA and suchlike.

The Brigadier's phone interrupted his mood; probably for the best, he decided. 'Yes?'

'A call from Rudloe Manor, sir,' Carol Bell's voice told him. 'The DI55 duty officer on station.'

'Put him through, Corporal.'

'Brigadier? Captain Valentine here. We'd appreciate it if you could send someone down here – we're in a bit of a quandary. . .'

People always were when they had to call in UNIT, the Brigadier reflected. They always were.

DI Boucher stepped over the body of Magnum's armed guard, trying to avoid the pools of blood.

The third floor still looked like a set left over from a Charles Bronson movie, but it smelled more like the back of a butcher's shop. The lights and glass panes in the doors were all smashed, and the air was still thick with the stench of fresh blood. Three more private security guards – useless cowboys, Boucher thought – were sprawled in the corridor. The pine-trimmed walls were marred by darkening blood splashes and tags marking bullet hits.

Whoever had done this, they weren't the usual rent-a-thugs you could pick up down the Log Cabin Club in Wardour Street. The one who had killed Thorpe had done so with an assault rifle, not the usual pre-war Webley or sawn-off shotgun. That must mean some pretty hefty influence.

'I'm sorry about Rob,' a sharp voice said from behind him.

He turned to find the slightly stoutish scene-of-crime officer, Wallis, in her white boiler suit, running a hand through her wavy red hair. 'I know it must have hit you pretty hard –'

'You could say that.' He was trying to be flippant, but felt sure he hadn't quite managed it. He had got Thorpe killed, after all, by charging in instead of waiting for SO19, who at least wore flak jackets instead of tweed ones like himself. 'What have you found?'

Wallis gave him a long look and he expected her to say something about seeing a doctor, but then she turned away. She pointed at some holes in the wall with her glasses, which she had removed for that purpose.

'Numerous bullet hits around the place. All 7.62 mil, and the spent cartridge cases are rimless, which means you're probably right about them using Kalashnikovs. Plural.' She indicated a scorch mark on the floor at the lift door and then some more pits in the plastered walls. 'We think this was a grenade. Hopefully we'll be able to dig out enough of the casing to identify the model. Then at least we can check it against known IRA preferences. Which reminds me, there's a couple of blokes from Special Branch who want to take a statement from you.'

It just got worse, Boucher thought. 'I don't suppose they left anything more useful – fingerprints, hair samples, a wallet with a driving licence?'

'No. But we can estimate their numbers. From the pressures on the seats in their van, among other things, we think there were seven altogether. We'll know more later.'

Boucher nodded and took a deep breath. He really didn't want to go on today, but some part of him knew that this was the best way to set about catching the killers. 'I'll come down tomorrow. I suppose I'd better go and talk to those Special Branch types now.'

He went down in the lift and, when the doors opened on to the ground floor, he was greeted by a familiar face. The man was a barrel-chested six-footer with facial bones just on the right side of heaviness, and neatly brushed

short-back-and-sides. Boucher might have guessed they'd meet at some point during this investigation, but he hadn't expected it to be quite so soon.

'Why, if it isn't Mr Grant. Shouldn't you wait till we actually find someone to pin this blagging on before you turn up to accuse us of breaching his rights?'

Grant took the insult in his stride. 'We all have our callings. In fact, Detective Inspector, you and I are on the same side this time. I'm here to represent the bank's owner, who has given me power of attorney while he is unavailable. I am, if you like, the boss here. I assure you, I am not going to defend whoever you catch for this one.'

Boucher blinked. 'Am I having hallucinations or are you trying to develop a new career as a stand-up comic?'

'Neither. Now why don't you go and plot your arrest with young Thorpe, before you totally corrupt him.'

Boucher flinched, almost instinctively making a fist. He calmed himself forcibly, but saw to his chagrin that Grant had noticed the reaction. 'As well as murdering several security guards, the robbers also murdered DS Thorpe.'

Grant at least had the decency to look shocked and apologetic. 'I'm sorry about that, Boucher. He was a good copper.'

Boucher agreed automatically, wondering if Grant meant a word of it or was just being polite, then he slowly moved to one side to let the lawyer get on with his business at the bank.

Ross Grant had a law practice in a small office overlooking the edge of Hyde Park. He had been brought up in council tenements during the war, but evacuation to Kingsdown in Kent had given him enough love for nature to make him feel the need for greenery around him.

That said, he was by no means a country boy and had been more than glad to return to the Smoke after the war. Thieving in the city had been a very different kettle of fish to apple-scrumping in Kent; it hadn't taken long for him to be caught. Not by the police, worse luck, but by an older and wiser thief who worked for the Richardsons – just like the shopowner he had stolen from. He couldn't even remember what it was he had stolen now. Something pretty stupid, no doubt; he had never been much good at it.

He was smart at other things, though, and had won a scholarship to university. He knew that some of his superiors in the business had bought it for him, but he didn't mind. Their investment had paid dividends; he had successfully got several of them off serious charges.

Whoever had robbed this bank, though, he wouldn't defend, even if it was his own brother. Growing up in the war and coming of age amidst the Richardsons and the Tibbs, and the ever-present Kray Firm, Grant had seen violence, of course, and had never shied away from cracking the skull of any copper or

rival gangster who got in his way, but that was professional. This indiscriminate slaughter just wasn't right, was it?

He stood on the third floor of the Magnum Bank and watched sadly as the last of the guards was carried out, the sheet on the stretcher covering a face that didn't need to maintain an expression any more. The damage and the unpleasant burnt-metal scent in the air reminded him all too much of that childhood in the Blitz.

The stocky Joseph Barron emerged from the lift and surveyed the scene with keen interest. Grant found the lack of disgust on Barron's pudgy features somehow offensive. He knew he shouldn't, that this was just Barron's way, but feelings had a way of insinuating themselves into one's thoughts.

'Jesus, what a mess,' Barron commented, none too discreetly.

He approached with a smooth speed that belied his apparent bulk. In fact he was quite muscular under the business suit, but he had a wide face that tended to give an initial impression of rotundity. The glittering little eyes under his solid black brows gave him the aspect of a well-fed ferret.

'What did they get?'

'Too early to tell. The old bill aren't finished in the vault. I want to know who did this.'

'Fancy being on the prosecution this time?'

'I don't think it's likely to get that far.' Not once the boss got wind of this, anyway. 'They killed seven of our people.'

Barron nodded. 'That's pretty bad, but these things happen sometimes. They all worked for -'

'And how many of them knew that?'

He hoped Barron wasn't going to get into one his moods where he had to have the last word. Grant just wanted to hit him when that happened. These were legitimate employees. That made them innocent bystanders in his book, and killing innocent bystanders was something he had never condoned.

Barron shrugged. 'Have you told his nibs?'

Grant was relieved at the change of tack. 'Not yet. I want to find out what the total losses are first. He'll want to know. Besides, I'd better make it by appointment, so he knows to get back to Aylesbury to see me.'

'So, what do you want me to do?'

'Put the word out on the streets. There will be a... substantial reward for anyone who provides information about any job scheduled for this morning.'

Barron perked up. 'How substantial?'

'That depends on who the nark is, doesn't it? If we get lucky and one of the guilty party spills his guts on the others, he gets a quicker death.'

* * *

The directions given to the Brigadier by Valentine turned out to lead to a small wood just outside Little Storting, near Aldbury. The view outside UNIT's Land Rover was one of undisturbed countryside, wet and darkened by the winter sky.

A rough farm track led into the wood from the B-road that bisected it, and a group of RAF police were standing around another Land Rover at the turning on to the track. Captain Yates brought the UNIT vehicle to a halt, and Lethbridge-Stewart rolled down the window.

'Is Captain Valentine around?'

An RAF sergeant nodded. 'Yes sir, about a quarter of a mile down this track, at the site.'

'Thank you, Sergeant.'

He nodded to Yates and the Land Rover turned off the B road and down the muddy farm track. For a minute or so, he could see only the grey and green growths of moss-covered tree trunks and the rusty carpet of leaves. Then he saw the tailfin of an aircraft through the trees.

A thin-faced RAF officer, his scrawny frame wrapped in a greatcoat, stomped across the damp ground to greet them.

'Captain Valentine?' the Brigadier asked as he exited the Land Rover. He hadn't brought his own greatcoat, but relied on a thick pullover to keep him warm. He was already regretting that decision.

The UNIT truck that was following them entered the glade and Yates went over to get Benton to fall the men in.

The man nodded and brushed at a runny nose. 'Glad you could make it. This is pretty weird.'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked around slowly, trying to work out what was so weird. The ground was churned in a huge furrow and a line of trees had been shattered by the aircraft's impact. Wreckage was scattered throughout the woods, with wings torn off and left lying as if they had simply been carelessly discarded. One of the landing legs hung from the branches of a tree a short distance away.

It was a Jetstream 31, and the identification codes on the tail, fuselage and wings all matched those of the missing Victor six-zero. The paint was scored and covered with dried bubbles where it had clearly been melted. The fuselage was split like the skin of an overcooked sausage. Worst of all in the Brigadier's opinion was the smell that pervaded the woods: burnt rubber and heated metal, with a hint of fire and brimstone.

It was a chilling place to be and the Brigadier wasn't enjoying it much, but to him it seemed like a perfectly ordinary crash.

'Why exactly did Rudloe want us down here?'

Valentine gave him a sickly look. 'Inside.'

He led the Brigadier towards the open wound in the side of the fuselage. Lethbridge-Stewart exchanged a glance with Yates before following, but the captain looked just as baffled as he was.

‘Apart from what I’m about to show you, the control tower at West Drayton had a conversation with the pilot shortly before the plane vanished from radar. The pilot claimed that he’d been buzzed by something unusual and that it wasn’t an aircraft.’

This piqued Lethbridge-Stewart’s interest. ‘I’d like to have a recording of that, if it’s possible.’

‘We’ll arrange it.’

The inside of the plane was thick with stale smoke and slippery from the water and foam that had been used to stop the plane burning up. Ignoring the grime that smeared his uniform, the Brigadier followed the slightly gagging Valentine to a broken body that lay across the aisle. He tilted his head to look at the slack-faced corpse. Whoever it was had been a middle-aged man with thinning hair cut in a military style. One plate of his dentures had fallen out and his heavy jowls hung sideways, making his face seem lopsided.

‘I know this man from somewhere. . .’ the Brigadier began.

‘You should do,’ Valentine said. ‘It’s the Right Honourable Frederick Jackson, MP.’

‘The Junior Armed Forces Minister?’ The Brigadier could have kicked himself.

Valentine nodded. ‘Fingerprints check out. Now here’s the strange thing. This plane disappeared a week ago. It crashed last night.’

‘Did you know Jackson was on board?’ Surely, Lethbridge-Stewart thought, the loss of a government minister would have attracted more attention.

‘No. It gets better – or worse, depending on your point of view. I spoke to Jackson on the phone this morning.’

The Brigadier nodded. ‘Then one of them was – or is – an impostor.’ Perhaps even an Auton replica. Unfortunately even he could hardly just ask a Cabinet minister to prove that he was who he said he was. ‘The first thing we’ll have to do is make sure of who and what this body is – a full autopsy.’ That, at least, UNIT could arrange quietly. He scrambled out of the wreckage. ‘Captain Yates!’

Mike ran over. ‘Yes, sir?’

‘Stretcher party on the double, Captain. We’re not too far from Ashbridge, are we?’

‘About fifteen miles, I think, sir.’

‘Good. Get on to Dr Henderson there and tell him we have a little job for him.’

Joseph Barron was quite enjoying himself. There were two ways he knew to find out what the word on the street was. The first was to go round every back alley in London, buying drinks for parasites whom he would rather just bury in a nice secluded quarry. The second was to find a copper who was willing to talk about what tips they'd received.

'You said something about a surveillance operation,' he reminded her gently. 'I bet you hope it isn't surveying us now.'

Wallis smiled slightly, but drew the thin covers more tightly around herself instinctively. Barron liked that; it was kind of cute.

'It was this morning. They expected that there might be some sort of job on at one of the building society offices.'

'And what gave them that idea?'

'A tip-off.' She rolled over, kissing his shoulder. 'You know, all this is highly confidential.'

Barron tried to keep a straight face at that. 'I know, but... Mr Grant's put up a fifteen-grand reward. Don't you want to share that?'

'Course.'

'Well, then, I have to know who gave this tip-off, so I can ask him some questions before your friend Boucher does. If he gets the names first, do you think he's going to hand the reward money in to some charity? Course not. He'll keep it himself, even though he already gets paid for doing that job. That ain't fair, is it?'

'I'm in the police too, you know.'

'Yeah, but you're SOCO. That's -' not a real copper, he was about to say, but stopped himself. She'd entertained him quite well, so he didn't want to repay her by insulting her. 'More a technical job,' he finished. 'Solving a case would be sort of an extra.'

'That's true... I think it was "Mutton" Jeff Sully. He hangs around at the Dog and Ferret, down Piccadilly.'

That was all Barron wanted to know. Now he could leave her any time he felt like it. Right now, though, he felt like staying another hour or so.

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart waited in Dr Henderson's cluttered office at Ashbridge Cottage Hospital. If the body did prove to be that of an impostor, or not even human, he could rely on Henderson to keep quiet about it. The simple fact was that Henderson was one of the few medics who had had experience with aliens, having treated the Doctor when he arrived back on Earth. He had kept quiet about the Doctor's alien physiology, and so the Brigadier had occasionally brought him in for advice on specialist medical matters.

So far there was nothing to suggest that the body was alien, but, given the identity of the victim, Lethbridge-Stewart wanted to make sure that only

people he could rely on knew about the apparent death of a Cabinet minister.

The door opened and Henderson came in, peering at a clipboard through plain NHS glasses. The Brigadier liked that; it showed that he wasn't in the medical business just for profit, or he would have designer frames.

'Well, doctor?'

'Hmm?' Henderson looked up from the clipboard. 'He's human enough, if that's what you mean.'

The Brigadier shouldn't have been surprised, but somehow he was all the same. Something about his time working with the Doctor seemed to have rubbed off.

'Could he have been altered by plastic surgery?'

Henderson shook his head. 'No signs of that, and despite anything you might see on television, that wouldn't have changed his fingerprints – and they're definitely Jackson's.'

With this one sentence the Brigadier's life had suddenly become very, very complicated. He now had to face the fact that the Junior Armed Forces Minister might well be an alien impostor.

'Well, there is one thing... ' Henderson hesitated, clearly reluctant to mention whatever was troubling him.

'Yes?'

'According to Jackson's medical records, he had an appendectomy fifteen years ago. There's no post-operative scar on the body, which still had a perfectly healthy appendix.'

'How is that possible? Even if he had an identical twin, they wouldn't have the same fingerprints.'

'Your guess is as good as mine, Brigadier.'

Henderson looked dismayed at not being able to come up with a definitive answer, and Lethbridge-Stewart felt some sympathy for the man. He had clearly done his duty to the best of his ability, and yet it hadn't helped.

'Thanks for your time anyway, Dr Henderson. I'm sure the clues you've provided will be valuable.'

'I hope so, Brigadier.'

'I'd best be off, but I'd like you to keep the body on ice for a while.' It was always possible that they might need to examine it again.

'I'll deal with it,' Henderson said. 'And it's been a pleasure seeing you again.'

They shook hands and the Brigadier left the hospital. Sergeant Benton was waiting with the Land Rover out in the car park and started the engine as soon as the Brigadier got in.

'Where to, sir?'

'Back to HQ, Sergeant.' Lethbridge-Stewart replied, then took out his walkie-talkie and thumbed it on. 'Greyhound to Trap Two.'

‘Trap Two here,’ Yates’s voice replied.

‘Captain Yates, we’re going to need a scientific opinion. Leave Osgood in charge of the site and meet me back at HQ, over.’

‘On my way, sir. Out.’

Grant was sitting in the manager’s plush office at the Magnum Bank when Barron returned around nine that night. The tally of what had been removed from the safety deposit boxes was looking quite bad. The raiders had targeted very specific boxes, obviously taking only what they had come for. They had even ignored a box with a priceless Fabergé egg inside.

Such precise knowledge could only mean one thing – an inside job. Perhaps the chief clerk. . . It was strange that he was in at the time. Perhaps he had got cold feet when they killed the guards and was killed for that reason?

‘Mr Grant?’ Barron asked cheerfully.

It had been a long day and Grant wondered how he managed to be so alert. ‘Any luck?’

‘Lots, as it happens.’ He grinned and licked his lips. ‘Including a name.’

‘I’m listening.’

‘Didn’t you think the police arrived awfully fast when the alarm went? It turns out that they were having a little surveillance get-together just round the corner. They’d had information from a “Mutton” Jeff Sully that a blagging was in the offing.’

Grant recognised the name immediately. He had defended the man in court a couple of times, for drunken affrays. He rose. ‘Did you happen to find out where he is?’

‘Piccadilly.’

‘We’ll take my car.’

He would find out who had killed the men whose families he had had to call that afternoon. Afterwards, perhaps he would be able to sleep without wondering whether his conscience was going to make a nuisance of itself.

Mike Yates was able to snatch a quick cup of coffee and a corned beef sandwich before the Brigadier returned to his office. Yates could tell at once that whatever the Brigadier had learned at Ashbridge, it hadn’t been reassuring. Having said that, though, he didn’t seem any more troubled than before.

‘The Doctor’s timing in going off on his little jaunt has been bad, after all,’ the Brigadier said. ‘I wondered if we ought to bring Miss Shaw back in?’

‘Again?’

Mike doubted she’d like that. She had worked well enough when she was brought back after her leave of absence following the business at the Glasshouse, but in the short time they had worked together he had learned to

respect her sufficiently to know that trying to bring her back out of retirement once more would just antagonise her. He was sure the Brigadier knew that too, but he respected his men enough to ask for their opinions too.

'Anyway, I gather she's off in America somewhere. A lecture tour with Stanton Friedman and Carl Sagan apparently.'

'So I'd heard,' the Brigadier agreed. 'That's why I want you to find us a new scientific opinion.'

Mike had anticipated that and, like any good officer, had used his initiative. 'I tried to reach Anne Travers,' he offered, 'but she's now working at Whitehall and unavailable. I'm still waiting for a reply from Rachel Jensen.'

'If this is an aviation mystery, perhaps we should try to get some help from the RAF side,' the Brigadier suggested. 'That chappie from the British Rocket Group, for example. Captain Valentine might know someone.'

'I'll get on to it.'

'Believe me, yours is the easier task, Captain Yates. Now I just have to find some way to persuade a Cabinet minister to take a full medical to prove he is who he claims to be. And I can hardly tell him why.'

'If he's genuine it's a political embarrassment and if he's an impostor then it'll alert him that someone is on to him?'

For once, Mike Yates was actually quite glad that it was the Brigadier who was the commanding officer of UNIT's British section and not himself. It was a position he quite fancied some day, whenever the Brigadier got a much-deserved promotion, but Yates knew in his heart that he would much rather leave situations like this to someone who was better qualified to deal with them.

'Exactly. You know there are times when I hate this job.'

Yates didn't believe that for a moment.

'Still, perhaps it won't come to that. We can always assign surveillance to watch him for a bit until I can get backing,' the Brigadier continued.

'What about Lieutenant Beresford?'

He had been brought in to replace Yates when Yates was promoted. Yates hadn't worked with him much yet, but he seemed dependable enough.

The Brigadier mulled it over, then nodded. 'Fine idea, Captain. Send him in on your way out.'

The Dog and Ferret was one of those watering holes off Piccadilly Circus that somehow managed to be not only clean and well cared for, but also somehow dingy and unlikeable at the same time. Ross Grant had never been able to work out quite how this could be. He sometimes thought it must be the way it was very much a club for working in – working girls mingling with men

looking for jobs to do. Perhaps it was a too much of a locker room in which people prepared for, or cleaned up after, trips to the real world.

Grant liked his stout of an evening, but he wouldn't come to a pub like this to get it; not now that he had crawled his way up in the world.

'What a tip. It's like paddy's market in here.'

Barron shrugged. At least Grant had the face to fit in around here, if not the clothes, but Barron looked even more out of place – more like he'd come in just to ask directions to the nearest second-hand car showroom.

'Needs must, when the devil bites your bum.'

'Where's Sully?'

'Just a minute.' Barron went over to the bar, which was tended by someone who might have been described as a bear of a man if it hadn't been for the fact that he was totally hairless. He had ex-wrestler written all over him. 'Two Guinneses, Tony.'

Somehow Grant wasn't surprised that Barron was familiar with this bar. He might wear the expensive suits that came with rank in this business, but he had no discrimination. As far as Grant was concerned, the whole point of getting rich by bypassing the law was so that one could have the best of everything, and give one in the eye to the toffs who thought their birthright entitled them to the good stuff. He didn't like Guinness either.

'Time, gentlemen, please,' Tony called out from behind the bar as Barron returned with the two pints. Various scruffy men in the bar glanced at time-pieces, but Tony was giving the room a challenging glare and nobody complained about the last call being at half-past nine tonight.

Barron jerked his head back at Tony. 'I thought we might want some privacy. Just in case.' He nodded towards a grimy, dark snug at the rear of the bar. 'Tony says Mutton's sitting there.'

'Good.'

Grant wanted this chat over with quickly. Something as simple as finding out what a cheaply paid informant had found out and told the police shouldn't take very long. With any luck he'd be home in time for the late film. It was a Western and he was particularly fond of those.

'Mutton' Jeff Sully didn't look much like the stereotype police informant. He was a scruffy young man with lank blond hair and unwashed jeans and denim jacket. He was handing some money over to an equally unkempt young brunette who seemed to have a cigarette permanently glued to the corner of her mouth.

Barron snapped his finger. 'Bitch, out.'

Grant bit his tongue. He'd have to do something about Barron's choice of words, but now was not the time to show dissent in the ranks.

The woman looked about to protest, but Grant caught her eye and shook his head. 'You'll have to excuse my friend, he's been feeling a little sick lately. Keep the money and take the night off.'

She didn't need to be told twice and Grant noticed – although it could have been just his imagination – that she even looked relieved. Sully started to rise indignantly, but Barron sat down next to him, blocking his way. Grant sat on the stool on the opposite side of the table.

'Mr Sully, how nice to see you again.'

Sully gave him a suspicious look. 'Hey, whatever it is, I wasn't there, right? I've been here since opening time –'

'No, no, no. Nothing like that. Now don't tell me you don't remember me?' This was like trying to win the trust of a small child.

Sully clearly didn't, and he leaned forward to peer at Grant's face under what passed for the lighting here. Grant tried not to breathe in, lest he choke.

'Hang on. . . Yeah, I remember. It's Grant, right? You were my lawyer when I went to the magistrate's court for fighting with that silly cow up west. Got me off too, didn't you?' Sully broke into a grin and started to gesture to Tony. 'Here, I'll buy you a drink for that!'

'I've already got one.' Grant pointedly took a sip of his Guinness, and regretted it. It always had an aftertaste of Germoline, he thought. 'Actually, I came to see if you could help me.'

'Anything,' Sully agreed eagerly.

Not that Grant could trust this eagerness; in his experience it tended to last only as long as the person in need was actually present.

Grant leaned back, hoping to relax Sully by seeming relaxed himself. 'My friend and I heard that you knew something about a bank robbery that was planned for this morning.'

Sully shrugged. 'I hear a lot things. Some I forget.'

Grant had expected that. 'Well, perhaps this will jog your memory: I am representing the bank that was robbed. There is a reward for information leading to the. . . capture of the criminals. For information.'

Sully mulled this over, his lips moving silently as if to prove that he was thinking. 'Well. . . I heard that maybe there was a blagging set up for the City. A building society head office, I heard.'

'Except that it wasn't,' Barron said.

'Disinformation in case of leaks,' Grant suggested. 'The leader may have only informed his crew of the real target when they were en route.' But that was a question Grant would rather discuss in private, not with a hired gossip on the other side of the table. He turned back to Sully. 'And where exactly did you hear this?'

Sully assumed a haughty expression. 'I can't tell you that. Those of us who report the truth have a duty to our sources. It's like a priest in the confessional.'

Grant let a few seconds tick by, so that Sully could wonder what he was going to do next. 'I see your sense of humour has improved. I want to know who passed on this information.'

'I don't know. I got a phone call with the word. I dunno who was at the other end of the line.'

'Anonymous tip-off, eh?' Grant suddenly slapped his hand on the tabletop, startling Sully. 'You think I'm bloody stupid?' He leaned in closer to Sully, this time ignoring the rank air that surrounded him. 'Sully, do I look like a torn cloth?'

Sully's eyes glazed over, trying to interpret the non sequitur. 'I dunno what –

'You don't? Well, you seemed pretty sure earlier on, or else why the hell were you trying to stitch me up?' Grant was thoroughly disgusted with this putrid little man. No professional villain worth his salt would allow himself to get this far gone. He reached across, grabbed Sully's head and slammed the man's jaw into the table. He tried not to wince at the wet sound of teeth cracking. He abhorred violence as a rule, but he could live with it when it was necessary as part of the job.

'Oi,' Tony growled from behind the bar. 'You want to get me closed down?'

A typical mistake, that, Grant thought.

Barron stood, spun on his heel and marched over to the bar. Tony backed off, but he had already committed his sin. Grinning cheerfully, Barron lifted a bottle of Newcastle Brown from a table as he went and smacked Tony across the side of the head with it. Unlike in the movies, it was Tony's skull which cracked under the impact and the beefy bartender reeled backwards.

'Silence is golden,' Barron told him. 'You never heard that song?'

'Yeah, OK,' Tony slurred.

'Then why did you just speak again?' Barron hit him once more and this time Tony fell to his knees. 'Can't you take a hint?'

'I'm sorr–'

The bottle crashed down again. This time it broke.

Tony rolled on the floor, groaning and reaching feebly for the gash on the side of his head. Blood was now pouring down the side of his face.

Barron chuckled slightly and held up the jagged bottleneck. 'Now can you take a hint?'

Tony nodded shakily.

Barron grinned cheerily. 'Good boy. Sit. Stay.' He walked back to Sully's table, giving Grant a 'What can you say?' look.

Grant wondered momentarily what his daughter would think if she knew that this was the sort of work that was paying her tuition fees. Then he remembered Sully, who was cowering back into the snug's wooden bench. 'Who gave you the nod?'

'I dunno,' Sully stammered.

Grant had hoped he would have more sense; he didn't want to have to hit him again. Sully must have read that in his eyes, because he started shaking more violently.

'I swear it, Mr Grant. I wouldn't tell you no lies. . . I owe you, don't I, for getting me off before. All I know is I get this phone call last week from some guy who says there's a job on for this morning at a building society in the City.'

Grant looked deeply into Sully's eyes, but could see only fear there, rather than deception. Perhaps he was telling the truth after all. . .

'What did he sound like?'

'Who?'

'The nark's nark,' Barron snarled, 'who d'you think?'

'Oh, er, right. . . I dunno. Sort of foreign. Not German or French or that, but like he learned English instead of being born to it. You know what I mean?'

'Did he give any hint as to who it would be?'

Sully shook his head frantically. 'No. Nothing. . .'

This time Grant could see something other than fear in Sully's eyes and he tensed himself to act again. Sully saw the movement and held up his hands.

'Wait! Maybe one thing. I don't know what he meant, but he said something about it being a crew. A sixty-nine crew or something. I didn't understand.'

Grant did, or thought he did. The Americans sometimes referred to a team assembled for a robbery as a crew. Perhaps that was a clue after all. He smiled and tossed a few fivers on the table.

'Thank you, Mr Sully. I believe that should cover your outlay on the young lady.' He turned to Barron. 'Take Mr Sully home, would you? It wouldn't do for him to get mugged in his weakened condition, would it?'

He nodded to Sully and made for the door. The last thing he saw as he stepped out into the night was Sully looking woefully apprehensive as Barron stood. Grant didn't mind; fear of being around Barron should keep him quiet for a while.

George Boucher – he was off duty now and so not bothered about rank – sat in front of a half-bottle of Smirnoff, trying to ignore the racket in the rest of the pub. He would rather have simply gone to an off-licence and got peacefully drunk at home, but they were all closed by the time Special Branch had finished trying to work out from his conversation whether the robbers were Irish or not.

He supposed they were, going by their weapons and mode of dress, but couldn't legally swear to it. He had hoped to reflect here, and allow Rob Thorpe a proper send-off, but somebody was constantly whistling from the other end of the bar, disturbing up the moment with jarring squeaks.

Unable to think straight – a prerequisite of feeling sorry for oneself and building up a really worthwhile depression – Boucher gritted his teeth, as the tuneless whistling stabbed at his eardrums again. It was like fingernails on a blackboard. Boucher could only take so much of this. He turned to the whistler and snapped his fingers. 'Hey, you.'

The whistling stopped. 'What?'

'Do you have a favourite tune?'

'A what?'

'A favourite tune,' Boucher repeated, letting his tone become more forceful, 'do you have one?'

'Yes.' The gorilla who had been polluting the air looked puzzled.

'Then try whistling that instead.' Anything would be an improvement.

'I was. Who gives a damn anyway?'

'I do!'

Boucher swung a punch at the annoying git's head, but was too drunk to connect properly, or keep his balance. The whistler snarled and backhanded him across the face, his signet ring digging a furrow along Boucher's cheek.

Boucher reeled back, as much from the drink as from the impact, but recovered before an imminent collision with a glass-filled table. He straightened his lean shoulders and booted the whistler in the groin, while the man waited for the apparent forthcoming punch. The whistler doubled over, even further than Boucher did when a burly barman punched him in the stomach. A meaty pair of hands grabbed Boucher's shoulders and steered him through the door. A hefty kick sent him out into the street, where he collided painfully with a parked car.

Somehow, the evening's close seemed perfectly fitting. Not enjoyable, but fitting.

By the time Ross Grant had returned to his penthouse flat in Holland Park, the figures he'd been calculating had become so much mush in his mind – he had never had that much mathematical skill, hadn't even passed the A-level. Still, he had called Aylesbury before leaving the bank and was now sitting in his living room with a large box of half-assembled plastic pieces before him, surrounded by little pots of paint.

He had hoped that working on the model Tiger tank he was building would somehow soothe his mind after the annoying meeting with Sully. However, even with a bottle of stout by his side and The Who on the turntable, his

attempts at relaxation merely succeeded in making him think more about the problem at hand. He hated criminals. He was one himself, of course, but he was one who knew what he was doing. People like Sully were just pests.

He had been trying to dry-brush a weathered texture on to the Tiger's hull, but soon felt compelled to put down both the plastic and the brushes, before his frustration at the robbery got the better of him.

Anyway, Tara would be home for the weekend and the smell of paint and glue always made her hard to live with. Doubtless he would be in for another session of demands that he grow up and get a life. Such was the price he paid for custody, he reflected. He had always thought that Nicola had been daft to let him take care of the divorce proceedings himself, but these days he sometimes wondered if maybe she hadn't been more canny than he gave her credit for. Their daughter's tantrums would have driven her mad.

At least he'd had the sense to pack her off to boarding school. That way she was not only out of his hair but also protected from the business he was in, as well as getting a better upbringing than he had done. Well, he hoped so, anyway. He argued with her often, but it was for her own good, and he was so proud of the progress she was making. Someday he might even tell her, if he could find a way to do it without worrying that she'd read perceive some deceit or falseness into his words. Women seemed to have a tendency to read deceit or falseness into his words, but he had never been able to work out whether it was because of him or them.

Cursing to himself, he pushed the table with the modelling materials away. He wasn't going to get anywhere with it tonight – he just couldn't find enough concentration within him to do a proper job.

He turned on the TV instead and sat back, but the telephone rang before could really get into the film. If it was Barron, he'd give him a good talking to... He picked up the phone.

'Yes?'

'Dr Conran here, down at Aylesbury. Just wanted to let you know that your request for a visit to your... client has been approved. You'll be expected at one.'

'Thank you. I'll be there.'

He hung up the phone. Now he just had to think of the best way to break the latest news to his nibs. Even watching Clint Eastwood decimate a town full of badly-dubbed Mexican bandits wasn't going to help distract him from that one.

CHAPTER 3

Mike Yates was back at the Jetstream crash site with the pre-dawn frost, but at least Sergeant Osgood had a brew-up on the go in the mobile HQ. Osgood was more of an engineer than a soldier, but Mike was of the opinion that he might have missed his true calling. Perhaps not a chef, but he could probably run a fair motorway café.

The frost had set the sleet and mud around the crashed plane as hard as concrete, though it was rough enough not to be slippery.

‘Isn’t Valentine here?’

Osgood shook his head. ‘He went to collect some sort of civilian expert that you asked for, sir.’

Yates was glad, but wondered why the man had gone himself. Surely he could just have called his choice of expert on the phone. Still, it didn’t matter as long as he had found someone.

‘Did he say who he had in mind?’

‘Someone from the RAE at Farnborough, I think, sir.’

Yates nodded. The Royal Aircraft Establishment was highly respected, and certainly had the relevant scientific geniuses in residence. ‘Right. Was everything all right here overnight?’

‘Quiet as the grave, sir,’ Osgood said morosely.

Mike understood well enough; he’d missed a date himself last night. At least the mobile HQ had a couple of bunks stashed away behind the cab, or poor old Osgood would have frozen in a tent. Like the Brigadier, Mike had quickly discovered that his men worked better if they could get a good night’s sleep.

A car horn peeped from outside and Mike jumped down from the mobile HQ to see a beige Range Rover bouncing along the frozen track towards them. Mike could make out Valentine in the passenger seat, with another man driving.

The newcomer who emerged from the Range Rover was in his late thirties and obviously still fit. He looked as if he’d been a sportsman in his younger days and had kept in shape. There was only a touch of grey starting to show at his temples. From the back seat, a woman emerged. Dressed in eminently sensible trousers and sweater, with a belted jacket, she was around the same

age as the man. She had shoulder-length dark hair and striking features that looked as if they could become quite intimidating.

Valentine came over, indicating Mike. 'This is Captain Yates. He's in charge here at the site.'

The man proffered a hand and an easy smile. 'Pleased to meet you, Captain, though I can't say I understand what you need me for.'

'We'd just like a scientific examination of the wreck,' Yates said. 'Radiation metering, some samples taken, that kind of thing. Mr...'

The man smiled and seemed a little embarrassed. 'Oh, sorry. I'm forgetting my manners, aren't I? Ian Chesterton.' He held out a hand, which Mike shook firmly. 'And this is my wife, Barbara.'

DI Boucher trudged into the cluttered third-floor office he shared with half a dozen officers and slumped into his chair. Only one other person was in; one of the younger hotshots fussing over a report he was writing. Boucher momentarily imagined Rob Thorpe in his place, typing up the report on the Magnum Bank...

Boucher wished the reality had been that easy. The report he'd written before going to the pub had been far harder to write than anything else he could think of. He wanted to give up on it, as if not filling in all the official details would somehow make what had happened less real. As if denying it had happened meant that Thorpe, Collins and Shaw would all walk back into work as normal this morning and leave him feeling less guilty.

Of course, he knew this wasn't the case. Instead, it would probably look like he was trying to cover something up. Or was that just the guilt he already had talking?

Boucher had wanted to join the police ever since he saw *The Blue Lamp* in his local cinema as a child. Even though Jack Warner got shot dead in it, he had still wanted to join the force. And even though he'd seen more murders and woundings than he could reasonably count, he'd still never thought such a thing would really happen to someone close to him. Nobody ever did, until it happened. You could pretend that you were prepared for it, that you would deal with it as part of the job... but you were deluding yourself. And unlike Jack Warner's *Dixon of Dock Green*, Thorpe wouldn't be miraculously resurrected to enjoy a long life on Saturday nights. Boucher's sister, Janice, hadn't even wanted her son to join the force, but George had got him in and kept an eye on him. Somehow it didn't seem like such a good idea any more. Rob would still be alive if Boucher hadn't gone against her wishes.

Boucher turned his attention to the files on his desk. 'Mutton' had told them about a job on in the City, so perhaps he'd heard other things too, since. He dragged the phone across and dialled his number from a card index.

When the call was answered, he recognised the gruff voice, but it didn't belong to Mutton.

'Tom, is that you?'

'George? What's up?' DI Tom Elson asked.

'I should ask you that. Is Mutton there?'

'He's here.' There was a pause, then, 'You haven't heard?'

Boucher suddenly felt that he knew what was coming next without having to be told.

'Mutton is dead. Looks like burglary.'

Ian wasn't really sure what UNIT – a name he knew only from an occasional vague news report in the silly season – thought he could do for them. They had asked quite politely and paid him compliments about his teaching at the Royal Aircraft Establishment's technical college at Farnborough, so he obviously wasn't in any kind of trouble. It was flattering to be asked to consult on something important – almost as flattering as it had been to take part in that year-long exchange programme to NASA – but he would have thought that the military and the security services would have their own experts to deal with this sort of thing.

He could still feel Barbara's disapproval of his agreement to give up the weekend, but the fact that she had come along too suggested that she wasn't really unhappy about it.

The young officer who had invited them into the mobile headquarters for a refreshing coffee seemed personable enough, and they had chatted briefly about Ian's National Service days in the RAE. He hadn't actually enjoyed them much at the time, but it couldn't have shown to his superiors and now he was glad of it. Without their letters of recommendation, he would probably still be unemployed after being AWOL from Coal Hill School for nearly three years.

Instead he had been given a lecturing position at the RAE technical college. He and Barbara had at first been reluctant to tell the story of where they had been in that time, thinking that they would be ridiculed like those UFO contactees in the 1950s. So they were extremely surprised when a government office they had never heard of before had corroborated certain details of their story to the authorities, explaining that they had both had dealings with a traveller known only as the Doctor. None of which had stopped their Coal Hill colleagues from assuming that the pair of them had simply eloped to Gretna Green. And after all those assumptions, of course, they had done exactly that, on the first anniversary of their return to Earth.

'I'm not really much more than a teacher even now,' he was telling Captain Yates. 'I'm unsure what I can do for you here that a proper air-accident investigator couldn't do ten times better.' Still, it did sound like it would be more

fun than the usual weekends.

'We've already contacted those people,' Yates admitted, 'but we'd like you to take a look over the wreck from a physicist's viewpoint, just to see whether anything feels odd about it.'

'Should it?' Crashes weren't that mysterious these days. Rare, yes, but hardly a physics mystery.

'Well, let's just say we have reason to believe there might be, but we don't know what. I can see that that isn't very helpful, but I'm afraid it's the best background I've got.'

Ian hadn't expected any more. 'I can take some radiation readings, some samples for chemical or metallurgical analysis. Is that what you had in mind?' He hoped it would be enough to help.

'Oh, that sounds ideal,' Yates agreed. 'Ordinarily the Doctor – our own scientific adviser – would handle this, but he's... unavailable at the moment.'

Ian briefly wondered who this other scientist was, but it wasn't really his place to ask and it didn't affect his job any. Probably someone who'd got the job through the old-boy network. He came perilously close to allowing himself a laugh at the thought that by 'the Doctor', Yates might have meant...

'Not in the TARDIS, by any chance?' Barbara asked.

'Well, yes... Of course,' Yates exclaimed. 'You must be that Ian and Barbara. The Doctor has spoken about you from time to time.'

'Nothing bad, I hope.'

Now Ian did laugh. 'Finally got himself a respectable job, has he?'

'I don't know if I'd call it that,' Yates said with a grin.

Nevertheless, this explained a lot as far as Ian was concerned. He must have been chosen because of his experience with the Doctor. Which meant that perhaps this crash had something to do with aliens of the sort they had met before.

'All right, I'll get on with the tests, then.' He looked to Barbara. 'Will you be OK here?'

'Yes, of course. But I'd rather do something useful if possible.'

It tied in with her drive to become a schoolteacher, Ian had realised long ago, this idea that everyone ought to be doing something useful.

Yates nodded and for a nasty moment Ian thought he was going to make the mistake of suggesting that she rustle up a nice cup of tea for them all. Instead, though, he beckoned Valentine over.

'Have you brought that recording of the conversation between West Drayton and the Jetstream?'

'Yes, it's in here,' Valentine replied, handing a briefcase to Yates.

Ian caught a brief glimpse of files and tape spools inside.

'You don't hold any military rank, do you?' Yates asked.

Ian gave him an ironic smile. 'As a matter of fact, I do. When I was appointed to Farnborough, they gave me an MoD grade of Higher Executive Officer, which I'm told is equivalent to the rank of major in the Army for jobs like this one. And Barbara has seen just as much as I have.'

Yates grinned disarmingly and handed the case to Barbara. 'Since you wouldn't be here if you weren't cleared, you can go over this. See if there are any discrepancies between the reports and the recording.'

Barbara opened the case with a smile.

Boucher hammered on the Super's office door with more force than was wise. Just habit. 'Come in,' a voice called from inside and Boucher went through.

As always, Superintendent Morgan was squeezed into a suit that had fitted him some time before he was moved sideways to his current desk job. He came round his desk to Boucher with a disapproving look.

'You didn't have to come in today, George. You need some time –'

Boucher wasn't going to stand around waiting for the Super to tell him how he should rest and prepare for counselling.

'Why wasn't I told that Jeff Sully was murdered last night?'

'You're on compassionate leave until the end of the week. Not to mention personally involved. There are laws against you getting involved in this case.'

Boucher ground his teeth. 'Mutton was the one who told Rob and me that something was up in the City yesterday. Him turning up dead right afterwards can't be a coincidence.' He paused briefly before adding, 'Sir', as an afterthought.

The Super glared at him. 'Some of the drawers in the sideboard were opened. There are dust-free spots from which objects have been taken and the weapon looks to be a sawn-off shotgun.'

'So it was made to look like a burglary gone wrong, so what?' It wasn't that unusual.

'Listen to Columbo, here... ' The Super didn't smile, but nor did he relent. 'Or maybe – just maybe – there is a vague possibility that it was a burglary gone wrong. Despite what the papers would like the public to think, the evidence does occasionally support our theories. That's why it's called evidence.'

'So somebody just happens to burgle one of my informants on the night we interfered in a robbery he warned us about?'

He hoped the Super wasn't going to protest about it being a different job as well. Of course, the report he'd written was a little vague on that point... .

'Well, that's the second option, isn't it?' Morgan admitted. 'The evening after one of our men gets killed, his partner goes off and gets blitzed, and later the man who sent them to the scene gets killed as well. You're lucky not to be on the front page of the Sun this morning.'

Boucher could hardly believe his ears. 'You expect me to believe somebody thinks I killed Mutton? Now who's been watching too much bloody telly?'

'Don't be daft,' Morgan sighed. 'I just mean that it's another sign that the villains have the upper hand. They're busy wiping out clues we're going to need, while it seems 'we' are off down the boozer.'

He poured out a cup of coffee from the urn on the sideboard, and slid it across to Boucher.

'Here, you need this stuff more than I do.'

Boucher took it gratefully.

'Look, George, I know you want to catch hold of these bastards yourself. Any of us would feel the same, but there's a conflict of interest. If you arrest anybody for this – especially if it's anybody you've nicked previously – that git Grant or one of his lawyer mates is going to be all over the press, claiming you're just fitting somebody up to satisfy a lust for revenge. The next thing you know, the TV is doing one of their bloody Tough Justice specials, and the guilty party not only goes free but makes a tidy profit out of selling the story, while you and me get to collect our dole.'

Boucher momentarily imagined yelling out his intentions to go ahead anyway and storming off. . . . But unfortunately he was painfully aware that the Super was right. There were plenty of people who could never admit that the other side in an argument was right but Boucher wasn't one of them. He hated its happening, though.

'All right, I'm sorry, guv,' Boucher said, hoping he sounded sincere. 'It's just. . .' What was he supposed to say? That he had got his nephew killed? That he was now hiding from his sister, because he knew she'd want to give him a kicking for it? 'Rob was a good mate and a fellow officer. I can't just sit back and forget about it.'

'You mean even if you took some time off, you'd just worry at it?'

'Yeah, exactly,' Boucher said gratefully. 'I need to keep my mind focused.'

Morgan tried to keep a straight face at that.

'Just let me deal with it in my own way.' If only he knew what his own way was.

Morgan mulled this over briefly, then said, 'All right, George, but you're on light duties. There was some sort of barney down at the Dog and Ferret in Piccadilly last night. Since you seem to be in a thirsty mood, why don't you go down and ask around there?'

Boucher examined the Super's features for any sign of wit or deception. Surely he knew that that was Sully's usual watering hole?

'The landlord made a complaint about one of his bar staff being assaulted,' Morgan explained, as if he could read Boucher's mind. 'There's no suggestion of a link to the Sully case.'

Which didn't mean there wasn't one, Boucher knew. He forced a smile, and it took less effort this time. 'Right, gov. I'll just be on my way.'

Morgan nodded. 'And, George, that's your lot. I'm sticking my neck out as it is, just letting you work today. If you cock this up, you're on your own.'

Ian Chesterton was more than a little curious himself about how this aircraft came to be here. He had walked along the tops of the wings and now made his way through the shattered interior, passing the sensor of a Geiger counter over every exposed surface.

The crackling stayed relatively constant all along the length of the fuselage and the span of the wings. At least that meant no leakage from some radioactive cargo. It was more like the effects of a widespread fall-out, but there had been none that he knew of. Not in Britain, anyway; the government could hardly cover that up, surely?

Sighing, he switched off the counter and made his way back to the mobile HQ, where Barbara was listening to the tape of the plane's disappearance. She looked somewhat dazed.

'Anything interesting?' he asked.

'They report seeing a UFO and then there's all this static. Assuming there was some kind of spaceship up there with them, almost anything could have happened.'

Ian heartily agreed. Between them they had been materialised, dematerialised, flown in rockets, jumped time-tracks – you name it. There were plenty of things a sufficiently advanced technology could do to an Earth aircraft.

'What about you? Any luck?'

'The plane is slightly radioactive – nothing dangerous,' he added hurriedly. 'It's just that it's higher than the usual background radiation.'

Her eyes flicked downwards. 'It's still not a nice thought.'

'No. Look, d'you want to go home and check up on John? If being around that plane makes you uncomfortable...'

'It's all right. Besides, my mother's been saying for simply ages that she wants to spend some time with her grandson. Now that she has him for the weekend, how will it look if either of us goes rushing back?'

'That's true.' Barbara's mother could take things the wrong way, and could easily interpret such an event as a slur on her baby-sitting abilities. 'Who baby-sits the baby-sitters, eh?'

Joseph Barron had always wanted a big house in the country; something like Mick Jagger's place, maybe. Unfortunately, what with all his commitments in the Smoke, the best he could manage was a couple of weeks a year in a hotel that used to be an old manor house.

His actual home was rather more modest – a semi in Cricklewood. He'd done his best, though: gravel on the ten-foot drive; a 'Dunroamin' plaque on the wall. . . He didn't really know why he wanted a big country house, just that he did. The grass being greener, he supposed.

He fancied having a little domestic assistance as well – a nice Swedish maid would be good to start with. In fact, it would be good full stop. In his suburban semi, he had to do all the housework himself at present and he hated anything that smacked of work. If he had wanted to work he would have got a proper job, not turned to crime before he was even out of short trousers. As it was, washing the dishes was his pet hate, which was why he usually let them pile up in the sink for a few of days, until he had no clean plates left.

He was in the middle of working his way through the pile when he heard his front door open. That was unusual enough – nobody else lived in the house – but doubly so considering his dangerous nature. Taking a carving knife from the draining rack, he went through to the living room, just as someone else came in.

The figure that stepped through the door was short – no more than five foot two – but looked very voluptuous, even in the smart suit she wore. Her jet-black hair was trimmed quite short, with only the vaguest hint of a side parting. It looked soft and smooth, like velvet, or a cat's fur.

She gave the knife an amused-looking glare from large and expressive eyes. 'Joseph; how good to see you again. I can see you haven't forgotten how to treat a lady.'

She smiled engagingly and Barron somehow felt pleased. He tossed the knife back through the kitchen door and it clattered into the sink.

'Ms Kyle,' he said delightedly, 'I didn't expect you to come round to the house.'

Not that he was disappointed. Far from it, actually; she was certainly the most attractive visitor he'd had for quite a while. It wasn't so much her looks as a certain vitality in there somewhere. She was vibrant.

'Your message was quite insistent, so here I am.'

'Oh, that. . .' He shrugged. 'Yeah, well, there's been this little hitch –'

She cleared her throat and gave a fixed smile. 'I hope you're not going to tell me that there's a problem meeting your promises.'

She helped herself to brandy from the decanter on the sideboard.

'What, me?' Barron was insulted. 'You saying I look like the sort of person who'll back out on you?'

Marianne Kyle shook her head firmly. 'Of course not.'

'Good.' Barron calmed himself; never an easy task, but made easier by his feelings for her. Some people you just couldn't be hostile to, even when you

probably should. 'Anyway, it's actually more a warning about a problem you might have. Jackson never made it.'

Kyle stiffened. 'He what?'

'There was some kind of accident and his plane crashed. According to the news, the wreckage is spread over half of Little Storpington.'

Kyle put down the brandy, businesslike at once. 'Were there survivors?'

'Apparently not.'

Kyle lifted her glass again, tapping the rim. 'But the authorities did converse with the aeroplane before it was lost?'

What did she think Barron was? A walking newspaper? 'Yes. As we expected, though, UNIT have sealed off the area.'

She frowned, delicate brows drawing together. 'UNIT?'

Barron nodded, assuming that she didn't know who UNIT were. 'They're a United Nations-sponsored anti-terrorist force. The people who do all the secret military stuff.'

'And deal with "new and unusual threats to mankind".'

He was surprised at that. She hadn't even known who the prime minister was when they'd first met, yet she knew about UNIT? More likely she was just trying not to appear too thick, so he ignored the discrepancy. She closed her eyes and Barron could almost hear the wheels of her mind ticking over.

'This loss is unfortunate,' she admitted, 'but not a mortal blow to operations. Our forgers will have to do something of a rush job on a replacement, but I'm certain they're up to it.'

'Well, I hope so.'

Kyle nodded in agreement. 'You'd better.' She draped an affectionate arm around his shoulder. 'Because if they're not, the first loose end UNIT will find is you. And I don't like loose ends.'

The Aylesbury Grange Detention Centre wasn't officially a prison. During the Second World War, it had been home to those scientists – some no doubt of Axis extraction – who were too untrustworthy to let within a hundred miles of Bletchley Park, or any of the experimental installations of the time, but at the same time were too expert in their fields not to be put to work for the British cause.

After the war, it had housed the occasional defector from the East; usually GRU officers en route to the capitalist joys of a flat in suburbia.

Expansive grounds surrounded the main house, which was almost as big and grand as Buckingham Palace. Small concrete blockhouses were discreetly positioned in the woods around the perimeter, while soldiers from the Military Police patrolled the gardens that had reputedly been designed by Capability Brown himself.

Despite the troops and bunkers, Grant had always felt that it quite resembled the school that Tara attended. After being waved through the electrified main gate, Grant guided his Jaguar up a gravel drive that was covered by a fine sleet.

Two guards were waiting for him at the front door and checked his pass again. He was their current prisoner's lawyer, however, and so was the only person accorded much freedom of access. They should be almost used to him by now, he thought.

'Mr Conran is expecting you, Mr Grant,' one of them said. 'It's this way.'

Grant allowed the soldier to lead him into the spacious reception hall, while the other soldier drove his Jaguar away to secure parking. He had hardly expected valet parking when he first came here, but of course it was so that his car could be thoroughly checked. He didn't mind at all, since he wasn't stupid enough to try bringing in anything that he shouldn't.

The droopy-faced Conran, shabby white coat draped over his slumped shoulders, was waiting for them.

'I hope you're treating my client well,' Grant said.

'Of course. We're not barbarians here, you know. His rehabilitation will take time, but I don't intend it to be forced. He's waiting for you in his quarters. You know the way.'

As if he could say otherwise; Grant was here at least twice a month.

Escorted by the redcap, Grant made his way through the oak-panelled rooms that had been here for centuries, to the more modern east wing, an annexe which had been added in the 1940s.

The soldier unlocked the door to the prisoner's suite and Grant entered, ignoring the oft-heard instructions about the alarm button to press if anything should go wrong. The rooms were decorated in rich colours, and resembled the most luxurious hotel accommodation. It was, Grant noted, more extravagant than his own £1,000-a-month flat.

The east wing's sole occupant looked up, the grey at his temples and the corners of his goatee beard almost glinting. He stood, offering Grant a hand to shake. As always in his employer's presence, Grant felt vaguely overshadowed, though he couldn't see how. It wasn't that his boss was tall or broad, but there was some kind of compact energy in his frame. Or perhaps he was thinking of compressed, rather than compact. Yes, he decided, that was it; there was a sense of compressed power there, power that might easily escape with devastating force.

Grant shook his hand. 'You're looking well, for someone in prison, Mr Magister. Mind you, this is hardly a dungeon.'

The Master – as Magister usually liked to call himself – looked blankly at his environs. 'A gilded cage, Mr Grant.' He indicated the small mini-bar cupboard.

‘A drink?’

‘It’s a bit early, but OK. Scotch on the rocks.’

The Master poured the drink and handed Grant a glass. It crossed Grant’s mind to wonder if he’d poisoned it, perhaps having some idea why Grant was here.

The Master sat in a leather-upholstered chair and lit a Cuban cigar, while Grant settled on one of the couches. ‘Now, what was so important that you felt the need to distract me from my other interests? The robbery at the bank, perhaps?’

Grant felt his heart sink. The Master knew already, and he would be displeased that his second-in-command hadn’t been the first person to tell him about it.

‘Yes. . . I’ve been chasing up some leads as to who was responsible. Barron and I –’

The Master held up a hand for silence. ‘How much did they take?’

‘Seventeen million. That’s US dollars, thank God, not sterling.’

‘Currency is not the issue, Mr Grant. Someone has disturbed the order I created. That is the important thing.’ The Master took a long draw at his cigar and cocked an eyebrow at him. ‘You and Barron?’ he prompted.

Grant shuffled uncomfortably. ‘We asked a few questions around town. The other firms. . . They reckon that we’re open for business. What with you being banged up in here, I mean.’

‘Oh, do they now?’ The Master’s eyebrows arched. ‘Then we must prove otherwise. Do we know who was responsible for this stupidity?’

Grant tried to suppress a shiver. Someone was going to suffer soon, he could tell. He just hoped it wouldn’t be him.

‘We suspect the Americans. We spoke to a grass who said that he was told of a robbery being planned by a sixty-nine crew. Crew’s an American term, isn’t it?’

‘Indeed it is, but. . .’ The Master paused in thought. ‘I wonder if perhaps he meant K-R-E-W?’ He went to a small intercom by the door that was supposed to be for emergency use by visitors threatened by the prisoner. ‘Find Private Duff and send him in, will you?’

Grant wondered what the Master wanted with one of the guards. No doubt he had something in mind – he always had. He had even planned for the eventuality of his capture and trial.

Duff arrived a few moments later – a nondescript redcap who didn’t look any older than Tara, wearing an Argyll badge on his cap. ‘You wanted to see me?’ His Scots accent was quite mild compared to some Grant had heard.

The Master nodded. ‘My lawyer and I require your advice, Private. Are there not Scottish criminal organisations called Krews, with a K?’

Duff nodded. 'Aye, there are, like the 21 Krew.'

'Good. . . And is there by any chance a 69 Krew?'

Duff frowned as he thought, then nodded again. 'Aye, I think they're from round Garelohead or Coulport way.'

The Master smiled affably. 'Thank you, Private, that will be all.'

Duff saluted and left.

The Master chuckled slightly. 'I do so like the military mind. They know when to show the proper respect.'

'So it seems.'

'Unlike these people we must now deal with.' The Master's voice hardened. 'If this 69 Krew are trying to establish themselves in London, the police will undoubtedly be aware of it, Grant. Use your legal contacts to find out what the police know. If there is a 69 Krew group in London, then we can assume they are the ones your informer referred to.'

'And if there is?'

The Master looked surprised that Grant should even have to ask, and admitted Grant already knew what the answer would be.

'Teach them some respect, Mr Grant; the sort that their widows will not soon forget.'

CHAPTER 4

Barbara had no idea what she was supposed to be listening for on the tapes of the conversation between West Drayton and the crashed Jetstream. All she did know was that the devil made work for idle hands and she hated to be idle.

At the same time, she had hoped that this weekend would give them some time together. Between bringing up John, Ian's lecturing at Farnborough and her own teaching at the local comprehensive, life was pretty hectic. At least their son was old enough to be at primary school now, so in some ways he wasn't quite as dependent.

She heard a vehicle draw up outside the huge truck which was UNIT's mobile HQ and went to see what it was. Outside, a UNIT Land Rover had disgorged a self-assured man around the same age as herself with a neatly trimmed moustache. Yates and Ian joined him as he came over.

'You must be Ian and Barbara Chesterton,' he said with a smile. 'Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart. Sorry I couldn't be here earlier to brief you properly...'

'Captain Yates took care of that perfectly well,' Barbara said. 'We've both been doing our best.'

'Ah, excellent,' the Brigadier answered. 'Had any luck so far?'

'Only to find that the plane is somewhat radioactive,' Ian answered. 'It's not at what you'd call really dangerous levels, but a fair bit higher than normal background radiation.'

'You mean it couldn't be natural?'

'No. At least, not on this planet. I'd like to conduct some further tests, though. Maybe some metallurgical or spectrographic analyses.'

The Brigadier nodded. 'The Doctor's laboratory will have all the equipment you need for that sort of thing.'

'What about you, sir?' Yates asked. 'Any luck with Jackson?'

'I'm just on my way to see him.' He frowned. 'Can't see how I'm going to persuade him to prove that he's not an impostor, but one must try.'

Now Barbara saw her chance to do something a little more useful. 'Well, if you need to just talk to someone – diplomatically – why don't I go?' As a teacher, she had often had to prise confessions out of bullies, or gently draw troubles from the troubled.

The Brigadier gauged her sincerity and confidence with a look, then nodded. 'All right, Mrs Chesterton. I don't see any harm in it.'

Barron was carefully clipping ads from *The Times's* appointments section when there was a sharp rapping at his front door. A glance through the window showed it to be Grant. Barron hastily shoved the paper under a cushion before going to open the door.

'Mr Grant,' Barron said, trying not to look too flustered. 'How did it go with Mr Magister?' The only thing Barron liked about having a superior in the organisation was that it was his superior who had to report to Magister.

Grant gave him a knowing look. 'Your turn to have some fun. Get Ken to assemble a little group of men we can trust. We're going on a small journey.'

Barron grinned. 'Mr Magister decided to give them what for? Great! Who are we going to kill?' It didn't actually matter. As long as it was fun, Barron would take on anybody.

'Some Glaswegians from the 69 Krew. Apparently they've carved themselves out a little patch at Hounslow. They're the ones Sully talked about who killed our security guards. Magister wants an example made of them, so that the rest of them will stay on their side of Hadrian's Wall.'

'Where do you want to meet up?'

'The usual lock-up. In an hour.'

George Boucher didn't see much evidence of trouble when he strolled into the Dog and Ferret. In fact, the only sign of the previous night's difficulties seemed to be that the barman had a bandaged head and a bruised face. 'Let me guess, Tony. I should see the other guy?'

'What other guy?' Tony asked nasally, probably as a result of his beating. 'I tripped on my way down to the cellar.'

Normally Boucher quite enjoyed these little formalities, but he just wasn't in the mood today. 'The one you called to complain about.'

'I didn't call anybody. I just work here, but I don't own the place. The boss was the one who called.'

That explained a lot. This place was owned by a fairly reputable businessman who had started off with cafés. 'So he was concerned for your health?'

'Exactly.' Tony grinned smugly – the sort of expression Boucher wanted to punch. He reflected that maybe this was exactly how Tony came by his injuries.

'All right, then. Tell you what, while I'm here I might as well check up on Mutton. You reckon he'll be in today?'

Tony shrugged. 'I suppose.'

'If he wasn't, it'd be a first,' Boucher commented innocently.

‘That it would.’ Tony frowned. ‘I mean –’

‘You mean he was in last night.’

Tony looked as if he was going to deny it, but then shrugged again. ‘Yeah, he was here. Trying to pick up Deirdre Young. Then he left.’

‘With her?’ Boucher asked sceptically. Even Deirdre had some taste.

‘I dunno, I didn’t see. Maybe.’

Boucher had been in the police force long enough to get a feel for when someone was lying to him. He could almost see a sign light up on Tony’s forehead announcing that the ex-wrestler was lying through what was left of his teeth. He also knew that pressing the issue would just make him shut up altogether. The question was why? Had Mutton done this? No, Tony could break him in half. Perhaps whoever had really left with Mutton. . . And Tony would know full well that if Deirdre had seen them with him, she would be amenable to telling. . . for a price.

He looked back up at Tony and saw a depth in those eyes that he hadn’t noticed before. The meaty barman wasn’t as thick as he looked.

‘Yeah, right,’ Boucher said. ‘She still got that bedsit round the corner?’

‘As far as I know.’

Boucher stood up. ‘Thanks, Tony.’

‘For what? I didn’t give you any help.’

‘I know.’

The Right Honourable Frederick Jackson, Junior Armed Forces Minister, was at his desk in a study lined with leather-bound books, carefully writing up his parliamentary journal. Some day he hoped it would be a beacon to future MPs, like Churchill’s memoirs. Not that he would ever be big-headed enough to consider himself in the same league as the great Winnie, of course.

The telephone rang and he answered it promptly. That was a habit he had – always respond promptly, especially if there was any danger that it might be the Minister or the Chief Whip on the line. Instead it was his secretary calling from the office, asking if someone from the Ministry of Education could come and see him.

‘All right,’ he answered. ‘Say they can catch me any time before ten.’

He had no idea why someone in Education would want to see him. Maybe to arrange some sort of lecture circuit. . . Yes, that must be it; lots of his ‘honourable’ colleagues had made a little something on the side that way.

Pleased by this good luck, he turned back to his journal, but there was a knock at the door before he could write another word. Annoyed, since it was unlikely he was going to be so fortunate a second time – he slammed the journal shut.

‘Come in.’

Well, there again, maybe he was to be favoured twice, judging by the figure who slinked into the room.

'My dear, how nice to see you again,' he said, grinning broadly.

The silenced shot which killed him failed to wipe the smile from his face.

Outside, in the car on the far side of the little Kensington square, Lieutenant Beresford sat and envied Jackson the time he was spending with that latest visitor.

Barbara had taken the Range Rover, agreeing to meet Ian at UNIT HQ. Lethbridge-Stewart was confident that she understood the delicate nature of the situation; she was no slouch and he had long since learned to trust his instincts in such matters.

The other teacher, Ian, seemed just as capable. Obviously he didn't have quite the range of experience that the Doctor had, but he did have rather more knowledge of aliens and suchlike than most MoD scientists. Between them, they should be able to get to the bottom of a relatively simple air crash before the Doctor returned from. . . well, from wherever he was.

Lethbridge-Stewart's radio buzzed. 'Greyhound here.'

'Main gate,' Benton's voice crackled in his ear. 'Sir, the Minister without Portfolio is on his way up to you.'

'Good grief,' the Brigadier exclaimed. 'Very well, Sergeant.' He put the radio away in a pocket and hurried out to meet the Minister's car as it arrived.

The Minister himself, Carswell, wasn't nearly as corpulent as the Brigadier expected of a politician, and in fact resembled nothing so much as a gaunt Charlton Heston. He grimaced as his trouser legs dragged in the mud and didn't bother to shake hands.

'Lethbridge-Stewart?'

'Sir.' The Brigadier knew from long experience that such calls out of the blue usually meant bad news, but he never failed to show the proper respect.

Carswell indicated the singed fuselage. 'I understand that the wreckage you're inspecting is radioactive. Is that correct?'

'Yes, it is. May I ask how you came by that information, sir?' He had not yet filed any reports, so there should be no way for anyone to know.

'Had a call from the Americans. Apparently one of their satellites picked up the radiation and they – not knowing what it was – decided to warn us about it.'

'I see.' It was unusual, but not unknown. 'I have the best people available checking –'

In fact, Lethbridge-Stewart could already see Chesterton approaching with a clipboard. He had put on a pair of glasses to make his notes.

‘I’m sure you do,’ the Minister said approvingly, ‘but I am concerned about this radioactivity business.’

‘As we all are,’ Ian interjected. ‘But it’s not up to dangerous levels.’

The Minister gave him a sidelong glance. ‘And is there such a thing as a truly non-dangerous level?’

‘Of course not, but –’

‘Precisely. Which is why I have given orders for the wreckage to be collected by the RAF, decontaminated and destroyed. I have no intention of allowing the chance of further contamination to affect this woodland, or the surrounding farms.’

Ian looked as astonished as the Brigadier felt.

‘But we’ll need this evidence to find out what happened. There’s no more real danger than there is working in a nuclear power station.’

‘I agree, Minister,’ Lethbridge-Stewart added. ‘I believe something very odd happened to this aircraft and, with the crew dead, the wreckage is all we have left for analysis.’

‘But you’ve taken the relevant readings?’ Carswell indicated Ian’s clipboard.

‘Well, yes, but –’

‘Then the matter is closed.’

Lethbridge-Stewart wondered, as he often did, why government types tended to have such abrasive attitudes. Or why this one was so keen to remove this wreckage. All the same, he was making some kind of sense. Perhaps he was just firm about his environmental views.

‘Do you have children?’ the Minister asked.

Ian nodded. ‘A son.’

Carswell smiled. ‘Me too. Are you willing to risk contaminating that son after you’ve been clambering all through that wreckage a few more times?’

Lethbridge-Stewart could see the balance tip in the Minister’s favour; the decision was written there on Ian’s face even before he quietly said, ‘No, I’m not willing to risk that.’

Deirdre’s three-room bedsit wasn’t much to look at, but Boucher felt strangely comfortable in it. Perhaps because the place reminded him of the little flat where his mother had brought him up after the war. Him and Janice. Single parents had been frowned upon in those days, but the war had been a godsend to her, and those like her, since they could simply tell the voices of disapproval that the man of the house had been killed in action. Not exactly what Germaine Greer would have approved of, but it had made life easier. There were a lot of fatherless kids at school then.

Deirdre wasn’t so much the girl with the flaxen hair as one with a waxen face. Boucher could tell at a glance that she wasn’t spending her earnings on

health foods.

'Don't worry, I haven't got a search warrant,' he told her. 'I just want to chat a bit about Jeff Sully, not go scraping around for your needles.'

She relaxed slightly and lit up a cigarette. Boucher resisted the urge to put it out – her flannelette nightie didn't look particularly fireproof. She had obviously been woken by his knocking at the door, catching up on her rest in preparation for a more active evening.

'He hasn't been here, if that's what you mean.'

Boucher shook his head. 'No, it's just that I heard you were talking to him in the pub last night.'

Someone had been here, though; she was in too good a state not to have made some money last night.

'That Tony's got a big mouth,' she muttered. 'I spoke to him for all of about three minutes.'

'So you didn't leave with him?'

Deirdre brayed laughter. 'God, no. These two other blokes came in to see him. One of them gave me fifty quid and said I should take the night off. So I did.'

'D'you know who they were?'

'No... I've seen one of them around a few times. Looks like a fat stoat. The other one – the one who gave me the money – was like some sort of City type. Had a suit and everything.'

Boucher thought hard. The descriptions didn't narrow the field any. 'Could you identify them again, from pictures maybe?'

'Maybe.' Her pinched face took on a calculating look and Boucher could read her mind. At least, it seemed that way to him.

'If you can come down to the office and look through some files, I'm sure we can find a way to reimburse you for loss of working hours.'

She beamed. 'Hang on till I get dressed.'

And then Boucher recalled that the one thing he'd hated about his own family's tiny bedsit was the lack of privacy. Strangely, it didn't particularly bother him this time. He just caught himself turning to pass some comment to Rob Thorpe. Then the moment was over; Deirdre was gone, leaving only the nightie behind, and Boucher's mood had sunk once more.

Ross Grant's immaculate suit was very out of place in the Paddington lock-up garage, but he didn't feel that way himself. His barrel chest and boxer's face fitted the environs quite well. Ken Thomson, a bouncer currently between clubs, so to speak, greeted him and Barron at the door. There were three other men lounging around the lock-up. None of them looked like accountants.

Grant had always liked Thomson. He was professional, like himself. Ex-Army, and knew that hurting the bystanders was bad for business. Of course, he also understood that hurting the right people was an everyday part of the job. They had occasionally met for a drink, and Thomson used to date Grant's sister, until she married and moved to Swansea.

'Afternoon, Ken. You ready?'

Ken nodded. 'Joe said you wanted to be tooled up?'

He moved over to the Vauxhall Cavalier that was parked in the shadows amidst the overflowing shelves of junk and opened the boot. A pair of SPAS 12 semi-automatic shotguns were taped to the inside.

Ken looked at Barron. 'You never said what Mr Magister wanted me and the boys to do, but after what happened at the bank I can guess, so I thought I'd better be prepared.'

Grant decided that Ken was certainly prepared. Packed neatly on the boot floor were over a dozen handguns – magnums, Brownings, a couple of models even Grant didn't recognise – and some boxes of ammunition.

'What did you do? Blag an ordnance warehouse?'

Ken shook his head. 'My oppo's still in 2 Para. Couple of months ago they dug up an IRA cache in Lurgan, but somehow half the contents never made it back to base...' He grinned, showing unnaturally healthy teeth that clashed with his well-worn features. 'A total mystery, that, eh? It gets better an' all.' He lifted a little green bag from the boot and opened it. There were at least half a dozen grenades inside. 'What do you think?'

Grant was impressed and shocked in equal measure. 'Leave the grenades; they're too random.'

He took a Colt .45 automatic and checked that it was loaded, then slipped it into the waistband of his trousers. He took one of the shotguns and started sliding cartridges into it. Ken helped himself to the other shotgun and the rest of the men armed themselves with pistols.

Grant nodded to the nearest. 'Jack, bring the van round.'

Benton was watching the RAF boys manoeuvre a crane over the main body of the fuselage, ready to lift it on to what was just about the longest low-loader that he and Mike Yates had ever seen. Benton was leaning against the side of a Land Rover, helping himself to some hot coffee from a flask.

Yates was actually quite glad that he could now get back to Denham; he should be able to catch up with that date he'd missed. After Jo's disappearing with the Doctor last week and then having to stand up this girl, he hoped it would be third time lucky on the going-out front. He'd have to bring her flowers and chocolates to make up for having let her down, but that and his best clean uniform were usually enough to do the trick. And if all else failed,

at least he still had a slate at Denham's best pub, where he and Benton could continue their on-and-off darts tournament.

Benton stood as Yates approached, but Yates waved him back to his seat.

'Have you got a tool kit in there by any chance?'

Benton nodded. 'In the back. Shall I get it?'

'Don't bother.' Yates went round to the back of the Land Rover, and dug out a small tool box and an ammunition crate. 'These things never left this vehicle, if you see what I mean.'

'Understood. Can I ask what you're not going to do with them, sir?'

Yates grinned. He and Benton had worked together for so long now that they could almost read each other's thoughts. 'I'm not going to take these things over to the wreckage and I'm not going to grab something for Chesterton to take back to the Doctor's lab.'

Beresford had been diligently watching for the first visitor to leave Jackson's house, but so far she had not emerged. Most likely she was there for the night. It wasn't really any of his business, of course, but HQ had called him to warn that they were sending someone else to ask Jackson a few questions, and he had hoped that the MP's bit on the side would be gone before she arrived.

He realised his hopes were futile, however, when a beige Range Rover drew up outside Jackson's office and a striking – though not beautiful – woman emerged. This was undoubtedly Barbara Chesterton, the one he'd been told about.

Beresford was in something of a quandary: should he go and stop Mrs Chesterton before she interrupted the MP and his visitor, or should he stay put and not blow his cover.

The internal debate answered itself, as before he could leave the car Mrs Chesterton had gone inside. By the time he reached the door, he heard a scream from inside.

Boucher considered helping himself to a few gulps of the brandy in his desk drawer, but knew at heart that it wouldn't help. Worse, someone might see. Not that it would matter if they did, he told himself; it wasn't as if he was consuming too much of anything.

Deirdre was still flipping through a large book of file photographs, looking for anyone she recognised. Boucher was beginning to suspect, however, that she wasn't going to be able – or willing, more like – to identify anyone. In a way he couldn't blame her; he wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of whoever had smacked Tony's head in. And Deirdre didn't even get paid for the risk. That wouldn't stop him from criticising her later, though; hypocrisy was a perfectly reasonable state of mind as far as he was concerned.

Superintendent Morgan suddenly barged into the office and looked around. Boucher thought he ought at least to have tried to hide his disappointment when he saw that Boucher was the only detective in.

‘George, you’re in luck.’ He handed over a piece of paper with an address on it. ‘A nice murder to occupy your time.’

Boucher looked at the note. ‘An MP?’

‘That’s right, so don’t spare the horses, eh?’ And with that, Morgan vanished back into his lair like a troll going back under a bridge.

Boucher grimaced. OK, some politico had got himself killed, but so what? The country would be in a better state with a few less of them. Whoever did it should get a medal. He slipped the brandy hip-flask into his jacket as he stood, before attracting the attention of a uniformed constable who was going through some files.

‘Hey, you?’

‘Yes, sir?’

Boucher indicated Deirdre. ‘Keep an eye on her and leave a note on my desk of anyone she fingers.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Boucher was already heading out of the office. The sooner he got through with this call and handed the case over to the public-school boys of Special Branch, the sooner he could get back to working on who killed Thorpe. He still felt a stab of guilt at taking up this other case at all. MPs weren’t his responsibility; not in the way his nephew was.

But at least it would keep him out of the way when his sister came looking for him, because he didn’t have any idea what to tell her.

Ross Grant quite enjoyed watching the emerging lights slide by as the stolen blue Transit moved through the rainy evening. In the driver’s seat beside him, Barron was quite cheerful at the prospect of giving out some aggro. Over the strains of ‘Little Green Bag’, which was emanating from the radio, Grant could hear the other boys’ banter in the back of the van. Some, such as Ken, were nervous, while others seemed keen to inflict GBH, much to Barron’s obvious amusement.

Grant was neither nervous nor excited. This was just another day at the office as far as he was concerned. He might not particularly like violence, but he doubted that secretaries particularly enjoyed typing, or taxi drivers enjoyed driving. It was just something that went with the territory.

Barron slowed the van and Grant looked around, puzzled. They weren’t near Hounslow yet. ‘What’s up?’

Barron tapped the tank indicator, which was reading almost empty. ‘We’ll have to top up,’ he said, embarrassedly. ‘Some people are right skinflints, eh?’

Jesus,' Grant muttered despairingly, and waved at the sign for a petrol station just ahead.

Barron guided the Transit around some roadworks and a JCB at the junction on which the petrol station sat. It looked like the council was adding yet another mini-roundabout. There were two rows of petrol pumps and the van drew up between them.

'It'll only be a minute,' Barron assured Grant, before stepping out into the rain.

Grant nodded; a few minutes weren't going to make any difference to the Scotsmen's fate.

While Barron went round the side of the van, Grant turned to look at Ken and his mates in the back.

'This never happened to Ronnie and Reggie, eh?'

They all smiled, and Grant knew that Barron would be the butt of their jokes for a few days. He glanced idly at the wing mirror, looking for Barron at the filler cap. He wasn't there. Grant was momentarily puzzled, but then realised that Barron must have finished putting in enough petrol for the night's trip and gone to the little shop to pay for it. He looked over at the shop, and sure enough Barron was inside, but he was going through an interior door.

Why was he leaving through the back door? Grant wondered. It was almost as if he was making a getaway. . .

'Get out!' Grant yelled, opening his door.

It was too late. Grant didn't even have time to yell in fear as the JCB's dozer blade side-swiped the Transit. The van bucked sideways, the nearside wall crumpling, and Grant was flung out of the door. The JCB reversed, trying not to run over the petrol pumps, and the Transit's rear doors burst open, disgorging Ken and three of his comrades. They all looked around dazedly.

Grant was equally confused, but also practical, and the fact that the JCB driver was wearing a balaclava under his hard-hat suggested that this wasn't an accident. Blue smoke coughed up from the JCB as it revved up again and Grant backed away from the Transit, cursing his stupidity for having left the shotgun inside. He still had the Colt, though, and took careful aim at the JCB driver. A couple of shots knocked the man from his perch, but he must have been wearing a bulletproof vest, since he rolled to his feet and took shelter behind his vehicle.

'What the bloody hell's going on?' Ken shouted.

'Barron's stitched us up,' Grant snarled.

Shots boomed into the van and he looked back at the shop. He'd get hold of Barron tonight and find out what the little toerag was up to – before he killed him.

Something metal clanged on to the concrete by the van and bounced. Grant was already looking for the man who had thrown it before his brain registered what it must be. He was on his feet and bolting for the shop an instant before the grenade went off.

Ken screamed and chunks of metal were blasted out of the corner of the van, but thankfully there was no damage to the petrol reservoirs.

An armed figure appeared from the shop door and Grant blasted him, wishing again that he'd grabbed the shotgun. The grenade had caused the others to scatter, undoubtedly fearful of being caught in an inferno if the petrol pumps were breached. With their targets now more accessible, several new armed figures in black fatigues and balaclavas emerged from the little striped tent by the roadworks and from the side door of the garage shop.

Kalashnikov muzzles flashed in the twilight and Grant rapidly forgot about the other men near the van, though he suspected he would hear their dying screams for as long as he lived.

There were some cylinders by the side of the shop – compressed air for tyres or gas for camping stoves most likely. Hoping for the best and knowing that his enemies were protected against gunfire, he squeezed off his last remaining shots at the cylinders, simultaneously leaping for shelter behind the wrecked van.

With the sound of a gale battering the windows, the cylinders erupted into a satisfying wall of flame, blasting the gunmen sideways. One lay still and the others rolled around, trying to extinguish the flames that had engulfed them.

His rage as hot as the flames from the blast, Grant scooped up a Kalashnikov dropped by one of his victims and emptied its magazine into the agonised survivors' heads. Eventually the bolt clicked down on an empty chamber and Grant remembered to breathe.

He shivered slightly, unsure whether it was down to the rain soaking into him or not.

'Nice performance,' Barron's voice said from behind him. 'I really go for that sort of thing, you know? I mean, Mr Magister himself would be proud of you tonight.'

Grant turned slowly on his heel. Barron was holding one of the SPAS 12s on him. 'You bastard, I –'

Barron looked offended. 'Hey, mind your bloody language, OK? I mean, we are supposed to be professionals, right. This is just a question of managerial reorganisation.' He half-smiled. 'Oh, yeah and organ reorganisation.' He laughed. 'Anyway, it's like this – you just turned against Mr Magister and killed half a dozen of his best minders, before vanishing –'

Grant nodded understandingly. 'With the proceeds of the bank's safety-deposit room?' He should have seen this coming.

'You're quick. That's right.'

'So whose plan is this? I don't imagine you thought of it yourself.'

Barron flushed. 'You saying I'm thick? Do I look thick? Am I the one with a shotgun in his face?'

Grant didn't think seeing Barron's anger would make up for his imminent death, but it did have a certain pleasure. And the reaction proved that he was right; Barron was too uptight about his mental abilities.

'Actually, it's my plan,' a familiar silky voice said.

The shapely figure of Marianne Kyle, his accountant, strolled through the burning forecourt, looking with interest at the fallen gunmen. He had seen her in Barron's company quite often of late, but had never thought she had this kind of ambition. Frankly, he'd never thought she was anything but honest with him.

She let the corner of her sensuous mouth drift upwards and stroked his cheek. 'I always did like men with power,' she murmured. 'But only those who know how to hold on to it, those who can stay the distance.'

He could feel her warm breath on his cheek and was excited in spite of himself. A shame she never behaved this way in the office; she certainly must have known that he wasn't married any longer. It wasn't enough to ease the worry about Tara. She would be home for the weekend. Would she be safe? Or would Barron go after her too? He started forward, hoping to take them by surprise, but Kyle slid a silenced automatic under his chin.

'That doesn't sound like Barron.'

She smiled more fully, her large eyes a picture of sweetness. 'Good eggs and bad have the same shells,' she whispered, and he felt a sudden stab in his arm.

The last thought of his daughter's welfare dissipated along with his consciousness. His body swayed for a moment before falling.

Kyle lowered her gun and discarded the hypodermic that she had held in her other hand. She touched her fingers first to her own lips, then to Barron's.

'I'll ensure the body is never found once we're finished with him. Leave the others here and tell Magister about his untrustworthy servant. Don't be late.'

CHAPTER 5

Mike Yates had expected to find Ian in the Doctor's laboratory. He hadn't, however, expected to find the lecturer simply rooting through the oddments of technology on the benches with a wistful expression. Obviously some of these bits and pieces were things he'd seen before and reminded him of his travels.

As Mike watched, Ian picked up a tiny metal and crystal dumbbell, not much bigger than a household fuse. He looked at Mike and brandished the object.

'You've no idea how much trouble the Doctor got us into over one of these fluid links.'

Mike thought that Ian would be surprised at just how good an idea he had of how much trouble the Doctor could get someone into. His determination to deal with Axonite in his own way had almost convinced Yates and the Brigadier that he was a threat. Still, things had always worked out well enough in the end.

Mike hefted the ammunition box he was carrying and set it on the nearest worktop. 'Actually, I brought something else you might like to look at. Nothing so nostalgic as circuits from the TARDIS, but interesting all the same.'

Ian came over and Mike opened the box lid. Inside was a charred piece of metal cylinder with a serial number just visible on it. Ian gave it a quizzical look.

'Would I be right in assuming that this is a piece of the Jetstream wreckage?'

'You said you wanted to run some lab tests; now's your chance.'

'Captain Yates!' the Brigadier's voice rapped out.

Mike stiffened to attention as the Brigadier followed him into the lab. He hadn't heard his superior approaching, but knew that he wouldn't be overly happy with this bending of the rules.

'Is this a chunk of the aircraft the Minister ordered destroyed?'

'Yes, sir. The Minister didn't say how he intended to destroy the wreckage and the dismantling of one part seemed as good a start as any.'

He knew the Brigadier wouldn't believe that for a moment, and nor did Mike intend him to. But it would help show whether the Brigadier agreed with his sentiments.

'That's a rather liberal interpretation of orders, Captain,' the Brigadier said reprovingly. 'But, as it happens, no one has given a better definition.' He looked at Ian. 'I trust you can actually get some useful results out of this?' He tapped the piece of metal with his swagger stick.

Ian glanced over the piece of metal. 'I don't see why not. As long as it was on the outside of the plane originally, it should have picked up some contaminants from the local environment that could tell us where it's been.'

'Right, then.'

The Brigadier gave an approving crooked smile. Something about the way his moustache moved reminded Mike of Samantha's twitching nose on *Bewitched*, but he would never dare say that aloud.

'The Minister needn't know that this piece is here.'

'I won't tell if you won't, sir,' Mike agreed with a straight face.

'Is there any news from Barbara?' Ian asked. 'I thought she might have made it back here before us.'

The Brigadier's expression darkened. 'I've just come off the phone from Beresford. It seems that when he and Mrs Chesterton went in to see Jackson, they found him dead. Shot through the heart.'

Barbara hadn't enjoyed staying in the house while the police took notes and examined the scene, but she had seen enough death in her time to know that she could get on with her work regardless. Those deaths had been on other worlds and in other times, while she and Ian travelled with the Doctor in that TARDIS of his. Somehow she felt that she oughtn't be surprised that there would be trouble now that she was on an errand for the Doctor's friends, even though he wasn't around.

It was something she had almost managed to put out of her mind in the last ten years; the dark side of her and Ian's travels. From the very first journey they had made in the TARDIS, there had been fear and death. It had faded with time, and they – or at least she – had come to recall only the good things. They had shared a wonderful companionship with Susan and later Vicki. They had seen wonders that no one else alive today had seen. Not that all the wonders were pleasing, of course. For all the excitement of a historian being allowed to witness Aztec civilisation first-hand, there was nothing pleasant about watching a human sacrifice intended to honour a god who never listened anyway.

Best of all, though, they had fallen in love. Or grown to love each other, if there was a difference.

So she had buried the memories of Daleks murdering innocent people; of being imprisoned in the squalid conciergerie; and of being offered at auction to a group of lecherous Romans.

It was as if the Doctor had left a shadow on her and Ian, just waiting to darken their lives. Like the one the Daleks' poisoned atmosphere had left on them. But that was a shadow they had cheated through treatment, and John was living proof of that. She wished Ian had at least found out what UNIT had wanted and consulted her before agreeing to do their bidding. They weren't bound to the TARDIS any more; they didn't need to go through all this just to get home. . .

'Mrs Chesterton?'

The voice had a rich timbre, almost hidden by the common accent. She turned to find a lean man in grey slacks and a scruffy tweed sports jacket surveying the scene from the door. His head was almost a bald as an egg and his eyes gave him the image of a questing bird of prey. The stubble on his chin and the frayed clothes, however, gave more the image of a tabloid hack in some old film.

'Detective Inspector George Boucher,' he said. 'I understand you and Lieutenant Beresford found the body?'

'Yes.' Barbara stepped aside to let another forensics expert through. 'I rang the bell several times and there was no answer. I thought perhaps it wasn't working properly, so I went to knock on the door. When I tried, the door just swung open.'

'So you came in for a look-see?'

'Yes, exactly. I've given a statement to one of the constables.'

Boucher nodded. 'I like to hear things from the horse's mouth. You were coming to see this Jackson?'

Barbara hesitated, wondering how much she should tell him – UNIT was supposed to be secret after all. But in this case perhaps honesty was best. 'I came here to ask him a few questions, that's all.'

Boucher immediately perked up. 'Questions? You're a journalist, perhaps?'

It was an understandable mistake. 'No, actually I'm a teacher, but right now I am here on behalf of UNIT.'

'And what did you want to ask him?'

Barbara had hoped he wouldn't ask that. 'I'm sorry, I can't tell you, Inspector.'

'I'm afraid I must second that,' Beresford added.

Barbara looked gratefully across at him. Somehow he seemed more like an amateur rugby player than an officer, especially in civilian casual wear. He briefly returned her smile, then carried on speaking to Boucher.

'I suggest that you contact Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart at UNIT headquarters. He'll explain the situation to you.'

'Oh, I will, mate, don't you worry about that. And might I ask how you came to be here as well?'

'I was conducting covert surveillance on Jackson,' Beresford admitted.

Barbara could see her own surprise and dismay mirrored on Bouchers face. 'And it didn't occur to you to stop him being murdered?'

'I didn't know that was happening. A woman went in and then, a couple of hours later, Mrs Chesterton arrived. I was just about to suggest that she refrain from entering while Jackson's visitor was still here, when she walked in and found the body.'

'The other woman was still here?'

'I hadn't seen her leave, so that was what I assumed.'

'Didn't see much of use, did you?' Boucher muttered.

Though she felt sorry for Beresford, Barbara couldn't help agreeing that Boucher had a point.

'She must have gone out the back way.'

'That thought had occurred to me.' Boucher took out a small dictaphone and held it towards them. 'Sorry about this, but my handwriting's a bit less legible than your average set of hieroglyphics. OK, what did this woman look like?'

Beresford closed his eyes in thought. 'Quite short, maybe five feet two at the most. White. Very curvy, if you see what I mean.' His hands drew a vague hourglass shape by way of illustration. 'Her hair must be short, but I don't know what colour – she was wearing a hat and nothing showed under it.'

'Young? Old?'

'Youngish, I'd say – early to mid-thirties.'

Boucher grunted noncommittally and turned to Barbara. 'You?'

'She wasn't here when I came in.'

Barbara wasn't sure whether to be glad that the killer wasn't still her to threaten her or ashamed that she had nothing helpful to add. She settled for a mixture of both.

Boucher put the little dictaphone away. 'All right. I've changed my mind and I'm not going to call your Brigadier.'

'You're not?' Barbara could scarcely believe that. Why, even she would be suspicious of the vagueness of the answers she and Beresford had given.

'No, the three of us are going to pay him a visit.'

Marianne Kyle walked through the canyon streets of the City, carrying herself so gracefully that her head all but floated atop her slender neck. It would perhaps have been more fitting for someone in her position to be chauffeured from place to place, as she had been used to at home, but she had found that she liked walking in the open air; even here, in London.

The open sky and the bustle of people were slightly countered by the exhaust fumes in the air – which she had never really noticed before – but even

the fumes were a welcome sign of life and activity. She had even discovered a country and western club last night and had whiled away some pleasant off-duty time.

Besides, the interrogation of the late Ross Grant had opened up some wonderful avenues of thought for her. He had not wanted to talk, of course, but the combination of pain and Scopolamine that Kyle's men had given him worked eventually. He was, after all, only human.

Kyle walked on and reached the Magnum Bank. She showed her pass to the new guard on duty. Poor Ray and Bill, they were unfortunate but unavoidable casualties. At least it had been quick. She didn't like to think about how different it must have been for those at home. She was intelligent enough to imagine the terror and the panic they must have faced, but also pragmatic enough to decide to stop her imaginings.

Looking on the bright side, there were half a dozen vacant posts here at the bank, which she would have Barron see to immediately. He would have to get all the papers and documents ready quickly.

Humming her favourite Willie Nelson song, Kyle took the lift up to the manager's office. With Magister in prison and Grant dead – well, officially only missing – she now had direct control, as the firm's accountant. Barron would conduct the day-to-day running of the business, but she would have to keep him briefed at all times and confirm every stage of operations.

When she entered the office, she found that Barron was in her chrome seat behind the desk, listening to a horse-race on the radio. He didn't notice her come in, being too excited by the commentary. His face was twisted so greedily that she half expected him to start drooling. Then he suddenly gasped as the commentator mentioned a new horse taking the lead and seemed to be fighting an urge to snarl like an animal. He crumpled a piece of paper and hurled it viciously at the speaker recessed into the wall, swearing all the while.

'Have you quite finished?'

She could have made an issue of his behaviour, of course, but he wasn't worth the effort. If he had been formally under her command, she would have had him court-martialled and shot. Unfortunately, he was merely a collaborator she had to – for the moment – work with.

'It's a fix,' Barron informed her bluntly. 'I've read Dick Francis books; I know what they get up to at the track. . .' He shook his head. 'It doesn't matter. I'll make my money back on the dogs at White City.'

He smiled belatedly and got up to greet her with a kiss. She turned her face away, so could only peck her cheek, knowing it would make him wonder how he'd displeased her.

It was a shame that she couldn't have used Grant this way instead. He was better-looking too, which would have been an added bonus. Ah, well. . . She

tossed a folder on to the desk.

'These are the six men who can take the places of the security guards that were killed. I trust you can make the necessary arrangements for legal documents?'

'Have I ever let you down? I'll get it seen to right away.' He led her to the small couch next to the radio and TV that were set into the wall and sat beside her, one arm round her shoulder. 'It went pretty well, eh? None of the boys suspect anything.'

'They will,' Kyle warned him. 'But by that time it'll be too late.' She didn't move away this time – the closeness was vaguely comfortable, and the little reward would be balanced in a moment anyway. 'You won't need to worry about Grant any more either. He told us some interesting things – before he passed away.'

'How interesting?'

'Oh, very interesting,' Kyle assured him, her smile coming more naturally now. 'Our interrogators are very thorough.' She half turned, breaking his hold but leaning against the back of the couch to face him. 'Why didn't you tell us that your employer is a Time Lord?'

'What?'

Kyle found the blankness of Barron's expression a surprisingly refreshing change from his usual passionate displays.

'A Time Lord.'

'Grant? You mean like a Mason or something?'

Now he was playing her for a fool and she struck him across the face with lightning speed, her rings leaving bright scratches. 'Magister! Why didn't you tell me Magister was a Time Lord?'

Barron touched his cheek and gritted his teeth. He so clearly wanted to hit her, perhaps even kill her, but Kyle knew as well as he that she was too profitable to him to be damaged.

'Do that again and I'll cut your throat.'

Kyle gave an unladylike snort. If he had been able to block her strike, she might have believed he was capable of doing what he threatened, but he just wasn't fast enough and both of them knew it.

'I don't even know what a Time Lord is,' Barron said stiffly. 'Mr Magister is Cypriot. He came to England in –'

She didn't want to hear the rest of it – it was all lies anyway. 'Really? Or is he Swiss, like Emil Keller? Rhodesian, perhaps, like Colonel Masters? Magister isn't from this planet at all.'

Barron pulled away slightly, as one might from a lunatic. 'Not from this planet? What is he, a Martian? Is there a zip up his back, with a little green man inside?'

She should have known, of course. These people did not know about other species any more than most of hers had. It was easy enough to forget, given how open their society was in other ways. It was fortunate that the slip had been made here and not in a more public discussion.

‘Never mind. Did Magister have an inner sanctum that no one was allowed into?’

‘Not that I recall. He tended to use this office. There’s his home, of course, but I don’t remember anywhere in it being off limits. Really neat place too.’

Kyle waved him to silence. ‘What about a vehicle, then?’

Barron shrugged. ‘He liked to be driven by someone rather than do it himself. Anyway, if your interrogators are as good as you say, Grant should have told you all this.’

Kyle had nearly slipped away in thought; she had much to consider. ‘What? Oh, he did. I thought it was worth asking you as well, in case there was something that Grant simply didn’t know.’ She shook her head. ‘His TARDIS must be somewhere.’

‘Ask the boss himself,’ Barron suggested insolently.

Kyle poised to hit him again, but then calmed herself and gave him an appreciative look. ‘That is a good idea.’

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart was normally proud of his men. They did a difficult job that was by its nature thankless, since the authorities preferred to simply bury matters afterwards, and faced types of danger that no soldier could know about when he signed on. This made it all the more vexing when one of those men displayed any sort of incompetence. Lethbridge-Stewart was as surprised at Beresford’s failure as he was angry.

‘Good grief, man! Didn’t you have the back of the building watched?’

The bluff young lieutenant took it on the chin. ‘No, sir. As it gives on to a larger building behind, there was no way of telling there even was a back way out.’

The Brigadier shook his head, suddenly weary. He supposed the mistake was more a result of Beresford’s inexperience than incompetence, but that didn’t make it any easier to accept.

‘Lieutenant Beresford,’ he said with exaggerated patience, ‘there is always a back way out of anywhere. Your first priority should have been to check that when you set up your surveillance.’

His anger had already burned past its hottest, though, and he could see that Beresford was genuinely upset at his error. He wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice.

‘All right, Beresford, carry on.’ As long as Beresford learned from his mistake, it wasn’t in vain. ‘Oh, and send in this police inspector of yours on your

way out.’

Boucher came in a few moments later and the Brigadier greeted him with a handshake. The inspector was a little shorter than himself and had the sort of haunting features that reminded him of pictures of medieval nobles, for some reason. The tweed sports jacket and rumpled clothing were rather less aristocratic, though, and led the Brigadier to wonder whether this man had any self discipline. Still, it took all sorts, he supposed, and by and large the police force did its job well enough, as far as he could see.

‘What can I do for you, Inspector? Oh, and do sit down.’

‘Thanks, guv,’ Boucher said, taking a seat opposite.

Lethbridge-Stewart wasn’t sure that ‘guv’ was an appropriate term, but let it go.

‘It’s about this discovery some of your people have made. Two of them found the body of the MP Frederick Jackson this morning, but neither of them could tell me what they were doing there in the first place.’

‘Do you suspect either of them?’ Lethbridge-Stewart asked. He trusted his own judgement well enough to be sure that neither Beresford nor Mrs Chesterton was responsible, but it seemed wise to ask. If Boucher did suspect them, at least he could start to prepare some sort of defence.

‘I find their presence there suspicious,’ Boucher admitted. ‘But... no, the evidence suggests that an earlier visitor may have been involved. The shot came from pretty close – a stranger wouldn’t have been able to get that close without him screaming loud enough for the staff to hear, so that suggests he knew his killer.’

‘This other woman who went in a couple of hours earlier...’ Lethbridge-Stewart understood Beresford’s concerns well enough – God knows, there had been enough scandal in the government recently.

‘Yeah. Probably his bit on the side.’ Boucher gazed at him. ‘But I’ll still need to know what your people were doing there.’

The Brigadier wanted to tell him; a man had been murdered, after all, and perhaps the information would help catch the killer. Unfortunately, his duty was equally clear.

‘I’m very much afraid it’s a security matter, Inspector.’ He considered further, trying to think of some way to help without giving away any of his concerns about Jackson’s identity. ‘I can give you some details, but they’ll be covered by the Official Secrets Act and can’t go in your report...’

‘Fine by me,’ Boucher said quickly, brightening up. ‘Any help would be appreciated.’

‘We are looking into some concerns about Mr Jackson’s health and also some irregularities over his movements. Lieutenant Beresford was there to

keep tabs on those movements, while Mrs Chesterton was going to request that Mr Jackson undergo a full physical, just in case.'

Boucher's eyes narrowed and the Brigadier found himself being regarded very suspiciously. 'Is UNIT always so "concerned" about people's health?'

Lethbridge-Stewart couldn't help but smile, since they both knew that he was covering up something deeper.

'Whatever, those were the reasons for my personnel's presence.'

'I believe you,' Boucher reassured him. 'I just don't understand you.' He shrugged bony shoulders and stood, straightening his jacket. 'I don't suppose that matters, though. If you hear anything that might provide more clues -'

'I'll contact you at once.'

While the Brigadier had been speaking with Beresford and then DI Boucher, Barbara had gratefully gone to meet Ian in the laboratory, to tell him about the discovery she had made.

Ian held her hand reassuringly. 'At least the killer was gone and you're safe.'

'Yes, but I just couldn't help thinking how much I'd forgotten that part of it - the deaths, I mean. There always seemed to be trouble wherever the Doctor went.'

Ian nodded. He had put the bad times out of his mind too. They sometimes crept up on him in his dreams, but he had always concentrated on recalling only the good sides to his travels in the TARDIS, such as his relationship with Barbara. He doubted they would be married now if they hadn't left Shoreditch with the Doctor and Susan. Somehow that made up for all the trials he had faced.

'I doubt there's really a connection. This is just a plane crash, remember. After getting us good jobs, we can't just turn down a request for a weekend's help examining a wreck.'

'You could have asked what else was involved, or what the plane was carrying.'

Ian knew that, but hadn't thought about it at the time. No doubt she would soon remind him that not thinking at the time was his main problem these days.

'Are you having any luck?' Barbara asked instead.

Ian took a deep breath. 'Well, if you can call it that.' He held up the plexi-glass box into which he had put the metal fragment, giving the impression of trying to unlock its secrets by force of will. 'Apart from being radioactive, this metal has also been exposed to great heat.'

'A nuclear blast?'

'That's what I first thought, but I think somebody might have noticed a nuclear bomb going off in the garden of England! Besides, there's also a lot of

surface scoring from atmospheric particles – lots of carbon, helium, hydrogen. . . Very little oxygen. Wherever this little piece of metal has been, it has an atmosphere quite different from that of Earth. It has also been magnetically depolarised.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Every metal object made on Earth is magnetised to some degree during manufacture; it’s a side-effect of the Earth’s magnetic field. This piece of metal has been depolarised, which means it’s been subjected to an intense magnetic field different from that of Earth.’

‘Surely these effects could all be produced in a laboratory.’

‘Absolutely,’ Ian agreed. ‘But why? I could imagine the magnetic effect being a result of some sort of experiment with stealth technology, but why corrupt the thing with exposure to such a damaging atmosphere?’

‘I’m no scientist,’ Barbara admitted, ‘but this looks very like the atmosphere that primeval Earth is believed to have had. While the planet was still cooling.’

‘Primordial soup, you mean?’ Ian peered at the results again. ‘Yes. . . yes, it does look that way, doesn’t it?’

‘Could the aeroplane have travelled in time? Back to a time when the Earth was like this? Surely the magnetic poles would be different then, if they changed every few thousand years.’

Ian made reached the same conclusions, but wasn’t sure whether he was glad or not.

‘I don’t know how a plane could travel in time, but if nothing else the TARDIS proved that time travel is real enough. . .’

The Brigadier was looking forward to a quiet evening down at the British Legion. The two Jimmys, Turner and Munro, were both in town and a little reunion was called for. He couldn’t tell them anything about operations, of course, since they had left UNIT, but there was enough in the events they had shared to last for several reunions.

Benton, on duty at the desk, looked up as the Brigadier buttoned his coat.

‘Off for the night, sir?’

‘Yes. You know where to reach me in case of emergency?’

‘Down the Legion?’

‘That’s right, Benton.’

‘Good night then, sir.’

‘Good –’

‘Brigadier,’ Chesterton’s voice called from the hallway.

Lethbridge-Stewart turned as Ian and his wife approached.

Barbara spoke first. ‘Sorry to hold you up, but you weren’t in your office and –’

‘That’s all right, Mrs Chesterton. Have you found something?’

Ian nodded. ‘I’ve analysed the fragment of wreckage that Mike brought in. As well as being radioactive, it’s contaminated with particulate damage that can’t possibly have occurred on Earth. Its magnetic polarisation is all wrong and some of the elements that contaminate it just aren’t found in our atmosphere. Not normally, anyway.’

Lethbridge-Stewart at least got the gist of that, which was more than he usually did with the Doctor’s explanations.

‘Then you think the aircraft has somehow been taken to another planet?’ That rang a bell somehow, but he couldn’t quite place it.

‘Well, that’s one explanation. Barbara has an alternative.’

Barbara stepped forward. ‘I teach history and I know that the Earth’s atmosphere was very different millions of years ago. The results that Ian describes seem very similar to the primeval Earth. Perhaps the aeroplane was taken back in time.’

Only a few years ago, the Brigadier would have scoffed at such a ludicrous idea. But now, having encountered beings from other worlds and time travellers from hundreds of years into Earth’s future, he was now willing to be more open-minded. But how could a plane possibly travel in time?

‘It was an ordinary aircraft, wasn’t it?’

‘As far as I could tell,’ Ian agreed.

‘Then it certainly fits in with the UFO the pilot reported before they went off the air. Perhaps it somehow captured them and took them either into space or through time.’

If so, then the question was: which was it? And how was he supposed to tell without the Doctor? He was grateful for Ian’s expertise and clarity, but he just didn’t have access to the same sort of equipment as the Doctor.

‘Perhaps the Doctor’s TARDIS has instruments that could make something of this. The sooner he comes back with Miss Grant from heaven knows where, the better.’

‘Excuse me, sir,’ Benton piped up, ‘but maybe we can get hold of some instruments.’

Lethbridge-Stewart frowned; he didn’t need this sort of interruption. ‘The Doctor has gone, Sergeant.’

‘I know, sir, but if we need an expert opinion, what about the Master?’

The Brigadier turned slowly on his heel. What good could the Master do them? They could hardly blame him for this, now that he was safely locked up.

‘The Master?’

Benton scratched his chin. ‘Well, we’ve got him in the clink, so why not go along and question him about his TARDIS? If we can find it, it must have

similar controls to the Doctor's and maybe Ian will know how to work them.' He sat back down with an apologetic look.

'Actually, that's not bad thinking, Benton. We've pretty much got him where we want him. Why shouldn't we get some good out of him for a change?' He turned back to Ian. 'All right, Chesterton, you might get your hands on some TARDIS equipment yet. You, Yates and myself will all go down to Aylesbury first thing in the morning.'

'What about me?' Barbara asked.

The firmness in her tone conveyed that she was instructing them to find a place for her rather than simply asking a question.

'The detention centre is no place for you, Mrs Chesterton.'

Barbara bristled. 'I think I have a right to do some something useful. I'm already involved, what with this dead body –'

Lethbridge-Stewart saw his chance. 'Excellent idea! How about if I have DI55 arrange to let you help Inspector Boucher with the civil end of the case?'

Barbara looked mollified. 'I suppose. . . Yes, I can do that.'

'Then it's settled. With any luck we should be able to get to the bottom of this.' He glanced at his watch; the Jimmys would soon be on their first round. 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a reunion to attend.'

CHAPTER 6

Returning to his desk the next morning, DI Boucher tried as hard as he could to stay awake long enough to read the scribbled note that the uniformed officer had left on his desk after Deirdre's departure. In fact, he had slept like a log, but Boucher was convinced that he hadn't had a wink of sleep. No one who had slept could possibly feel as tired as he did.

It must be something to do with the stress of Rob's murder, he thought. He knew he had to fight against that sort of ennui, or the killers had won another victory. But knowing and actually doing what was necessary were poles apart. He considered the possibility that a quick nip of brandy would add something to the day, but the damned hip-flask in his jacket was empty.

It was perhaps just as well, since the Super chose that moment to grace the world of mere mortals with his presence. But Morgan was not alone, and Boucher was surprised to see that he had the woman from Jackson's house – Barbara Chesterton – with him.

'Is something wrong, guv?' Boucher asked.

'On the contrary, you've got a new partner of sorts,' Morgan informed him, indicating Mrs Chesterton. 'I had a call from Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart about the questions you needed to ask Mrs Chesterton. He's had DI55 work something out so that she can observe the case and help you liaise with UNIT.' He lowered his voice. 'Does this case clash with one of theirs?'

Boucher shrugged. 'Maybe. They were a bit vague.' What the hell did they think he was supposed to do with a civilian observer hanging around?

'Well, I'm told that her working with you means she can answer whatever questions she couldn't before, as long as you let her report your progress back to UNIT.'

Boucher had been around long enough to know that when other agencies started poking their noses in, it usually meant trouble. All the same, the chance to get some decent answers might make it worthwhile. 'OK, guv.'

Boucher pulled himself up straight, glad that he had at least remembered to shave this morning, and reached across to shake Barbara's hand. 'Nice to see you again.'

'You too,' Barbara said politely.

Now that he came to think of it, she looked just as nervous and ill at ease about this arrangement as he felt himself.

'Good. Keep me posted,' Morgan reminded Boucher, and left.

Boucher swept some files off Rob's chair and hesitantly gestured to Barbara to sit. 'Cuppa?'

'Thanks,' she said gratefully as Boucher fetched two plastic cups of strong tea from the office urn. 'I suppose neither of us expected this.'

'Well, I didn't anyway,' Boucher agreed. 'I have to say, you don't seem much like a shady government figure.'

Barbara laughed softly. 'Well, I'm not, of course. I'm a schoolteacher. But my husband is helping the Brigadier and I wanted to do my bit. I suppose they sent me here because they felt it would be safer.'

Boucher nodded understandingly. 'You sound like you don't know whether to be glad or not.'

'I don't,' she admitted. 'I'm glad to be helping, but I'd rather be back at my school. And I'm glad to be on a "safe" assignment, but it is rather chauvinistic of them to be so protective.'

Boucher grinned. "'Safe" is relative.'

Barron turned the statuette over in his hands. He had never thought about its weirdness before, but there was something about the conviction in Marianne's voice when she had told him that Magister wasn't from this planet. The idea was nonsensical of course – she'd been watching too much Space 1999.

And yet. . . There was something about the way she said it. As if it was just a casual remark that had slipped out, not some momentous revelation. A shiver ran through him.

Then he remembered the statuette. Mr Magister had quite a collection of art, and one or two of the pieces were placed in the manager's office here at the bank. Barron had even 'lost' one – a Ming vase – just the other day, when he had used it as collateral to cover a bad debt. This piece was quite unusual and Barron had assumed it was some kind of modern art. It was a strange figure carved out of rock the colour of sandstone, but much harder. The figure was humanoid enough, but it had a sinuous quality, with large bug-eyes. Barron used to think it was just some sort of strange tribal god-image, but what if he was wrong?

What if it was a portrait of some creature who had lived on another world?

He shuddered and put it back on the shelf. Self-consciously, he turned it to face the wall, no longer liking the way it looked at him. That Von Daniken bloke had a lot to answer for.

He sat back at the desk, telling himself that Marianne had just been having him on. She had an odd sense of humour, that one, but he could live with it, since she was so good to him in terms of the business. She could be a

bit sarky, he knew, but mostly he admired her courage and professionalism, because there was something sexy about them.

In a way, he envied her that professionalism. Frankly, he couldn't be bothered with all the paperwork he had to do; he'd much rather be out on a job, or spending the profits. Some things were unavoidable, though, and the folder of documents on his desk was one of them.

The personnel records Marianne had brought were quite comprehensive and Barron could see no difficulty in arranging matching birth certificates, passports and so on. Finding suitable placements was another matter entirely.

Barron hated *The Times's* recruitment section. It was full of ads for positions that were clearly going to be filled through the old-boy network anyway and had been posted solely to fulfil a legal requirement. Or as a subtle sort of advertising for the business, of course. This wasn't a problem for him, though. In fact, the more 'old-boy' posts he could find, the better. Then it would be doubly satisfying to assign them to Marianne's people, since the 'old boys' deserved what they were going to get more than some ordinary bloke did.

And he'd got quite a good thing going with a fixed-odds dead-pool bet with an unscrupulous bookie as well. It was shame that he had to be so clever about hiding his tracks; he'd love to see the bookie's face if ever he found out how it was being arranged. Hey, there was a cheery thought – maybe Marianne would bring a bookie over?

No, he knew better. Her leaders had probably had them all shot; that type had no sense of fun.

The Brigadier had arranged a helicopter to ferry Ian, Yates and himself to the detention centre at Aylesbury – a Bell JetRanger with comfortable upholstery that didn't feel at all military.

It was a bit flimsier than the sort of aircraft he was used to from holiday flights, but at least it was warm inside. Ian and Yates sat in the passenger section, while the Brigadier had elected to sit next to the pilot.

'Did you say this "Master" is one of the Doctor's people?' Ian asked over the headset mike. If so, then surely he must be equally advanced. And no doubt equally infuriating when he got an idea firmly in his head.

'He's one of the Doctor's lot, all right,' Yates said, 'but they're like chalk and cheese. You can't let your guard down around the Master, or he'll try to put the influence on you.'

'Bit of a Svengali, is he?' Ian laughed. He had seen stage hypnotists from time to time and had long since decided it was all to do with either mass hysteria or planted accomplices in the audience.

'More what you'd call a Rasputin, I think. One minute he could charm the birds out of the trees and the next moment, well... When he first started

causing us trouble, he hypnotised Jo – the Doctor’s assistant – into bringing a huge bomb into the lab.’

‘Doesn’t sound exactly friendly.’

‘He is exactly unfriendly,’ Brigadier agreed, turning round in his seat. He handed Ian a Sam Browne belt with a holstered pistol. ‘You know how to use one of these, Chesterton?’

‘Just about.’ He took it uncertainly, recalling weapons training from his National Service days. ‘Is it necessary?’

‘Hopefully not, but I don’t want any of us vulnerable in there. He could get nasty.’

Ian began to wonder if perhaps he should have listened to Barbara and not got involved. But it was too late now. The JetRanger was already descending towards the detention centre.

To be honest, Barbara was as surprised at her volunteering to help as she knew Ian must be, especially after her concerns the trouble they were getting into. She just couldn’t stand by and do nothing, though. There was a saying ‘By teaching, so we learn’, and the main thing Barbara had learned in her teaching career was that idleness bred apathy.

Her pupils tended to complain about her insistence on finding something for everyone to do, but at least she could say that she was willing to practise what she preached.

She had, of course, told Boucher the truth about her mission to Jackson’s house. When he had stopped laughing, she had asked whether any other MPs or civil servants had been murdered lately. There hadn’t, of course. Something like that would have been in the papers. Barbara didn’t know what any of this was about, but she did have a persistent streak and started to wonder how else you could get someone out of the way. So then she suggested going over missing person reports.

‘But no one is missing,’ Boucher protested.

She wouldn’t take that from her pupils, so nor would she from him. ‘It doesn’t have to be anyone currently missing.’ She was thinking aloud by now. ‘If Jackson was dead on the plane, then turned up alive. . . Perhaps someone was missing temporarily – just long enough to be reported missing – and then reappeared.’

Boucher grimaced. ‘If your line of thinking is right, then they probably wouldn’t be reported missing. Maybe they could be replaced without anybody noticing.’ His brows furrowed. ‘Bloody hell, you’ve got me at it now.’ He shivered involuntarily. ‘You must be a real favourite with the kiddies.’

He turned to burrow into the old files before she could answer. She didn’t like the implication any more than he did. If only he was one of her pupils,

she reflected, she could have reprimanded him for saying 'bloody hell' in front of her.

Barbara watched Boucher as he sorted through the folders. There was something in the set of his shoulders that told her he was upset. He hid it well and it didn't seem to be getting in the way of his work, but she couldn't help wondering if there was some way she could help.

He had told her about DS Thorpe and it didn't take much insight to see that the loss of his nephew had hit him hard. Barbara was not a trained psychologist, but she'd seen enough troubled pupils in her time to know when someone was trying to bury pain in a grave of banality. She'd even done it herself, when the need arose; when her grandmother had died in the build-up to Christmas, Barbara had coped by systematically rewrapping all the presents she was planning to send. Somehow the activity had helped carry her over the immediate rush of grief, instead of allowing herself to become mired in it.

It only worked, though, if you also set aside time to let the grief out. Otherwise it sank into the tissues of the psyche and became a poisonous darkness that spread through to the soul. Boucher was a good man at heart, she was sure, and she didn't like the idea of him letting that happen.

'Inspect-' No, she corrected herself, she shouldn't be so formal at this moment. 'George, you'd rather be trying to find the men who killed your partner, wouldn't you?'

He didn't turn round. 'Sounds like a *Starsky and Hutch* plot, eh?'

'I didn't mean it like that. Anyone can see that what happened has been terribly difficult for you.' It reminded her of the way the Doctor had been, after leaving Susan behind on twenty-second-century Earth.

Boucher nodded slowly, fiddling with the medallion he wore under his collar. 'He was my sister's eldest. She didn't want him to join up, but he asked me to help. I bent the rules a bit to get him into Hendon; called in a few favours, you know. Pulled some more strings to make sure he got assigned to work with me, so I could at least show Janice I was keeping an eye on the lad... Cutting all those corners put him in that bank. If I hadn't done it, maybe he'd still be alive today.'

'But you can't know that for certain,' Barbara protested. Now she understood why this situation reminded her of the Doctor. Losing a family member was never easy. Nor should it be. 'Even without your help, if he was as good an officer as you say, he would surely have made it on his own anyway.'

'But he'd have been posted to some other nick, not mine. He'd still be alive.'

'Or not, if there was another crime in that other area. No one can know what might have been; no one at all. There are a million things that could have happened as a result of the smallest change, both good and bad. All that trying to think of these possibilities does is... make you sulky.' She knew that

hadn't come out right. 'I mean, you can worry your life away wondering about "might have beens", but until you accept what is, you can't move on and deal with the consequences of what is.'

'You sound as if you're speaking from experience, Mrs Chesterton.'

'What might the Aztecs have been if Cortés hadn't been so offended by the sacrificial rites?' She gave a smile, not of happiness – far from it – but acknowledgement. 'I teach history, Inspector. "What might have beens" are an occupational hazard.'

Boucher made as if to scratch his nose before turning round, but she could see that he was wiping the corner of his eye.

'I found the files we're looking for.'

He dumped a pile of grimy folders on a desk that was already uselessly cluttered and shuffled through them.

'This one's dead – hit and run. He used to be a chief clerk at the Treasury. There was nothing suspicious about the death – drunk driver – but you never know. Next, a Foreign Office mandarin; missing for a week, but turned up claiming he'd been on holiday.' He squinted at the coffee-stained details on the next folder. 'Another one dead: Education Ministry spokesman. Natural causes...'

'I'll let the Brigadier know about all of these... I wonder, do we know who replaced the dead ones?'

Boucher grunted. 'Somebody does, but not us, no. You think the replacements might be...'

'I don't know what to think,' Barbara admitted.

'Try "bloody hell",' Boucher suggested, passing across another file. 'It works for me. Anyone for a Minister without Portfolio, Carswell, missing for forty-eight hours?'

Now that was just too much to be coincidence, Barbara felt. She didn't like the alternative either.

'I'd better call the Brigadier.'

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart really didn't like Conran – bit too much of a pen-pusher. This was one thing on which he and the Doctor agreed. It still irked him that the UN had chosen the Master's prison without consulting him. You'd think they'd have learned their lesson after putting him on remand at Stangmoor before his trial. He was glad when the telephone interrupted him. Conran listened to the caller for a moment, then offered the receiver to Lethbridge-Stewart.

'Your headquarters.'

'Is this a secure line?' The Brigadier didn't trust telephones that much – he had bugged enough of them to know how easy it was.

‘It’s on a scrambler.’ Conran flipped a switch at the base of the phone. ‘There you go.’

‘Lethbridge-Stewart.’

‘Sir, I’ve got Mrs Chesterton on the line,’ Corporal Bell’s voice said. ‘She has some information for you.’

‘Put her through.’ Some results at last; hopefully they might not even need to ask the Master.

‘Brigadier?’ Barbara asked uncertainly. ‘Inspector Boucher and I have found files on a number of people in the government who have either died under mysterious circumstances or been missing for a short time before returning – if it is the same people who returned.’

It was progress, then, but not exactly cheery.

‘And the dead ones were replaced, I presume?’

‘Supposedly through the usual channels, but. . . Brigadier, one of the people who was temporarily missing is Carswell. The man who came to order that plane destroyed before Ian was finished with it.’

The Brigadier could hear the concern in her tone. He was not in the least surprised. He had expected something like this ever since the Minister had skipped protocol to have the plane destroyed.

‘Good work, Mrs Chesterton. I’ll have a man put on it immediately.’ His tone changed, then, ‘Corporal Bell, have Lieutenant Beresford and Sergeant Benton move their surveillance operation to the Minister without Portfolio, Carswell. And Bell?’

‘Yes, sir?’

‘Tell Beresford not let this one get killed.’

He hung up and allowed Conran to lead them to the Master’s temporary home in the east wing.

‘There’s an intercom next to the door in case of need,’ Conran reminded the Brigadier. ‘You know the drill.’ With that, he stood back and let the visitors enter.

The Master’s prison was more like a hotel’s luxury suite, complete with comfortable furniture, TV, stereo, bookshelves. . . Even a drinks cabinet. Then he remembered, the secure accommodation here had been intended for protective custody of valuable defectors. Presumably Fortress Island would be more fitting when its refurbishment was complete.

The Master was waiting for them, having been notified of the visit by Conran.

‘Why, Brigadier,’ he began warmly. ‘I hardly expected you to visit me in my present circumstances, but you’re very welcome, of course. And Captain Yates and. . .’ He stopped at Chesterton. ‘I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure.’

‘Ian Chesterton.’

'I'm pleased to meet you – something of an inevitability, since I have so few visitors at all.' He turned back to the Brigadier. 'But... ' The Master looked vaguely puzzled for a moment. 'Where is the Doctor? Hasn't he come along for a little gloat?'

'The Doctor is... busy,' Lethbridge-Stewart answered, and could see that the Master didn't really believe him.

'Well, in that case, I shall make do.' The Master gestured to the chairs and settee. 'Please make yourselves comfortable.'

'I prefer to stand, if it's all the same to you.' Lethbridge-Stewart said firmly. He didn't come here for the Master to play mother to them. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Yates start to move to a chair, then stop in deference to his superior's ideals. 'This isn't a social call, as it happens.'

'Somehow I didn't think it would be.' He wasn't making things any easier, the Brigadier thought. This was embarrassing enough as it was.

'As a matter of fact, we came to... ' Damn, but he really didn't want to say this. 'Well, to ask for your help.'

The Master was somewhat taken aback. 'My help? After imprisoning me? You have a strange sense of humour, Brigadier.'

'Then consider it community service. Reparations for the trouble you've caused. I'm sure we can arrange some sort of –' he looked round the plush apartment – 'privileges in return.'

The Master was clearly sceptical, and Lethbridge-Stewart could hardly blame him.

'Very well, Brigadier. What kind of help?' The Master affected a sigh.

'We'd like access to your TARDIS.'

The Master blinked, then spread his hands. 'But of course. Give me my freedom and I'll give you all the help you need.'

'You know I can't do that,' Lethbridge-Stewart said wearily.

'Naturally! No more than I could give you my TARDIS.'

While Lethbridge-Stewart bit back the reply he was about to make, Ian broke in. 'All we need is some equipment that will allow us to test whether some samples we have in the lab have travelled in time.'

The Master gave him a sidelong glance. 'Such equipment is standard fitting in every TARDIS. Why not simply use the Doctor's?'

Lethbridge-Stewart tried to think of a reasonable reply, but clearly took too long, and a slow smile spread across the Master's features. 'You can't, can you? That's why he isn't here. Somehow he's got that old crock of his working again and has left the planet!'

Lethbridge-Stewart thought about lying, but knew the conversation had gone beyond the point where that would work. He nodded.

The Master laughed. 'So that's it! Other helpers fail, comforts flee, and you come to me.'

Lethbridge-Stewart gritted his teeth. The Master was enjoying this and would no doubt milk the situation for all it was worth.

'Why should I help you, Brigadier? Why help my enemy?'

'Why not?' Lethbridge-Stewart had no other answer to give. Except perhaps... 'The Doctor says that even now you're still a scientist. Aren't you curious?'

The Master relented slightly. 'You've hit upon my one uncorrupted vice. Yes, all right, I'm curious. Tell me exactly what your problem is and I'll consider it.'

Joseph Barron wasn't much impressed by the politicians he had to deal with, even if some of them were supplied by Marianne. Power corrupts, he knew, and he didn't like the idea of other people getting corrupted. Himself, yes, but not others.

Especially those who thought it was fun to make him stand around in Trafalgar Square, with only pigeons and tourists for company in the rain. Perhaps he should have a word with Marianne? Surely she would warn Carswell to behave himself? As a favour to Barron, naturally. He liked the sound of that – being favoured by others. Give him a win on the gee-gees, a night with a girl who wasn't too fussy and the favour of his peers. In that order.

A black Daimler had drawn up at the edge of the square and Barron went to greet its occupant – Carswell, at last. The Minister wasn't much of a snappy dresser; he looked like a caricatured City dealer in pin-stripe suit and bowler hat. Barron wouldn't be surprised to see him start practising silly walks. He tried to cover the laugh that threatened to erupt from him. Going by the crisp black armband that Carswell was wearing, he wouldn't want to see much jollity today.

'You have something for me?' the Minister asked.

Barron nodded, handing him a folded copy of *The Times* – which had a personnel folder inside. 'News from home; your new recruit has been found.'

Carswell opened it, glancing at the file, but pretending to look at the newspaper. 'Yes... He'll fit in at the MoD. As you saw in the paper, the advertisements have been posted.'

'Yeah, I'll be conducting the interviews. I'll keep it all above board for you.' Appearance-wise anyway. Appearances seemed to be what power was about, if Barron was any judge. Which reminded him, there was a new suit he quite fancied picking up...

Beresford's ego still smarted from the dressing-down he had received the pre-

vious day. Catching the Minister without Portfolio chatting to some shifty character in Trafalgar Square wasn't exactly what he had had in mind to redeem himself, but he would take anything he could get from whatever angels were in charge of his fortune today.

The high-powered cameras he was operating were safely hidden inside the Gas Board van in which Benton was driving him around, but he still had the uncomfortable feeling that the Minister would somehow turn round and spot him personally as he snapped the pictures of the meeting. He had no idea who the other man was, but they'd find out. It was probably totally innocent anyway. Beresford had begun to get the impression that this was more likely to be the next victim of whatever was going on than one of its architects.

Carswell returned to his Daimler.

'All right, Sergeant, they're moving off.'

'Right you are, sir,' Benton replied, and started the van moving through the bustling traffic.

'At least my luck seems to have improved today,' Beresford murmured. He was quite new to UNIT, and had hoped to make a better first impression.

'The Brig's pretty fair, sir,' Benton commented. 'I once lost a Chinese officer I was following, but he still gave me another chance. As long as you learn your lesson, he'll stand by you.'

'Well, let's hope I have learned it.'

The Master had listened to the story of the air crash and duplicate Jackson quite attentively, then sat back, mulling it over with closed eyes.

'I can see how you might consider this to be a possible Nestene plot. . . But I had nothing to do with it.' He opened his eyes and regarded the Brigadier. 'Even if your aircraft had travelled back to the dawn of time, it could hardly collect a duplicate human there. I suspect you'll find your answers elsewhere.'

'Then you won't help?'

'No,' the Master said flatly, as if the answer had never been in doubt. As, of course, it hadn't really. 'My TARDIS is my bargaining tool. It may come in handy later. I'm sure we'll see each other again before long. Was there anything else?'

Lethbridge-Stewart was disappointed. True, he had never expected the Master to help, but when he had agreed to hear their story, his hopes had risen. No doubt that was what the Master had intended all along; to raise his hopes, then dash them.

'Very well, then.' Lethbridge-Stewart led Yates and Chesterton to the door, then hesitated. In spite of all his crimes, the Master had been a worthy opponent. 'Is there anything else you need here?'

'A key to the front door?' the Master suggested.

Lethbridge-Stewart managed not to smile. 'Goodbye, then.'

The Master gave a little 'OK' sign. 'Be seeing you.'

Lethbridge-Stewart wasn't impressed; he hadn't come all this way just to watch the Master make jokes about his current status. He was supposed to be atoning for his crimes.

Perhaps Beresford or Mrs Chesterton would come up with something more useful.

The Master watched the Brigadier's helicopter take off. If he had thought they could see him through the window of his suite, he would have given them a wave.

The Brigadier's story was intriguing, he had to admit. He doubted that anyone would play around with time just to duplicate a dead MP, but if something serious was going on, then UNIT might become desperate enough for his help to make a more attractive deal later. If, on the other hand, they were stubborn, then their failure would be amusing.

Making a decision, the Master went over to the radiogram that was on his shelf. It was a typical flat combination of radio, cassette deck and record player. He switched it on and pressed the cassette play button. Instead of music, however, the call that the Brigadier had received in Conran's office was replayed over the speakers.

This was intriguing indeed – the Brigadier willing to spy on a minister? The Master smiled admiringly. The Brigadier could be an almost worthy opponent at times. If only he could be kept from the Doctor's decadent influence. . .

The Master considered notifying the Defence Minister, but then decided against it. This was an interesting game and he was content to watch a little while longer, until a more advantageous opportunity to interfere arose.

CHAPTER 7

Marianne Kyle listened patiently as Voshinin explained what Carswell had found through his unwitting subordinates at the Ministry of Defence. He was a competent second, though he clearly didn't much like liaising with a party dignitary. Kyle didn't care what he liked; only how he performed his duties. Especially here, where there were so many distractions. Besides, surely he knew by now that she was an able field commander.

Voshinin opened a telephone directory, turning it towards Kyle so that she could view the name and address that was printed there. His thin mouth cracked into a smile beneath his prominent nose.

'This is the key. I can send a car for him now.'

Kyle nodded. It had been a risk for Voshinin to be seen visiting her office here at the bank, but his progress had made it worthwhile.

'Then do so. Make the call immediately afterwards.' She knew she could trust him to do so, because she had drummed that sense of obedience into him.

The people she had trained herself were the only ones she could even consider trusting. She liked to make sure that those who followed her learned from the mistakes of those who had gone before. She certainly shouldn't have trusted her father or her husband so blindly.

But they were both long gone and today she didn't miss them. Some other days, yes, but not today.

'Well, Chesterton,' the Brigadier remarked as they returned to the UNIT lab. 'Looks like it's down to you.'

Ian was fairly confident that he could get some idea of what had happened to the aircraft, but he doubted he could make a full report without the help of some of the equipment from the TARDIS. The Brigadier sounded cheery enough, though, so perhaps it was possible. If not, then he certainly knew how to inspire his men.

'Perhaps the tape of the last conversation will give me some clues. They reported a UFO?'

'Yes, but nothing was recorded on radar. That doesn't mean much, though, Chesterton. If they've got the technology to travel from other planets, I doubt that perfecting some sort of stealth thing is beyond them.'

The Brigadier had seen enough alien technology by now to know that plenty of alien species were capable of coming and going more or less unnoticed.

'I suppose not,' Ian agreed. He had done some consulting work on the Americans' pet stealth project during his exchange tour, but it was far from perfect. 'Barbara didn't hear anything unusual on the tape, and I'm no more of a sound engineer than she is. Our best bet might be to see if your signallers can make anything of it. At the very least they might manage to clear up some of the static.'

The Brigadier nodded. 'I'll get Osgood and Bell on to it straight away.'

Ian wanted Barbara involved as well. She wasn't a scientist, but she did have a common-sense knack for spotting things that he might otherwise miss.

Kyle had finally found time for lunch. She made it herself in the bank's little staff canteen, of course. Though there was nothing wrong with eating out in a restaurant, that would have lacked the creative edge that she liked to hone as a hobby. Even though a trained chef would make better meals, there was something extra satisfaction in having done something herself. It added a richness to the food that was purely imaginary but nonetheless welcome.

And, of course, her National Service had taught her how to fend for herself. At least, it would have, if she hadn't already learned that looking after her family after her father walked out on them.

She used to feel that her military service was useful preparation for when she next saw him, but that feeling faded when she never did see him again. He was dead now, of course, and somehow she had always felt cheated by it. Death did that sometimes; cheated those whom it passed by, just as it no doubt surprised those whom it took.

The telephone rang as she was finishing the meal.

'We have the complete package you requested.'

Voshinin's throaty voice sounded pleased and she acknowledged that he had a right to be.

'Where?' At last! There was just this one section of the organisation's hierarchy to deal with. . .

'Aylesbury Grange.'

'Excellent work, Company-Leader. Proceed as planned.'

'Yes, sir.'

Kyle hung up the phone and sat back with a slow smile. Yes, things were moving well. This was just what she had been trained for, and she had always been a very conscientious student. That had led her into trouble with her peers, of course, but she need only look at the difference in their status to be satisfied that her way had been right in the end. She was a leading light in the Conclave and they. . .

Well, they were dead, of course, but before that they had been mere labourers in a construction division. Who knows, one or two of them might even have survived the labour camp's regime long enough to be released, if it hadn't been for the accident. Well, the Conclave called it an accident, but all those who survived knew enough to more accurately describe it as sheer criminal negligence. Kyle would never have allowed things to get so far out of hand if she had been the head of security at the camp.

Sedition was such an easy thing to prove – the accusation had been enough to convict them. As a bonus, the glory of putting away a few traitors gave her own reputation a further boost. All in all, her training had worked out very well indeed.

The Brigadier regarded the photographs that Beresford and Benton had brought in. 'Well done, Beresford.'

'Thank you, sir,' Beresford said, sounding a little chuffed.

Benton couldn't blame him – he'd felt just the same way after that incident with Chin Lee at the World Peace Conference. The Brig was fair, though, as he had said. For all its troubles, UNIT did get the best officers that he had ever served under, and he hoped Beresford would be one of them some day.

Lethbridge-Stewart frowned, holding up one picture to examine it more closely. 'I feel as if I know something, but not what it is.'

'What do you mean, sir?' Beresford asked.

'There's something about the armband. Something I've been briefed on, when I joined UNIT. . .'

Benton had had that feeling all too often. He hated that; it made him feel stupid.

'It'll come to you, sir.'

George Boucher had to admit that the woman from UNIT had a good head on her shoulders. All the same, he was glad that he hadn't had her as a teacher when he was at school – she seemed like the type who would go all stern without warning and probably send you to the head for talking out of turn.

Most of his teachers would probably have had coronaries if they'd known he'd become a policeman; they had always told him he was going to end up no good. Mind you, the Super would probably agree with them. . .

'That's it there, isn't it?' Barbara asked, breaking his train of thought. She was pointing to an imposing door set into the pale stone façade further along Whitehall from Boucher's Granada.

'That's the place,' Boucher agreed.

He caught himself expecting that someone from UNIT would have more knowledge about the corridors of power and had to remind himself that she

was a teacher on temporary assignment. He wondered idly if she was getting paid extra – work for a secret mob like UNIT must pay better than for some local education authority.

‘They’d refuse to see us, of course; the important ones always do.’

‘That’s a rather defeatist attitude,’ Barbara chided gently. ‘I’m sure they’ll be even more eager than we are to solve Jackson’s murder.’

Boucher admired her confidence. He often admired qualities in others that he lacked himself.

‘Their first priority will be to shuffle things around to make the best of it. That sort of thing tends to get in the way of common courtesy.’ It was a shame she was married, he thought. She had enough strength to put up with a copper for her man, he was sure. He wondered if her husband would get annoyed at her spending time – however innocently – in this parked car with Boucher, and he hoped he didn’t find out. Becoming the victim of a jealous husband sounded just the sort of addition to this week that his luck demanded. Still, she was doing her share of the work, right enough.

‘We’ll get more idea of what’s going on by watching who goes in and out than by blundering in asking questions.’

‘I thought that was what you wanted to do.’

‘We’re not all like Regan and Carter on the telly.’

Boucher had wanted to do that, but even he had second thoughts about things from time to time. Jackson knew his killer, and others within the Ministry were implicated, so Boucher had no intention of risking them finding out how much they already suspected. Besides, he’d got his nephew killed this week and didn’t want to add this woman to his tally.

To be blunt, he found he was a little afraid to take action. More than a little, perhaps.

‘At least the police on television always get their man.’

‘Yeah.’ That never failed to raise a laugh at the station.

‘Is that why you joined the force?’

Boucher took a sip from his refilled hip-flask. ‘Not exactly,’ he said, offering the flask to Barbara, who shook her head disapprovingly. ‘I saw this film when I was a kid – *The Blue Lamp*, you know the one?’

‘Yes, of course. Jack Warner was in it as Dixon.’

Boucher shrugged, trying not to feel embarrassed. ‘Yeah. Well, ever since I saw that, I wanted to be a copper.’ He laughed. ‘When I was a kid, when it first came out, I thought Dixon was real and I wanted to. . . I dunno, be his replacement or something after he got killed. Course, I grew up and it was just a film, but I still wanted to be a copper. I think it was because the film was the first time I saw a sort of mixture of the exciting stuff about the murder and the sort of real policework. I never forgot that.’ He grinned. ‘Either that

or it was just to spite my old teachers – they all said I'd end up as a crook.' He let the smile fade, and shrugged again. 'After all that's happened this week, I begin to wonder, you know. Even Dixon of Dock Green has retired now. Things just aren't the same.'

'Things always change,' Barbara said. 'Believe me, I know.'

Boucher did believe her – a teacher approaching middle age and working for UNIT was pretty unusual.

'You mean like changing from being a teacher to working with UNIT?'

'Well, partly that. . . It's just a temporary thing, though, to help Ian out. I owe him my life several times over, you know.'

For a moment, Boucher thought she was making some sort of reference to her love for her husband, but then he saw the lines around her eyes deepen and knew that she meant it literally. He couldn't imagine how – once maybe, in a crime or an accident, but not several times. He'd love to ask her what she meant, but those deeper lines dissuaded him. Clearly whatever had happened wasn't quite as harmless as his fascination with an old black and white film.

'I've heard about those inner-city schools,' he said finally.

She brightened and he felt better for that.

Carol Bell poked her head round the door of Lethbridge-Stewart's office.

'Sir, Sergeant Osgood and I think we've got something. You may want to hear this.'

'Lead the way, Corporal.'

Osgood was sitting in the radio room, where Bell was frequently on duty, and Chesterton had also arrived. Wires crisscrossed the desks and a couple of extra oscilloscopes from the lab had been drafted in. Amidst the chaos was a sophisticated tape recorder on which Lethbridge-Stewart could hear the last conversation between Victor six-zero and RAF West Drayton being replayed.

'What have you found?'

Osgood settled the glasses on his nose. 'Listen to this, sir.'

'I can't confirm. . . It's just a dark shape.' There was a muffled gasp from the recorded pilot. 'Drayton, this is Victor six-zero. The unknown has just passed over me, less than 1,000 above.'

'Roger, and it is a large aircraft? Confirm,' the air traffic controller's voice replied.

'Ah, unknown – it's going too fast to tell. Is there any RAF traffic in the vicinity?'

Lethbridge-Stewart couldn't see what Osgood was getting at. 'This is the recording from West Drayton?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And what exactly am I listening for?' So far it all sounded like a perfectly normal UFO sighting – if that wasn't a contradiction in terms.

'It's just coming, sir.'

'Affirmative. It... ' The pilot's voice hesitated.

'There!' Osgood exclaimed.

'It's not an aircraft. It is –'

There was a sudden jarring burst of static.

Lethbridge-Stewart hadn't heard anything unusual. 'He hesitated... Seems natural to me.'

Corporal Bell shook her head. 'No, sir, listen to the background.' She leaned forward to adjust some controls on the radio equipment. 'I'll see if I can make it clearer.'

'Affirmative,' the Jetstream's pilot said again. 'It –' And there was the hesitation, behind which the Brigadier could just about hear...'

'Big Ben?' Ian said.

Lethbridge-Stewart sympathised with the bafflement in his tone; he couldn't believe it either.

'Preparing to chime the hour, sir. This conversation was supposed to have taken place at 16.37, quite a way from London.' Bell looked a little apologetic for some reason.

'The message is a fake,' Lethbridge-Stewart mused. 'But this was given to us by DI55...'

'Oh, the conversation is genuine, sir,' Osgood said. 'At least, the West Drayton traffic control officer part is genuine. It's all of Victor six-zero's transmissions that were faked. Someone was transmitting a recording, or selections from pre-recorded responses.'

Lethbridge-Stewart understood. 'Which means something else happened to it – something perhaps not involving a UFO...'

Whoever was behind this certainly knew how to disseminate disinformation. And if the UFO cover wasn't just intended to make the report unbelievable but to lead UNIT up the garden path, then they must also have some sort of knowledge about the way UNIT operated. That idea didn't please the Brigadier at all.

RSM Mackay picked up the phone when it rang.

'Aylesbury Grange Detention Centre.'

'Henlow here. We're reading another helicopter headed your way. If they don't change course, they'll enter the exclusion zone in a couple of minutes. Are you expecting anyone?'

'No, but it's most likely more snoopers from the News of the Screws trying to get pictures of the prisoner again, same as last week.'

Bloody journalists, Mackay thought. As far as he was concerned, freedom of the press would be a good thing if it was more tightly controlled. 'If you can check them out, I'll notify his nibs.'

'Understood. I'll call you back in five minutes.'

'Right.'

Mackay hung up and left the small duty office.

Executive Officer Conran, the MoD's appointment as nominal head of the establishment – though Mackay was secure in the knowledge that he was the one who got things done – was in his Victorian study in the main building. Mackay knocked on the door and went in.

Conran, incongruous in his lab coat and rollneck sweater, looked up from the report he was writing. 'Is something wrong?'

'Not necessarily, sir.' Mackay didn't think a pen-pusher like Conran was much of a jailer. Surely they should have got some ex-copper in if it absolutely had to be a civilian head. He, of course, would have preferred to serve under a redcap officer. 'There's unscheduled air traffic on the way.'

Conran put his pen down. 'Those journalists again?'

'Henlow are checking that, but I thought you'd want to know. I'd like to sound an alert, just in case.'

'All right. Stage-one alert. Let's not get too jumpy yet.'

The helicopter in question was a Westland Lynx, wrapped in standard British grey and green camouflage and bearing RAF markings. It buzzed along quite smoothly, curving slightly towards the air exclusion zone that surrounded Aylesbury Grange.

The pilot was ready and waiting for the call from Henlow when it came in.

'Windmill fourteen-twelve, Henlow Downs. You are entering an air exclusion zone. State your purpose and permissions.'

The pilot toggled the radio switch. 'Henlow, Windmill fourteen-twelve. This is an unscheduled UNIT security inspection; authorised by Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart.'

He paused, waiting for the Henlow radio operator to check his orders and find out what the protocol was for checking up on inspections.

'Windmill fourteen-twelve, Henlow. What is your authorisation code from Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart?'

The pilot smiled to himself as he glanced down at the thigh of his flight suit, where the code was scribbled on his notepad.

'Henlow, Windmill fourteen-twelve. Authorisation code: nursery tango four alpha.' He fancied he could almost hear the radio operator flipping through his file to find the day's code for confirmation.

'Windmill fourteen-twelve, Henlow. You're cleared to enter the exclusion zone. Henlow out.'

The pilot switched the radio off. 'We'll be there in three minutes.'

In the seat next to him, Voshinin worked the bolt of his Kalashnikov, cycling the first round into the chamber.

'Well?' Conran asked when Mackay returned to his office.

'It's another UNIT flight, sir; unscheduled inspection.'

He sounded insulted, and for once Conran saw eye to eye with him. He didn't like the idea that UNIT didn't trust him to keep his prisoner safe until Fortress Island was ready to receive him. The Brigadier had tried everything he could to stick his nose into the security arrangements, claiming that the Master's attempted escape from remand at Stangmoor proved that somehow only he knew how to handle the prisoner. But Conran didn't need to be mothered by them the whole time. Hadn't the Brigadier seen for himself how well things were going here?

'Keep the platoon out on show – let them see that we can respond to unannounced visitors. But make sure the men know it's UNIT. I don't want them shooting down one of the Brigadier's choppers by mistake.'

Voshinin looked on with interest as the soldiers in the grounds below went through a listless battle-drill. If they had been serving under Kyle, she would probably have them all sent to a punishment battalion for being so lax.

Still, while they were so conveniently arrayed, it would be a shame not to take advantage of the opportunity.

'Begin suppressing fire,' he said into his headset microphone.

The strains of Bowie singing 'Diamond Dogs' filtered out from the Waltham radiogram as the Master sat with a copy of *The Financial Times*, idly toting up his profits from the day's trading. The humans used such a primitive system of investments that they might as well simply give him their money. He didn't need money as such, especially the currency of such an irrelevant planet as this, which wasn't even legal tender anywhere else, but it had its uses for acquiring local labour. And so it was a necessary evil.

The Master dropped his paper at the sudden blast from outside. What in Rassilon's name was that? He went to the armoured window to look out and flinched involuntarily as a helicopter buzzed overhead, someone firing a machine gun from the side door.

The Master felt a rush of irritation. Grant knew perfectly well that he considered this merely a convenient base of operations and could leave whenever it might be necessary. So why was he wasting his time with this ridiculous

rescue attempt? He was hardly likely to find a better alibi for anything than being in prison!

The only logical conclusion was that Grant was doing no such thing. Those who had robbed the bank had used a helicopter to escape, and so it was more likely that Grant had failed in his mission and they were now coming to abduct or murder him. He felt a vague temptation to laugh, despite the annoyance; they could try.

They were obviously brave, he reflected, but equally they were stupid. They had to be, to think they could defy his plans so blatantly. If Grant had failed, then so be it – mere humans were expendable. This 69 Krew would regret forcing him to take action himself.

An armed guard burst into the room, clearly intending to escort the Master to somewhere more secure. The Master was in no mood to be moved, however. Resigning himself to having to leave this perfectly adequate base of operations, he snapped his fingers at the guard, triggering the post-hypnotic conditioning he had given the man – along with the rest of the staff – soon after his arrival.

‘Full alert. Delay the attackers’ progress as long as you can.’

‘Yes, Master,’ the guard acknowledged, before hurrying out.

The military mind was so accustomed to taking orders, this was all quite ridiculously easy, the Master reflected.

From somewhere outside there came the sound of machine gun fire, and the Master could tell from the noisy rotors that the helicopter was hovering above the east wing’s roof. No doubt they were depositing men there. That was fine by him; by the time the fools blasted their way down here, he would have used the guards’ access stairwell to reach the west wing’s roof. While the intruders wasted their time searching for him, he would simply traverse the Grange’s roof. . .

Voshinin pulled the black balaclava down over his face while the pilot brought the Lynx down on to the roof of the east wing. The other six men in his group were dropping on to the gravel-covered roof even before the landing skids touched down.

Voshinin signalled to one of the men to blow the access door to the building’s interior. It took only a few seconds to do so. The east wing was quite lavish, but Voshinin ignored the antiques that were dotted everywhere as he made his way towards Victor Magister’s cell. He had memorised the layout quite thoroughly, as was his duty, and needed no map.

Around him, his group went swiftly to the doors, taking up defensive positions ready for the counterattack which was bound to come sooner or later.

* * *

RSM Mackay had frozen when the first grenade exploded. He had prided himself on serving two tours in Ulster without batting an eyelid, but no soldier was trained to expect attacks from his own side.

By the time he had recovered himself the attackers had landed their helicopter on the roof of the east wing, which meant they were here for the Master. Mackay felt vaguely upset, though he didn't know why. Surely if the Master had wanted to escape, he would have just left?

Conran was almost hysterical as he bellowed into the phone. 'At least twenty armed men, damn it! They're attacking the centre!' He paused. 'No I can't wait for confirmation, I need more men now. They've killed. . . I don't know how many.'

Voshinin zeroed in on Magister's suite with the accuracy of a programmed machine – which, in many ways, he was.

It was empty. Oh, there were pieces of furniture, art, possessions; but no guard and no prisoner. Voshinin's confidence was thrown for the first time since his basic training. What the hell was he supposed to do now?

And that was when he heard the Lynx's engines rise in pitch.

The Brigadier picked up the lab phone when it rang.

'Lethbridge-Stewart,' he said crisply. He could somehow feel the colour drain from his face as Conran's voice screeched in panic.

'We're on our way.'

Voshinin's heart pounded in his chest as he sprinted up the stairs. All the physical training in the world didn't help when it came to running while under emotional stress.

As he burst out on to the roof, the Lynx was already backing off from the edge of the building. Through the canopy, he could see the satanically bearded face of his quarry. Victor Magister gave him a mocking wave and wheeled the Lynx away.

Voshinin reeled back in surprise and his foot landed uncomfortably on something soft. When he looked down to see what it was, he was almost sick. But he was trained well enough to fight it.

In common with much Earth technology, the Lynx's flight controls were foolishly over-complicated for such a primitive mode of transport, but they posed no problem to the Master. Right now his problem was not the people who had come to Aylesbury looking for him, but UNIT, who would undoubtedly be sending the RAF to search for him. He'd seen Conran calling them as he left.

The Brigadier and his troops were hardly an adversary of the Doctor's calibre, but they did know how to go about their own jobs well enough to track a helicopter.

He was keeping it as low as possible, to avoid radar detection, but knew that this couldn't last long. Sooner or later the humans would programme their radar systems to not show any ground clutter, or targets moving slower than an escaping helicopter.

Aware of the danger, the Master slowed the Lynx to fifty knots. Its normal cruising speed was over a hundred, so that should be an adequate safety margin. Now, if he could just find a nice motorway or main rail line, where the vehicles upon it would be travelling faster than he was, he might have have a chance of throwing any such radar tracking on to them. It wouldn't be the first time a high speed train had triggered a fighter scramble by appearing on radar.

Luckily, this region of England was thoroughly crisscrossed by transport lanes, and the Master could already see a motorway junction ahead. Pleased, he took the Lynx in to land in a roadside field. While the Lynx's rotors were still whipping overhead, the Master strolled calmly on to the nearest motorway hard shoulder and looked along the oncoming cars. It took relatively little force of will to make one of the humans pull up beside him and chauffeur him away.

CHAPTER 8

Barbara had no doubt that the Doctor would just have blundered straight in to the Ministry and insinuated himself into a position where he could find out something useful. That was his great talent and it was a shame it so often led him into trouble. He'd be quite handy in a situation like this. Unfortunately, Boucher had to go through normal channels, which meant being fobbed off by assorted civil servants.

She also knew, however, that the Doctor wasn't around – the Brigadier had made that clear enough. It was a pity that she and Ian couldn't even just meet him again for a little reunion – provided that it didn't coincide with some sort of alien invasion. Knowing the Doctor, that's exactly what would happen.

Boucher paced up and down the corridor in which they waited for the next employee to come up with an excuse to delay them.

'Sod it,' he grumbled, 'I'm going in.'

He reminded her of a schoolboy forced to wait in line in the dining hall; he had the same sour impatience and the same grasp of language.

'Is that wise?' Barbara asked.

There were rules and regulations to be adhered to and she was fairly sure that those rules had been set with good reason. He stopped pacing and let out a long breath instead. 'They're giving us the runaround. They don't have any intention of letting us talk to the Minister.'

Barbara could understand his frustration; dealing with officialdom did always seem like charging repeatedly against a brick wall. She had had enough of that when she had tried to sort out the rent on her flat after two years of unexplained absence. Things had eventually worked out well enough once some other people who knew the Doctor had got involved, but for a while she just wanted to explode at some of those infuriating council officials.

She had been better off than Ian. He had ended up having to sell everything to get a new place, whereas at least she had been able to go and stay with her parents.

A clerk in shirt-sleeves approached Boucher. 'Inspector Boucher?'

Boucher perked up. 'Finally got some time to see me, has he?'

'Telephone, sir,' the clerk said. 'It's your Superintendent. He says it's urgent.'

'He always does,' Boucher scoffed. He shook his head wearily. 'Stay here, will you, Mrs Chesterton. I won't be long.'

Boucher left, slouching along casually, and Barbara turned to the clerk before he had a chance to leave.

'Do you have any idea when the Minister will be free to see us?'

'I'm afraid not.' Without Boucher's intimidating grimace, though, the clerk seemed a little more relaxed. 'He's very busy with the interviews for staff for Mr Jackson's replacement.'

'Staff? I would have expected another MP to be appointed.' Barbara was no expert, but that would be the common-sense assumption.

'One has been,' the clerk agreed, 'but the Minister felt a change of staff would be a good idea, so as to have a totally fresh approach. Some of Jackson's staff are obviously upset. . .'

Barbara thought about this. She knew from experience with the Education Department that civil service vacancies didn't progress to the interview stage overnight.

'I see,' she said slowly. 'If I'd known I might have applied.'

He grinned. 'The ads went in last week—'

He broke off suddenly, clamping his mouth shut, and Barbara tried not to react in any way that would suggest she'd noticed his slip. Boucher would want to hear this – and so would the Brigadier.

As the clerk hurried off, Boucher passed him at the corner, on his way back to Barbara. He looked pale and Barbara wondered what he had been told.

'Let's go,' Boucher said curtly. 'Something interesting has just happened.'

Barbara followed him back to the wide staircase that led down to the main entrance.

'Here too, George. There's something very strange going on.'

'Don't I know it,' he grumbled, then sighed. 'What did you want to say?'

'They're interviewing for new staff to work under Jackson's replacement.'

'So?' he said, leading her out of the door and towards the car.

'So, the advertisements for the posts were in the papers a week ago.'

Boucher halted. She'd known that would get his attention.

'But that was before – Perhaps they were planning a reshuffle anyway. . .'

'Do you believe in that level of coincidence?'

Boucher scratched at the back of his bald skull. 'Not that level, no,' he admitted. 'Look, I don't mean to be snappy, but. . .'. She could see that something was nagging at him, just like back in the file room. 'Forensics have matched the bullet that killed Jackson to one that was found in the Magnum Bank. The same gun must have been used, which means his killer is one of those who killed Rob.'

Now she understood. On the one hand, the fact that the killers of his nephew were definitely still committing more murders must be a blow to him, but on the other, it must increase his incentive to solve this case.

‘What exactly happened?’ Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart asked Conran.

They were both standing on the rooftop of Aylesbury Grange’s east wing, with Yates. Mike didn’t envy Conran right now; he’d be lucky to have a job at the end of this, let alone such high clearance. It was a shame, really – he doubted much could’ve been done to prevent the Master’s escape. Not from here anyway, since, Mike felt, security was aimed more at keeping spies out than residents in.

‘Henlow reported a chopper coming in with a UNIT clearance. I had Mackay set up a drill to show your inspectors that we were on the ball. . . And suddenly the chopper just opened fire on the guards. They didn’t stand a chance. It landed here, and the intruders went down to try to get at the Master. While they were doing that, he came across from the west wing’s roof and took their chopper.’

Yates was astounded at Conran’s admission of how easily the Master had left, but sympathetic as well. He knew the Brigadier would also know deep down that Conran wasn’t truly at fault, but it wasn’t going to show.

‘Didn’t you try to stop him?’ Lethbridge-Stewart demanded.

Conran gave him a look that suggested he was mad to overlook the obvious. ‘We. . .’ He stopped, trying to speak but without success. ‘I don’t know. It just didn’t seem right. He said we should call for help from you.’

He was dazed and uncertain. The Master had undoubtedly hypnotised him, and presumably the other guards too.

‘He must have planned this all along.’

‘I’m not sure, sir.’ Yates obviously disagreed. ‘Given that the staff here have been hypnotised, he could just walk out any time he felt like it. Why go to all these lengths?’ Unfortunately, he couldn’t offer a better theory offhand.

The Brigadier absent-mindedly stroked his moustache. ‘Perhaps as a message of some kind. To prove that he really could still organise things even from within prison.’

Yates could see that the Brigadier was doubtful himself.

‘What other possibility is there? Especially after he made that promise to see me soon. We’ll take the prisoners back to UNIT and hold them under the Prevention of Terrorism Act until they can be passed on to the regular authorities. Yates, you take charge here until the staff is relieved for debriefing.’

‘Right, sir.’

Yates would do a good job here; he was reliable that way. Some day he should probably end up commanding the UK section of UNIT. But hopefully it would be a long time before the Brigadier retired and made that necessary.

‘Do you want me to make sure a D-notice is sent out?’ It wouldn’t do for the government to be embarrassed by this escape, or to cause mass panic. The

Master wouldn't get far.

'I'll handle that.'

'What about this?'

Conran pointed downwards. On the gravel, the tiny twisted figure of a pilot was sprawled, legs crushed to a red paste by Voshinin's careless heel.

'I'll deal with it,' Yates said. Cleaning up other people's messes was his speciality.

In his finely appointed boardroom at the bank's headquarters, the Master was looking rather more like a high-flying City businessman, having exchanged his simple black clothes for a John Phillips suit. He poured a measure of milky-green liquid from a crystal decanter and took a sip. The taste was bitter, yet rich and rounded, with a hint of brandy. It was good. Now he knew he really was out of that prison. He could have had most of the privileges of rank there, but the few exceptions served to remind him that he was – at least officially – no longer in control of his life.

He turned to see that Marianne Kyle had come into the boardroom and gestured her to take a seat. She was one of the accountants hired by Grant not long before the Master's arrest at Devil's End.

'I presume Mr Grant is dead?'

'He's vanished,' Kyle corrected simply. 'According to Barron, he simply never returned from the trip to Hounslow to eliminate the Glaswegians. Their van was found, along with several bodies, but his was not among them.'

'Really.' The Master shook his head, tutting softly. 'It seems you can't trust anyone these days.' He held up another glass. 'Absinthe?'

She smiled. 'Thank you, but no. I've never been attracted to the idea of madness.'

The Master put the glass down. 'We all take risks, Ms Kyle. Some consort more with danger than others.'

She leaned back on the chaise-longue as he sat in the chair opposite. 'The greater the stakes, the greater the potential prize. None of us is in this business for a pension and a gold watch.'

'And what exactly are you in it for?'

'The same as you, I imagine.'

The Master doubted that very much. After all, she had never even heard of the worlds he had plans to conquer once he could cement a grip on Earth. Still, if she meant that she sought power and influence, then she could be either an asset to be exploited or a threat to be eliminated. The ambitious could be manipulated by promises and samples of power, but they could also be dangerously independent.

'And a new position has conveniently become available?'

Marianne nodded demurely. 'It's unfortunate, but yes. If someone is attempting to destroy our chain of command, then the best way to thwart them is to prove our strength by staying together.'

'Well put, Ms Kyle.' The Master reached across to the speaker phone on the desk. 'Have Barron sent in.'

The door opened to admit a nervous-looking Barron. And nervous he should be.

'I gather Mr Grant has not returned from his expedition.'

'Not so far. I dunno what happened.'

'Oh, I can see that,' the Master agreed. He produced his tissue-compression eliminator and toyed with it idly. 'You seem to have stayed at home that night.'

'Well, not exactly –'

'You are this organisation's head of security, yet you didn't go and vanish or die with the others. Why is that?'

The Master knew he wouldn't get a satisfactory answer, because there wasn't one. Barron should have been on that assault and that was that.

Barron indicated the dressing on his forehead. 'I was in casualty. A drunk driver hit my car on the way to the lock-up. Bloody lucky I'm still here.' Fear and the desire to run flickered across his eyes.

'Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, and here am I,' the Master snarled, aiming his tissue-compression eliminator at Barron. 'Six of our best men wiped out.'

He stepped forward suddenly and tore the dressing from Barron's forehead. Underneath was a purple-blotched mass of scars and stitches. The Master despised failure in his lackeys but, on the other hand, always expected it of inferiors. That was, after all, why they were inferior. It wouldn't be proper to punish a creature simply for being true to its nature, so he lowered the weapon. He would kill to prove their inferiority, but not as a punishment, not really.

'Our foes must be particularly adept... Superior, in fact, to yourselves. Would that be an accurate assessment?'

The relieved expression that Barron had taken on when the Master lowered the weapon quickly faded. 'Well, I don't know – I mean, that is... ' He trailed off into hopeful mumbling.

The Master nodded. 'As I thought.'

It had been a mistake to try to kill the Scots like that. One didn't automatically destroy superior tools and equipment just because they were owned by someone else. That way there was no source of upgrades. Perhaps there was a way to both take what he needed and re-establish the respect and fear that he deserved.

'Get in touch with the leaders of the 69 Krew. Tell them I want a meeting, to discuss a business venture that could be mutually profitable.'

'OK, but –'

'Be silent, and obey!'

Barron quaked and hurried out to do as he was told.

The Master snapped his fingers. 'Ms Kyle?'

'Marianne, please,' she said from just behind his ear.

He was momentarily impressed that she had been able to approach without his hearing her; it showed skill. On the other hand, her demonstration of the ability betrayed over-confidence.

'Arrange a suitable venue for our negotiations. Somewhere fairly public, to reassure our guests. The Birnam should be ideal.'

'I'll see to it immediately.'

She too left and the Master drained the rest of his absinthe. Once again, things were not going entirely as planned, but that would be corrected. The weakness his enemies shared with the likes of the Doctor was that they didn't have what it took to do whatever was necessary to achieve a goal. The Master, however, did. No matter what. It was a lesson his enemies would learn the hard way.

Now he had best check up on his TARDIS. If the Doctor had found it, he would no doubt have come round to Aylesbury to gloat before swanning off in it – not that the sanctimonious fool would call it gloating – so the Master knew that that hadn't happened. Still, it was better to be safe than sorry.

Marianne Kyle was half-way to calling Voshinin before she recalled that the raid had failed. He would, of course, now be dead or a prisoner. Under ordinary circumstances, it would be the former, but here the authorities were so weak. . . She would hear from her little bird at UNIT in due course as to whether Voshinin had been killed or taken alive.

Instead she put through a call to her current posting and gave the instructions that the Master had passed on.

He was a stronger leader than she had expected, especially for a Time Lord. Mind you, she knew of only two, so perhaps they were the exceptions. In many ways he reminded her of herself: unafraid to lead by example and to do what must be done to achieve goals. That, of course, could be a blessing or a curse. What mattered was that now she had the chance to find out which.

She had laughed long and hard when informed that he had arrived; it was so ironic that he had escaped her men only to come to her directly. Had Voshinin brought him back, the Master would surely have been delighted at her rescue of him, but as it was he had jumped to the wrong conclusion.

Kyle had no intention of correcting him about that, since knowing something he didn't gave her a slight advantage, should any change of plans become necessary.

That was what she had been told throughout her training – adapt and improvise to overcome. It was a lesson well learned. She could as easily adapt her military and political skills as she could the dance steps that amused her in the evenings. Her late husband would have been proud of her for that. As proud as he had been to marry his brightest subordinate.

That had been frowned upon and had left some elements of the Conclave determined to see her fail for daring to break tradition. Yu, in particular, had never let her forget that he assumed she earned her rank on her back. He didn't believe that, of course – he was no fool – but he always hoped that some of the mud he threw would stick.

Some day, she had once promised herself, she would tell him the truth; that he had things the wrong way round. She would do so in private, of course, so he had no cause to claim she was merely lying. Not that that would stop him. It didn't seem to occur to Yu that the more he criticised her, the worse it made him look in the eyes of the others. She hoped he never did realise that, at least not until she could move her plans along. He was being quite useful, like most of the men she knew. She wondered how useful the Master would be. Finding out should be intriguing.

Thinking of Yu reminded her that it was almost time to report in to the Conclave. Her helicopter would be leaving the city soon, so she didn't really have time to waste. Her newly acquired country and western cassettes were already safely packed for transport home. There was something else she wanted to collect first, though.

Kyle left her office and found Barron. 'Have you seen Magister?'

'I think he went down to the garage.' Barron frowned. 'What's up? Got hold of those Scots he wanted or –'

'Definitely or. Come with me, Joseph.'

She beckoned and he followed, like any obedient animal who desired a later treat. And like such a pet, he assumed that he was leading her.

Kyle made her way down to the building's garage. There were a few cars parked around, but none of them was quite what she was looking for. For one thing, she could see through their windows.

In a dark corner at the rear of the garage, however, was a heavy black limousine: a Rolls-Royce with impossibly dark windows. Kyle pulled Barron down behind a much plainer car.

'I thought as much.'

'What are we doing out here, Marianne?' Barron complained. 'It's just a car.'

'I think not. Besides –' she kissed him on the cheek, for the sake of keeping him properly motivated – 'you said you wanted more time with me.'

Barron's features twisted gloomily. 'I meant in bed.'

'Shh!'

Kyle held her breath instinctively as the Master emerged from the Rolls with an attaché case in hand. Although most cars had a light that came on when the door opened, the interior of the Rolls was just a black void. The Master walked back across the garage to the main building and disappeared inside. Kyle immediately went across to the Rolls and tried the door. It was, naturally, locked.

'You want Magister's car?' Barron asked. 'You want a Roller, it's no problem. I'll have one for you by –'

Kyle held up a hand for silence and put her ear to the side of the limousine. It buzzed slightly, an electrical hum that somehow didn't seem dangerous. It was like the sound of some mechanical animal hibernating. It was exactly what she was listening for. If only she could get inside... But she knew without even trying that she wouldn't be able to. The locks on these machines defied anything that could be directed against them, by humans at least. She straightened.

'Have this vehicle removed. Take it to the *Redoubt*.'

DI Boucher didn't feel particularly comfortable around UNIT HQ. There was no actual problem in particular, he just felt rather out of place. He supposed that they were all servants of the country as a whole, but the thought that this was the den of covert anti-terrorist groups and shady military plotters made him nervous.

The officers all being public-school types wasn't much of an incentive to visit either. They did seem to know what they were doing, mind you; that Brigadier would make somebody a good drinking mate if he ever dropped the posh accent. He claimed to be Scottish, but he didn't sound that way to Boucher. Actually, Boucher thought that there might be some sort of kinship between the two of them. He'd be willing to bet that the Brigadier joined up after seeing something like *Ice Cold* in Alex.

'So,' Lethbridge-Stewart said, 'there is a connection between your bank robbery and our plane crash.'

'It certainly looks that way,' Ian agreed.

He sounded concerned and Boucher couldn't blame him. Obviously Chesterton's side of the case wasn't as safe as he had hoped. But Boucher could scarcely keep his attention off the odds and ends lying around the lab and concentrate on what was being said. Science wasn't exactly his strong point, but he could see this was interesting stuff.

He flipped through the file of photos that the Brigadier had handed out, showing some sort of meeting between Minister Carswell and... No, it couldn't be? Barron and the government? It was a surreal and unpleasant thought.

'Bloody hell,' he murmured, but not quietly enough.

'Do you recognise that man?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked, sounding quite surprised.

'Yeah, it's Joseph Barron. Calls himself a legal adviser, but really he's a bruiser for Ross Grant and friends. They both used to work for the Richardsons, and now they represent the Magnum Bank.'

He couldn't believe that was a coincidence. True, Grant had seemed upset enough at the deaths there, but Barron would kill his granny if he thought it would be funny. He got the distinct feeling that this was who Deirdre had seen leave the Dog and Ferret with 'Mutton' Jeff.

He could still see Rob Thorpe fall, still smell the blood, but now he could sense a new addition to the replay in his imagination: Barron arriving at the bank and visibly not giving a damn about what had happened. The little toerag was in it up to his neck, Boucher decided.

'Right, thanks for the help. I think I can take this from here.' Barron was waiting for him, though he didn't know it yet. Boucher was going to enjoy surprising him.

'I shouldn't be so quick, Inspector,' the Brigadier said darkly. 'There are undoubtedly others involved and this man is only a lead to them, not the objective of the exercise.'

Boucher knew that and briefly considered snapping back at the Brigadier for daring to interrupt the arrest of one of Rob's killers. He thought better of it, though. Barron would be able to get off without more evidence and if Boucher simply wrung his bloody neck, then he'd be a lot less likely to find out who Barron's co-conspirators were.

He looked around for something to hit or to throw across the room in frustration, but there was nothing that he dared risk breaking. He counted to ten, but that didn't help. So he imagined hitting Barron with a cricket bat, and that did.

'All right, what did you have in mind?'

Barron was disappointed that Marianne had gone. He had seen so little of her over the past week that he had begun to fear she had been avoiding him. He hoped that wasn't the case, because fear made him angry and he didn't want to have to slap her around and teach her respect. She deserved better than that, most of the time.

When she gave him the silent treatment, though... He just wanted to do anything that would provoke a reaction, even if it was only an insult. Anything was better than nothing, and at least it would be honest. Next time she tried the silent treatment, he'd make her say something, by fist or foot.

He had no idea what she wanted with Magister's car, except that she found it vital. He supposed it was this – what had she called it? – TARDIS. Barron mulled it over. It could be, though it looked like a Roller to him. And he had no idea what a TARDIS was supposed to be anyway. Some sort of foreign word, he supposed. Russian, maybe, for car?

No, that didn't sound likely at all. Barron recalled her mentioning this TARDIS thing before, and it had seemed more important to her than Magister himself. In fact, he was sure that she wanted to get hold of him only in order to find it.

So went Barron's reasoning. He had never been much of a planner, even as a child. He was more the type the bullies' ringleader would send to extract the pocket money from the other kids, turning a blind eye if he beat up even those who did pay.

Except that he was the one losing the pocket money to other boys. They were the ones he had feared, until the accident that showed him how to deal with his fear. He smiled at the memory. Accident, indeed! So long as the authorities had thought that, he was happy. He was happier still that those who saw him as their plaything kept away from him afterwards.

It was difficult to bring up the courage to bully someone who had snapped and defenestrated another boy who was trying to hit him. From the geography classroom to the tarmac of the car park, four storeys. Unlike in the movies, the little git hadn't even had the decency to scream, Barron recalled; he had been too terrified even for that. When Barron thought back to that time, it was the fear before that day which haunted him in his dreams.

If the TARDIS was all Marianne wanted, then he could now get rid of Magister, couldn't he? Magister was the last remaining superior he had in the organisation and without him, Barron could look even Reggie and Ronnie in the eye as an equal, if ever they met.

He knew he was fooling himself. Even if Magister was harmless, having the power of life and death over someone really thrilled Barron. After he killed Magister, he'd give Marianne the best evening she had ever spent in London.

And in her gratitude for his removing Magister, she would return the favour. That was a much more pleasing thought than provoking a reaction any other way.

The Master relaxed in the back seat of a Vauxhall Cavalier, disgusted at the state of what was to begin with an already uninspiring vehicle. He was,

of course, confident that all would go well at the meeting in the Birnam's penthouse. Having checked the building plans he had stolen from the Public Records Office, he knew precisely where everyone and everything should go.

The driver's door opened and a bulky drinker in a denim jacket got in. The Master could smell the alcohol from here. It was a very downmarket brand of gin; clearly the man had no real discrimination. Suddenly the driver realised that he was not alone in the car and started to turn.

'Hey, what the –'

'Be silent!' the Master snapped, his gaze assaulting the driver's eyes via the driving mirror. 'Be silent and listen to what I say.'

'Who...'

'I am the Master.' It was a statement, not an identification. 'I am the Master and you will obey me, Dennis Hayman.'

'Obey... I will obey...'

Hayman's eyes widened, unfocusing. If they had been a little lower, in the centre of the windscreen, the Master could almost have taken them for the petrified gaze of a rabbit that knew it was about to die under the car. The image amused him.

'Tomorrow you and a colleague will go to inspect the penthouse suite of the Birnam Hotel, near the Thames.' The Master passed a small satchel over to Hayman. 'You will secure the pistols from this bag to the underside of the table, at the end furthest from the picture window. You will also confirm to your colleague that the room is clear of weapons. Do you understand?'

'I understand.'

The Master nodded, much as a stern schoolmaster might grudgingly acknowledge a pupil's efforts. He opened the back door and climbed out of the car, then hesitated before turning back to Hayman.

'Now you will take a taxi home.'

'I obey,' Hayman agreed dazedly.

Grabbing the satchel, he got out of the car and went to hail a taxi. Ordinarily his mode of transport wouldn't matter, but the Master had no intention of allowing the fool to further inconvenience him by getting killed or, worse, arrested while driving under the influence.

The Master was satisfied that everything was now ready for the meeting. He walked back across the pub car park to his own Jaguar, lighting a fine Cuban cigar. The drive back to his residence was uneventful and he soon turned the car into the garage.

He halted before even reaching his usual slot, plucking the cigar irritably from his mouth. The Rolls had gone. So his enemies had known where to find his TARDIS; much good would it do them without a trimoniac cipher-indent

key from home. He pulled a small device from an inside pocket. Wherever his TARDIS was, this would detect it up to a range of over 500 miles.

To the Master's surprise, the TARDIS homer remained inactive. There was no possible way it could have been taken out of range so quickly; at least, not by any current Earth technology. He fought down the fury that threatened to engulf him, combating it by reminding himself that the very nature of the theft was itself a clue. Whoever was controlling his enemies was not from twentieth-century Earth. That knowledge was valuable, and the Master tried to convince himself that that value was what he should concentrate on.

The morning was as dull and cold as any in London in November. George Boucher was beginning to get a distinct sense of *déjà vu* as he grunted and tried to straighten out the crick that sleeping in the car had put in his neck. At least he wasn't alone this time. Lieutenant Beresford from UNIT was parked in a Gas Board van even closer to the door. He would definitely rather be in bed, like Barbara. Not with her, of course, but like her. She was no doubt snuggled warmly at home, still in the land of nod.

She'd earned it, though, with her work yesterday. He'd never thought he'd have anything good to say about a teacher. Even after thirty years, he still despised the harridans and sadists who had taught him. It wasn't so much that they had treated him badly, or failed to teach him anything useful. It was just that. . . well, they'd been strict, and nobody liked that. He suspected that if he'd been taught by either Chesterton he'd like them a lot less than he did now.

He wasn't used to being in such a reflective mood, but something pushed him into it. He supposed you thought more about childhood things when someone you thought of as a child, like Rob, died. Boucher had always been close to the rest of the family and had made his mark in bringing up Rob. Too much of a mark, he thought now; young Thorpe had followed in footsteps that George had never intended to leave. Now look where it had got him.

A minibus drew up outside the Ministry door to break his reverie and Boucher sank deeper into his seat, while at the same time concentrating on who was inside. Eight men and two women disembarked to be greeted at the Ministry door by Carswell himself. Boucher suppressed a smile. It would be good to bring down someone from so high. He would make a more satisfying crash.

Boucher's car radio chose that moment to crackle into life and he grabbed at the handset. 'Four-five.'

'Some information for you, four-five. Your friend Barron just met a group of people off the overnight sleeper from Glasgow. Powell's following them now.'

Scots? What did they have to do with this? The minibus rumbled noisily past his car and Beresford's van followed.

'All right. Have Powell keep an eye on them and let me know where they go.'

Damn it, why couldn't he be in two places at once?

CHAPTER 9

The house was quiet while John was staying with Barbara's parents, for which both Ian and Barbara were grateful. No matter how much they loved their son, the occasional respite – especially after the last couple of days – was a welcome opportunity to recharge their batteries.

Ian had known fatherhood would be hard work, but somehow he had still been unprepared for the strain of the past few years. He had thought that his experience teaching the children of Coal Hill would provide some valuable lessons, but bringing up a toddler was very different to dealing with teenagers.

Ian had risen quite early, eager to get back to UNIT HQ and make some headway with that strange wreckage. He also wanted to watch Barbara sleep for a while; he had never intended for her to become involved again, and this reassured him that she was all right. She had suffered the most from their travels with the Doctor and he didn't want to risk reawakening horrific memories. The hours sitting by her side in the hospital recovery room after the operation were the most emotional of his life, filled with both fear and hope. Sometimes he had felt that the stress of the conflicting emotions might tear him apart.

She had taken it all very calmly, of course. She worked through her fears by filling in a journal that they planned to leave for Susan, when she took up residence on Earth in 2167.

'You're up early,' Barbara said from the kitchen door.

Ian took a sip of his morning coffee. 'I thought I'd best be getting back to UNIT.'

If this plane crash was caused by something more mundane than a UFO, then perhaps he did stand a chance of finding some clues. At the very least, he might be able to persuade the Brigadier to turn the investigation back over to the proper air investigation branch.

'How about you? Planning to join Inspector Boucher again?'

Barbara helped herself to some cornflakes. 'No, he's off following someone, I think. If you like, I could come and help you.'

He grinned. 'Ah, an offer I can't refuse!'

'It wouldn't really be right to give up in the middle of things, would it?'

That was what Ian liked most about her.

'No, I suppose not.'

Boucher himself was now sitting in Beresford's Gas Board van, in the car park at a small private airfield near Brentford. It was the sort of place where people earned their private pilot's licence, or took off on sightseeing flights.

In this case, however, Boucher and Beresford were watching the driver of the minibus. He had parked the vehicle in a small hangar and locked it. Now he had boarded a Bell JetRanger executive helicopter, which was taking off for points unknown.

'Can you have that chopper tracked?' Boucher asked Beresford.

The taciturn lieutenant nodded. 'Should do.'

'Good. Get on to Lethbridge-Stewart; I'm sure he'll want to know where it goes.' He stepped out of the van.

'Right, sir,' Beresford agreed.

Co-operation, Boucher noted; there was a pleasant change. Maybe this UNIT mob weren't so bad after all.

'Where are you going?'

'To search that hangar.'

He would have put money on Beresford making some comment about needing a warrant. . .

'Do you have a warrant for that, sir?'

The soldier sounded merely curious; Boucher sighed.

'I left it in my other jacket, all right?' And he might well have done, if he'd had either a warrant or another jacket.

He strolled across to the small hangar. A member of the airport staff approached, no doubt with the intention of querying his presence, but Boucher merely showed his identification. He wasn't going to let his quest for Rob's killers be interrupted by red tape or paperwork.

He directed the man's attention to the hangar. 'Can you open that?'

A set of master keys to undo the padlock that held the hangar doors together was produced and Boucher stepped inside. He was reluctant even to consider the place a real hangar. To him, aircraft hangars were huge things the size of a James Bond film set. This wasn't much bigger than a garage extension on a house. A wooden roof surmounted breeze-block walls.

'Thanks. Wait here, would you? I don't want to leave this open to thieves when I'm finished.'

Nor did he fancy the idea of the man warning any of the conspirators, if he was involved. The minibus was parked at the side of the hangar, near a half-assembled Cessna twin-seater. The plane obviously wouldn't be going anywhere in the near future; it didn't even have an engine.

If Boucher hadn't known better, he might almost have thought that this hangar hadn't really been used for anything in a long time. There was no sign

of it having been used to house operational aircraft. On the other hand, it was too spotlessly clean to have been abandoned.

The minibus didn't have much in the way of clues lying around either, though he'd be sure to get Wallis and her people up here to examine it. In fact, there was no incriminating evidence at all, and it began to feel uncomfortably as if there was nothing untoward here. Boucher hated that feeling; it meant he was probably wasting time – time that Rob's killers would probably be using far more effectively. He left the hangar, instructing the airport worker to lock it up again, and returned to Beresford's van.

'Are they tracking the chopper?'

'Yes, sir,' Beresford confirmed, running a hand through his sandy hair. 'There was a message left for you as well. The Scotsmen that Detective Sergeant Powell was following have taken rooms at the Birnam Hotel.'

Boucher nodded. If the Scots were here at Barron's behest, they must be up to no good. It was a simplistic idea, but Boucher had learned from experience that such ideas tended to be the correct ones more often than not.

'I'd better get back there and check up on them.'

Returning home – to her current home at least – should have put a spring in Marianne Kyle's step. The place was inhumanly mechanistic and the air tasted of heated metal from the ventilation system, but it should still feel right. Somehow this time it didn't. She couldn't really explain it, other than that she no longer belonged here.

Although she had left Britain in the clouded morning, here the stars shone steadily against the darkness of the night sky. She had been only too glad to stretch her limbs in her private gymnasium after the six-hour flight, and almost felt human again. Later she would get some well-earned solo sleep in her own bed before the flight back, but for now she knew that the Conclave would expect her to attend the regular meeting. Even though Marianne liked to take a hands-on approach to those projects under her direct control, the others still expected her to come in for the formalities.

It didn't seem to occur to any of them that her ability to do so at all was a great technological achievement. They would in time, though, and they would be so impressed by the revelation that they would have no choice but to promote her from being Commander of the Security Council to Secretary General of the entire Conclave. They would have no choice at all, if they wanted to reap the benefits of her achievements, and who in their right mind would not?

Yu was waiting for her when she arrived at the antechamber to the Praesidium. He didn't look like much of a leader; his heavy brows and sloping forehead making him appear far less intelligent than he really was. Like her,

he wore his hair close-cropped, though it made him resemble a caricature of a soldier from years past.

'You're just in time,' he said. 'I was beginning to worry that you might not make it.'

'I appreciate your concern,' she lied, fluttering her eyelashes. Let him think she was a token woman with no strength. Let him think so for the moment, that is. 'After the flight home, and before that the connecting flight from London, I needed to freshen up.'

Yu shook his head. 'Surety not! You are always at your best.' She was glad he didn't really know that. Like most men, his brains were in his trousers and, though he didn't approve of her holding such high rank, he was always glad to see her around. It was touching, in a way, and helped give her a weapon to deflect his political attacks.

She thanked him and they went into the Praesidium, whose domed roof let in the beauty of the starlit night. It was a large amphitheatre sunk into the floor, with plush chairs set on every level for lower ranks from each country that was represented here. Naturally only a handful of these seats were occupied. At the centre, five high-backed chairs surrounded a polished obsidian table into which the light just seemed to disappear. Three of them were already occupied by the other members of the Conclave.

The black-haired Sandobal was only faintly tanned from the Florida sun. Although he had a lined face, it wasn't entirely unhandsome and Marianne had often considered approaching him. But business always came first and so far it had not been necessary. The burly Nkome still looked as if his head might burst at any moment. The climate here certainly didn't help his high blood pressure, but somehow the elderly African managed to get by. Roshan was content to watch the others. If anyone recognised Marianne's ambitions, it would be this white-maned schemer. She kept careful tabs on him, though she had the consolation of knowing that his age made him unlikely to survive any other flight to or from here.

She herself was the youngest member of the Conclave and had only gradually got used to her position over the past couple of years. She had been quite content with her old position in the British security services, but then the day had come when she found herself the highest-ranking official available to replace her tragic predecessor, and was automatically thrust into this chair for the first time.

Although she had initially been nervous and hesitant about wielding her new-found power – not that there was much to wield it over – she had come to appreciate the opportunity. Here she could prove her worth to the father who had left the family when she was five. She knew he would never see it, but it did make her feel better. Her husband wouldn't have been surprised;

he had experienced her ambition first-hand. Perhaps using her power wisely would make up for what she had done to him. But in time, even that wasn't enough. It never was.

She still had responsibilities to her peers, though, and returning for these interminable policy meetings was one of them. The sooner she could get through it and back to London, the better.

The Birnam Hotel was a huge tower, based loosely on the architectural style of Glamis, and faced with a ghostly sandstone overlooking the Thames embankment. Its penthouse suite was circular, with huge windows giving unobstructed views of the city in every direction. From up here, the curves of the Thames were reminiscent of a discarded silk sash. The oaken decor could be illuminated by a large chandelier in the centre of the room, giving the building a spectacular glow when seen from outside. This afternoon the room was lit solely by the setting sun reflected from low clouds.

Although the various tables and couches could have accommodated several dozen occupants, only the main mahogany table under the chandelier was now being used. It was a good twenty feet long, and a group of unsavoury-looking men in suits from a lower-priced high street chain were clustered around it. At one end of the table, Malky Reeves, the leader of the 69 Krew, sat with folded arms. His lieutenants took up the next few seats on either side of the table.

The several bodyguards in the room, belonging to both groups, remained standing, so as to be more alert. They all looked up as the Master entered, pausing in the doorway.

'The room was checked?' he asked one of his own employees.

'Yes, Mr Magister. Everything is shipshape.'

'And your people agreed?' he asked Reeves.

The leather-faced Glaswegian nodded. 'I wouldnae be here if there was the slightest hint o' anything amiss.'

The Master smiled. 'Then allow me to explain my concerns.'

He took his seat at the opposite end of the table and carefully masked his satisfaction as the pistols concealed under the table brushed against his knee.

'I have a business venture of sorts to put to you,' he began carefully. 'A mutually profitable direction of operation here in London.'

Reeves barked out a laugh. 'D'ye expect us to share our scores or information? You're a wanted fugitive as it is, so you're no' going to have the time to run your gang. And if ye get caught after we've shared all our wee secrets, we'd go right into the Bar-L, wouldn't we?'

The Master put on an apologetic look, though actually he was quite looking forward to this.

‘Perhaps there has been a small misunderstanding about the purpose of this meeting. When I said that it was to discuss a business venture of mutual profit, I meant that we would be working together as a single group.’

Reeves’s scowl deepened. ‘A merger, d’ye mean? Don’t be daft, man. Why should we join forces with a smaller group who’s leader let himself get put away?’

‘Because I am the Master.’ He stared Reeves down, rewarded with a tremble of fear in the Scot’s eyes. ‘You misunderstand me again, Reeves. I have no intention of “merging” with a second-rate muggers’ club run by a primitive such as you. By single group, I mean that your organisation will from now on be run solely by me. As for ‘letting myself’ be caught. . . I should reconsider that phrase if I were you.’

‘You mean you deliberately let yourself get caught?’

‘What better alibi could one have than being in custody?’

Reeves looked doubtful. ‘Aye, I suppose that could be true. . . But it still doesn’t convince me to go along wi’ your scheme.’

The Master smiled. ‘I hadn’t really expected it to. I came here to offer you a simple choice. Accept my leadership and share in the profits; or be put out of business permanently.’

‘What?’ Reeves laughed. ‘And just how d’ye think we can be put out of business?’

‘Quite easily. In fact, I do believe you’ve just resigned.’

Reeves only got as far as opening his mouth to respond before the tabletop exploded into splinters all around him. He was catapulted back out of his chair, leaving a red haze in the air. Another three thunderclaps in rapid succession propelled him further away from the ruptured table before anyone could even think of reacting.

Reeves’s skull cracked back against the carpet as he landed, but he didn’t show signs of being in any condition to even notice this. The Master stood, a hint of smoke rising from the muzzle of the automatic pistol in his hand. It was already pointing at Reeves’s deputy, McTaggart, while the minders he’d brought were covering the rest of the delegates with Uzis.

‘Does anyone else have any questions?’

Not surprisingly, there was no sound from the frozen Scots, who all kept their hands conspicuously on the tabletop to avoid any fatal misunderstandings. The Master nodded, knowing that they wouldn’t dare resist today. Later perhaps, but for now their paltry minds would be fixated on the demonstration he had just provided.

‘I’m flattered that you all place such trust in me,’ he said smoothly, removing a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and absently dabbing at the specks

of blood that had floated down on to his cheek. 'Get rid of that,' he then snapped, nodding towards the corpse in its spreading red pool.

As two thugs dragged Reeves's body out of the way, the Master put the gun in a shoulder holster and spirited away the unused one as well. These Earth weapons were much clumsier and less efficient than his own tissue-compression eliminator, of course, but the noise and visible power of them seemed to impress these primitives more than a subtler technology would. He supposed that the increased efficiency in controlling his erstwhile followers made up for the slight drop in efficiency in killing his enemies.

Certain that he had achieved not only the other gangsters' full attention but also that healthy mix of fear and hate which passed for respect among them, the Master set Reeves's chair back in its place and sat down in it rather theatrically.

'Now, Mr McTaggart, let us discuss the terms of our combined work.'

'Terms?'

'They're very simple terms,' the Master reassured him. 'Simply put, I am the Master and you will obey me...'

Barron was so excited that he didn't even register the noise of the rotors of the helicopter he was in, let alone their wingman. He only realised he was humming 'Eve of Destruction' to himself when the gunner turned to give him a questioning look. Barron was quite amused and sang the notes a little louder.

'What's with the tune?' the gunner asked over the headset. He had paused in his checking of the six-barrelled rotary chaingun that had been jury-rigged on to the side of the door.

'Just whistling while I work.'

The prospect of scoring with a woman always made him feel musical and he was sure Marianne would be grateful enough to give him the reward he wanted from her. Yes, this was going to be an enjoyable evening. As far as he was concerned, the song was appropriate enough.

Then the gunner shook his head with a badly disguised sneer and turned away, and the moment was gone. Barron's good humour evaporated almost immediately. His moment of cheer had been stolen from him by this smartarse, who would probably spend the rest of the week telling his mates about his funny passenger trying to look tough. Anger returned, as if it had never been away.

'Where are we?' he demanded of the pilot.

'Passing over Hyde Park. Three minutes to target.'

McTaggart had become suitably obedient with no resistance. Admittedly this also suggested that he was stupid enough to make mistakes, but the Mas-

ter didn't really care about that, since the only one to suffer from any such mistakes would be McTaggart himself and, of course, his associates.

By now, the Master had had one of the bodyguards bring him a fine brandy and cigar.

'Tell me, Mr McTaggart, I want to know what your late friend Mr Reeves did with the seventeen million dollars which was stolen from the safety deposit room in my bank.'

'If ye mean the Magnum Bank,' the craggy old gangster answered, 'I dinna ken.'

'Are you denying that your people robbed me?'

'Aye. Whoever it was had ba's o' steel, but it wisnae us.'

The Master considered this. McTaggart was still totally under his domination, so he could not be lying. It was equally unlikely that he could have been kept in the dark by his own people. And, to be honest, the Master had suspected as much anyway; it had all been made too easy.

He turned to order the bodyguards to escort everyone out and was surprised to see that they were awash with a powerful blue-white light coming from somewhere behind him. There was a sound too; a distant roar growing louder. . .

The Master's head snapped round, registering the spotlights on a pair of helicopters outside the windows which were almost close enough to touch. The humans remained frozen like rabbits caught in headlights, their mouths foolishly agape. The Master, however, read the obvious danger immediately and vaulted across the damaged table, heading for the door.

With a noise so loud that it was almost beyond sound, the windows blew in, reduced to glittering dust. The air filled with red as streams of fire from two rotary chainguns scythed through the gangsters. Those nearest the windows simply exploded in a spray of gelatinous chunks, while the others dived for whatever cover was available.

Glass and shattered plaster swept through the air at the Master's heels as he bolted for the lift. He could hear a chime even before he reached it and the doors opened. Instead of an empty escape route, however, the lift contained four more of Reeves's thugs. They clearly weren't expecting to see him waiting for them, however, and didn't have their weapons ready.

The Master emptied both his automatics into the group before they could do more than let their jaws drop. A last reflex action from one of them sent a few rounds through the lift's ceiling, but mostly it was only blood that they loosed.

The lift doors closed again and the Master discarded the pistols, jabbing at the lift call button. Behind him, the fibreboard partitions and plaster walls

were exploding into powder as the helicopter's miniguns were turned in his direction.

The lift doors remained infuriatingly closed and the Master began to wonder if some damned human had called the lift to another floor. Then the doors opened and he flung himself on to the the warm heap of bodies, just as a rapid spray of rounds rattled into the lift's metal wall above him. Heated shrapnel bounced around the lift but then passed on and the doors mercifully closed.

It momentarily occurred to the Master to simply go down to ground level and escape on foot. He dismissed the idea, though. Presumably whoever had sent the helicopters would have stationed men outside, and even if not, this was a matter of principle. He had to show that he controlled his own fate and that attempts to interfere with it would be severely punished.

The Master glanced about for a weapon – despite what humans tended to depict in their entertainments, it was not particularly likely that one could shoot down a helicopter with a pistol. He regretted not bringing something a little more sophisticated to the meeting; a projected energy weapon of any kind would be very useful right now. He wasn't really worried though; the thought that any mere human could actually kill him was so far removed from reality that he didn't even consider it.

The dead thugs in the lift had also been armed with Uzis. He snatched up one and took the magazines from the others. If he could lure the helicopters close enough, a spray of bullets might have a chance of doing some damage. Not from a shooting point above it, though. Small-arms fire probably wouldn't be able to damage the rotors and would bounce off them without getting through to the fuselage or cockpit.

If he could get down to a lower floor, without the pilots realising, and shoot up at them from close range while they blasted the penthouse, he might be able to destroy one or both. These fools must think they were dealing with someone like the Doctor, who would run away rather than stand up for himself. The Master chuckled at the thought; he had learned his lesson in life.

The doors opened at the next floor on to an empty corridor. Keeping an image of the penthouse office's layout in his mind, the Master hurried through the rooms, finally kicking open a locked door to a darkened office which he calculated should be directly below the penthouse suite.

He had no trouble smashing one of the windows with a chair. From upstairs, he heard a slow series of gunshots as his hypnotised stooge fired uselessly at the helicopters. From below, there were screeching sirens and screams. The music of the big city, he told himself. As he had hoped, the two helicopters were swinging around for another run at their intended victims in the penthouse.

* * *

In the car from which he was watching the hotel, expecting Barron to go in or the Scots to come out, Boucher couldn't believe his eyes or ears. Sirens in the distance announced the approach of back-up, but they were virtually drowned out by the gunfire and smashing of glass landing on the street from a great height.

Boucher had been astounded by the scale of the violence at the Magnum Bank, but this was much, much worse. God only knew how many people were being killed this time. Boucher wanted to stay in the car, lest he see some other friend or relative die today. Even strangers would be more than he could bear after what had happened at the bank.

He was a diligent officer, though, and knew that he had a duty to perform. He didn't have to go charging in, guns blazing, but he could at least try to help the panicked hotel residents to get safely out of the line of fire. This time he would wait for SO19. Perhaps this time he could save a life instead of losing one. Even though it wouldn't bring his nephew back, it might make a difference to the lad's mother. Boucher didn't want his own sister to think that he was some sort of jinxed glory-hound.

Dodging the falling glass, he bolted for the Birnam's split-level reception area. People were streaming out through the doors in various stages of undress, and Boucher held his warrant-card up as he ran. 'Police,' he shouted. 'Everybody move that way!' He pointed eastwards, where there was no firing and thus no falling glass.

Some uniformed officers who had arrived on the scene followed his lead and began forming a chain of people, herding them to safety, but all in the same direction. Boucher couldn't resist a smile. PC Dixon would have approved of his action this time, even if Jack Regan wouldn't.

The Master checked his Uzi's magazine. It was only half full, so he topped it up with bullets from a spare. A short distance below, one of the stolen helicopters was swinging around the building, ready for another run at the top floor. The Master looked about for the other; it must be somewhere nearby.

He hoped they hadn't already left, assuming that he was either dead or fled. No, he must assert himself right away and prove that he would not take this insult quietly. The growl of rotors suddenly grew more pronounced and the second helicopter appeared overhead, having traversed the roof. It flew on a short distance, then turned back towards the hotel.

The roar of the engine was deafening, but the Master was quite happy with that. There were those who liked to rule from behind the throne, or direct from afar, but the Master was not one of them. He enjoyed the chance to get his hands dirty, as the humans put it. It was so much more invigorating than simply giving orders to inferior lackeys from behind a desk.

The helicopter sank until it was level with the ruined panoramic window above. From his position, the Master could see the pilot and gunner looking in without any signs of animation; clearly it was just a job to them. He almost wished one would look down and see him, just to watch their reactions. Almost.

The Master loosed the Uzi's whole magazine into the lower part of the helicopter's nose and was rewarded with a joyous fireworks display of sparks and flashes. The perspex panels shattered under the stream of fire and blood sprayed across the canopy from the inside.

By the time the gun ran dry, the helicopter had peeled away and was tumbling towards the road that ran along the side of the Thames. It crumpled like cardboard as it slammed into the tarmac. Three cars were knocked sideways, their windows shattered by the impact, and the wreckage exploded in a colourful splash of flame and shrapnel.

Boucher was flung headlong across the pavement by the hot blast and cracked his shoulder painfully. Sitting up, he was relieved to see that at least the downed helicopter had landed on the river side of the building, away from the evacuated guests.

Bizarrely, he didn't feel any emotion at noticing that his car was one of those set alight by the scattered wreckage. He looked forward to seeing how the insurance company would react to that one. Or the Super, come to that.

There was a roar from overhead and Boucher looked up to see the lights of the second helicopter leaving from the hotel and swooping away into the darkness. If he had to choose between Barron being one of the victims here and being in that second helicopter, he knew which way he would go.

Barron was shaking. It felt as if his bones were quivering inside his limbs. Luckily he was still sitting in the helicopter's seat, otherwise he might be staggering around rather than walking. It had so nearly been his helicopter which plummeted in flames; so nearly been him who was crushed and burned. He had nothing against dying, but not in flames. He expected enough flames afterwards.

He'd always wondered why people believed that the Devil would torture them for having been evil. He would have expected the Devil to thank them for doing his work for him. Or did that only apply to fictional characters played by Christopher Lee?

In any event, Barron's own pilot was cursing under his breath as he skimmed the rooftops. Barron was rather less quiet about it.

* * *

The Master watched the helicopter depart and then tossed his now useless gun aside before heading for the fire escape. Only two people could have known about this meeting in time to arrange the attack: Barron and Kyle.

Ordinarily he would simply kill them, but there was a problem. Clearly they had numerous powerful allies and – more importantly – they must have taken his TARDIS. One of them must have followed him to it. Kyle, most likely; Barron was too stupid to think of such an audacious plan, and too human to have access to whatever technology had removed his TARDIS. Kyle's past was a total blank to the Master, so she was the more likely suspect.

He must get his TARDIS back before he could properly punish her. It occurred to him that for that task he would need help. Well, not help, but... tools, perhaps. He laughed to himself as he emerged at the back of the hotel and slipped away into the shadows of the November night.

CHAPTER 10

Boucher could hardly believe his eyes. Even before he entered the hotel, he could see a dusting of broken glass and concrete chippings spread over the road. The fire brigade had managed to put out the burning cars and helicopter. He had been horrified at the scale of destruction in the Magnum Bank, but this made that robbery look like a kid going shoplifting to impress her mates.

The hotel's main doors and the glass faces to either side were totally gone, shattered by the blast when the helicopter crashed. People were milling around the lobby, wearing the sort of dazed and distant expression that Boucher usually saw only in news reports from Middle East trouble spots. Some were demanding explanations, others wanted to check out. The few who were smart enough to realise that they wouldn't be allowed to check out of the ruined building until after they had given statements were cursing and swearing about that.

There didn't seem to have been any actual warfare in the lobby itself, so Boucher took the working lift up to the penthouse.

The circular suite was a slaughterhouse the likes of which Boucher had never seen. Chunks of singed flesh and shredded organs were scattered like leaves in a garden. The bodies – over a dozen at first glance – were jumbled up with what was left of the furniture, jagged shards of wood soaked in enough blood to be indistinguishable from the bone fragments amidst them.

SOCOs in their white bunny suits searched through the wreckage, while Special Branch examined every corner.

He had been told that there were another four dead gangsters packed in the lift on the floor below, but he hadn't been interested in stopping there.

Boucher occasionally had cause to think that maybe mankind didn't deserve to survive the disasters that befell it from time to time. Standing here in this dank, meat-scented ruin was all the proof he needed that that attitude was right.

He wasn't going to give the culprits the satisfaction of making him throw up, even though they would never know about it. Like so many important things in George Boucher's life, it was a matter of principle.

He had to stick to those principles now, more than ever. He'd lost one of his family, his partner, as well as the confidence of the Super. . . His principles were just about all he had left. Lose them, and he might as well give up and

die. He would too, if Rob Thorpe's life could be restored in return.

So far Boucher had managed to avoid reporting to Superintendent Morgan that the case he had been assigned to had dovetailed into the Magnum Bank case. When the Super found out, he would have no choice but to pull Boucher out, due to the rules on personal involvement. He doubted that he could hide the fact any longer. Morgan would want – and need – to know every detail of how this massacre had come about. Then Boucher would have no way of being involved with the hunt for the killers, no way to make amends for bringing his nephew to his death.

Boucher leaned against the doorframe, feeling even older than he looked. Nobody would accuse him of failing either the force or the family, but he knew that he had. Sometimes things just reached a natural conclusion. Like a painting or a sculpture, there came a time when the work in hand absolutely had to be left alone and handed over to others. Nobody said he had to like it.

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart had managed to relax the previous evening, sampling some fine Scotches at a regimental dinner. Not too much, of course; he made it a point never to get too tipsy. Unlike the regulars, UNIT could be called upon at literally a moment's notice. If he expected his men to show that much restraint in their off-duty hours, then he had to be able to show it himself.

Ironically, that moderation was one of the things that had persuaded Fiona to marry him in his pre-UNIT days. And the reason for it was one of the things that persuaded her to end their marriage. Women were fickle creatures as far as Lethbridge-Stewart was concerned and he despaired of ever really understanding them. Would Doris really be any different?

Still, home was where the heart was, and in many ways he found the UNIT HQ at Denham more like his real home. It had a private apartment on the second floor, where he usually resided during the week, though he did mark the weekends by returning to his cottage. Unless, of course, there was some emergency that compelled him to remain at HQ.

His usual morning routine was check up on the night's communications traffic, but this morning he decided it was more important to check up on Beresford's progress. He found the lieutenant in the communications room, poring over some Ordnance Survey maps.

'Morning, Lieutenant. Has there been any word on where this chopper of yours went?'

'I was just plotting the course that the radar stations reported,' Beresford said quietly, marking off a spot on a map of Scotland's west coast. 'There, sir. This is where they came down.'

The Brigadier looked at the point Beresford was indicating. 'Good grief, that can't be right.'

'I've double-checked, sir,' Beresford said quickly, and the Brigadier realised that he had anticipated that reaction.

'Well, Lieutenant, it never rains but it pours.' Beresford had circled the Royal Navy submarine base at Faslane. 'I'll see about making arrangements for further investigation there.'

Kyle hadn't enjoyed the flight back from the meeting. They were always a strain. She had, however, hoped that she would be able to relax for a day or two while the new arrivals at the Ministry settled in, perhaps spending the evenings at her country and western club. She didn't get to dance as much as she would like and was looking forward to joining in there. The problem was that there were no other recreational dancers at home. A few musicians, some of whom could even waltz, but a good square dance was out of the question.

Unfortunately, the first thing she heard on her return to London was that Barron had made a spectacularly botched attack on a major landmark. He had exceeded his authority by a long way this time. She found him not in his office but at home, packing.

'What are you doing?' she demanded.

'Getting out of here. I've bought two tickets to Bermuda.' He grinned proudly and she blinked.

'Why did you make the attack last night?'

Although he would have to be punished for going behind her back, she would not kill him if things worked out for the best. A measure of practicality had to be maintained and he was only following his animal instincts after all. So had her husband been, of course, but he had been better at intrigue. Like Barron, he had misjudged the level of love she had for him, as opposed to the love she had for status.

He spread his hands, as if wordlessly asking her why she was complaining. 'For you, of course. Now that you have this TARDIS thing, Magister is a loose end.'

Ah, of course: he saw the Master as a threat. Not just to his life or position, but to his relationship with her. Men seemed to have a sense for that, she noticed, though it usually manifested itself too late for them. Very well, she would play out this game.

'And you didn't think the level of force you used was a little... excessive?'

He shuddered, which surprised her.

'You don't know Magister. You can't just sneak up on him and whack him with a jemmy. No, it had to be this way – wreck the whole place to make absolutely sure the bastard's dead.'

He shivered again. Fear and hate, Kyle saw; a powerful combination that was difficult to disobey. She nodded slowly and sat down beside him on the bed.

'You had no right to go behind my back.'

'You were unreachable,' Barron said plaintively. 'If I could have asked you, I would, but no one knew where you were. I took the action that I thought would most please you; most serve our needs.' As he licked his lips, she regarded him coolly, amused by his simplicity. After a brief pause, he spoke again. 'Now there's just us.'

She maintained her faint smile. 'I hope so.'

Because if the Master had somehow survived, it was going to be obvious to him who had tried to kill him. That would mean she must take pre-emptive action to protect herself against his inevitable revenge and she didn't want to be forced to kill the one person who seemed worthy of her interest for the moment.

The telephone rang, and Barron answered it. 'Yes? Yeah, she's here.' He handed the receiver over to her.

'We had a call from our source at UNIT,' Marianne's aide told her. 'The Master was not among the bodies left at the Birnam's penthouse. They were all human.'

She looked at Barron as she replied. 'All right. I'm coming up tonight.'

As she put the phone down, she knew she should kill Barron, but she also knew the fear that drove him. It would be far more appropriate to let him squirm. She stood.

'Goodbye, Barron.'

'What?' His eyes widened.

'It's over between us,' she said simply. 'You will not hear from me again, but I imagine the Master is already on his way.'

'No! You can't go!'

He tried to pull her back to the couch, too insecure to let her go. She slapped his hand away. Despite her slightness, he recoiled from the sharpness of her act.

'You're a fool, Barron. You threw away a great opportunity by turning the Master against us. Frankly, he's welcome to you.'

'You're a shark,' Barron said, as much to himself as to her.

She paused. 'Actually, I always thought of myself more as a dolphin. They're more intelligent.'

'Intelligent enough to handle the Master?'

'The Master?' she echoed. He was just a teddy bear, she thought; looking fierce, but with a charm that couldn't be denied. 'I shall use his talents to advance my standing in the Conclave and then set him aside, just as I did

with you. You could try telling him that, of course, but he will expect you to try to save yourself by bad-mouthing me. If it works, you can send me a postcard.'

He lunged at her, but she had expected that. Sex and violence went together for people like him. She had a gun at his head before he could reach her.

'Sit down.'

He dropped back on to the bed. Quite considerate of him, really, all things considered.

'Try that and you die now. Run to Bermuda and perhaps you might escape the Master, but I doubt it.'

He shook as she left.

The Master dialled Barron's office number from a call box across the street from the bank, but there was no answer. Next he tried the man's home number and was gratified to hear the phone picked up at the other end.

'Yes?' Barron yelled.

The Master cleared his throat, and spoke in a voice totally unlike his own, fairly certain that Barron would be unlikely to recognise an impersonation of the Doctor.

'Hello, can I speak to Marius?'

'There's no Marius here. You've got a wrong number.'

'Oh, good grief, so I have. Sorry about that, old chap.'

'Sod off,' Barron snapped, and hung up.

The Master smiled. Now he knew where Barron was. He also knew that the human was frightened and jumpy.

Kyle's part in the attack he could understand; she sought conquest, as was only natural. Barron's treachery was a personal insult, though. Once he could confirm that it was Kyle who had his TARDIS, Barron would be superfluous. Perhaps the violence of his death would help douse the anger. If not, well, no harm done.

The Master drove round to Barron's house. It didn't take too long this late at night. He could have knocked on Barron's door, but didn't want to scare him off. Instead, he picked the lock in a matter of moments. He could hear Barron cursing and bemoaning his fate from the bedroom, so he went upstairs.

As the Master entered the room, he saw a very shaky Barron frantically stuffing clothes into a suitcase. Another case was already lying by the door.

'Fleeing the scene of the crime?' the Master asked softly.

Barron spun round, whiter than the sheets on the bed. Whether the man's demeanour was down to fear of the Master or the cocaine habit he would need to feed shortly, the Master couldn't tell. Nor could he care less.

'Surprised to see me?'

Barron nodded dumbly, then coughed. 'I heard about the meeting... The news said –'

The Master held up a hand. 'Please don't insult my intelligence.' He put on a more companionable expression, as if the matter meant nothing to him. 'You know, you've shown greater courage than most of my... employees. Ambition, drive, the will to succeed; these are all traits I see in both you and myself.' Barron risked a wavery smile and the Master gestured to his chair. 'Sit down,' he suggested mildly.

Barron stumbled to the chair, then turned back. 'Whatever it was, I had nothing to do with –'

'Sit down!' the Master commanded, and Barron practically fell into the seat. 'That's better.' The Master suddenly grabbed Barron's chin, his gaze boring into the frightened human's eyes. 'Now you are going to tell me all about your friend Ms Kyle.'

'I can't...'

The Master concentrated more strongly, focusing all his powers of hypnosis on Barron. 'You are going to tell me about Ms Kyle.'

'I can't,' Barron snarled, shoving the Master away.

Some minds were impenetrable, due either to stubbornness or – as was probably the case here – to psychosis. A psychotic mind could easily be too fragmented to capture intact. Life shone back into Barron's eyes as he realised that the Master had failed in his attempt to hypnotise him.

'Doesn't work, eh? Too smart for –'

The Master backhanded Barron across the jaw, sending him rocking back in his seat. 'Insolent primitive!'

He caught himself in time, and suppressed the anger. It would be his undoing some day, if ever he was undone. A dead Barron would be of no use to him, anyway, so the Master restrained himself. He nodded, a hesitantly magnanimous gesture to his opponent.

'Congratulations. You're one of a very select breed, you know – humans who can resist my will. It's something to be proud of.'

As he expected, this threw Barron off guard. 'What? Well, some of us have got it, I suppose. I didn't mean no disrespect. I just mean I don't know anything.'

He wasn't a good liar. Those who dealt out punishments didn't need to be.

'Ah, I wish I could believe you, Mr Barron,' the Master said with a hint of apology in his tone. 'Unfortunately I cannot.'

He reached into his jacket for his tissue-compression eliminator, but hesitated. Humans had a need for less subtlety, didn't they? He drew an automatic pistol instead and pointed it at Barron.

‘Oh, right,’ Barron scoffed. ‘As if you’re going to kill me before finding out what you want to know.’

Barron had been his organisation’s usual interrogator. He knew that such things didn’t get results. He was also proceeding from a false premise, the Master was glad to note.

The Master merely raised an eyebrow. ‘A predictable if unwise response.’

He shot Barron in the left knee, twisting his shin and foot round in a burst of blood and sending the torn-out patella arcing into the corner of the room. The Master paused until the human’s screams had subsided.

‘Now, I’m not a patient man. Sooner or later you are going to tell me what I want to know.’

‘You shot me!’ Barron gasped, his face white.

The surprise in his voice was so comical that the Master laughed easily. Was the laughter a response to the question or just an exclamation at the shock of the injury? No matter, he had laid clear rules with the first shot: answer correctly or be hurt.

‘Tell me about Ms Kyle.’

‘If I do, she’ll kill me.’

Barron looked up at him pleadingly. Baby seals must look like that, the Master thought, before hunters club them. He fired again. This time the shot neatly scraped Barron’s earlobe, barely drawing blood.

Barron’s scream was almost religious in its intensity, despite the harmless shot. The Master sat on the desk, calmly waiting for the noise to subside to a moan.

‘I assure you, Mr Barron, this is hurting you more than it is me.’ He pursed his lips. ‘It must be an interesting experience for you, being on the receiving end. I wonder how long it usually takes you to make someone talk. I’d be ashamed if I didn’t do better.’

‘Go to hell,’ Barron finally grunted through gritted teeth.

The third shot splintered his right forearm just above the wrist. This time it took a lot longer for the screams to die, and the Master began to wonder if he hadn’t made a misjudgement. It was possible that Barron might die of shock and blood loss before actually giving up any information. He might have to start offering concessions, which would encourage Barron to resist further.

Movement caught his eye, and he realised that Barron wasn’t just shaking from shock and pain, but was nodding his head.

‘I’ll tell. . .’

‘I’m listening,’ the Master said. ‘I’ll see your pain is eased afterwards.’

‘She’s from the. . .’ He winced. ‘East. Russian Mafia or something. The Soviets don’t admit to having crime, but it’s there. She and I have been working

to get her people jobs here in the West, out from Soviet rule. Our jails are cushy compared to theirs.'

The Master harrumphed. It was an obvious tissue of lies, yet Barron's eyes held no deceit. Resentment, yes; shame, yes; hatred, yes. . . But no deception. The Master wasn't surprised, though. If his suspicions about Marianne Kyle were correct, she could hardly tell anyone the truth about her origins. And those origins were surely much further afield than the Soviet Union.

The Master's mind wandered back to his meeting with her after his escape from the paramilitaries at Aylesbury. He had dismissed her suggestion that they had similar aims, thinking that she could not possibly even be aware of the worlds he planned to conquer in time. Perhaps she did.

'You said you'd help me,' Barron reminded him breathlessly.

The Master nodded solemnly. 'And I always keep my word.'

He pointed the tissue-compression eliminator at Barron and triggered it. Barron's breathless screams were cut off by the popping of bones as they contorted and collapsed in on themselves. The Master made to leave, but then hesitated. He had just had an amusing idea. . .

Reports of the Master's presence at the Birnam had been like a candle-flame to the Brigadier's moth. He, Yates, Benton, Ian and Barbara had sped into London as soon as the news reached UNIT. Ian wouldn't have allowed Barbara to accompany him if there had been any suggestion of lingering danger there, but literally hundreds of witnesses had seen the attacking helicopter leave.

A disconsolate Boucher met them in the lobby, and even Ian could see that he was rather the worse for whatever he had seen up there.

'You don't look too cheerful tonight,' Ian said. 'Is it bad up there?'

Boucher nodded. 'Like something out of the First World War, but indoors. I wouldn't go up there if I were you.'

Ian could see in the other man's eyes that he wasn't exaggerating. Though he had a healthy curiosity, he decided that he'd best stay down here with Barbara. Besides, curiosity and a desire for a stock of new nightmares were two different feelings. There was something wistful in his tone, Ian noticed. As if he was unable to go up himself, for all his protestations.

'Is something else wrong? I thought you would be up there, detecting and inspecting.'

Boucher shifted uncomfortably. 'With this Jackson business being connected to the Magnum Bank robbery, I've been taken off the case and put on compassionate leave. Personal involvement, you see. We're not supposed to investigate cases we're directly involved in.'

Ian sympathised entirely. It was ironic but true that the cases one was involved in personally must be the ones you'd most want to investigate. He

was glad he had never has any desire to be a policeman; those rules would be a little too restrictive for him.

‘Perhaps,’ the Brigadier said, with a hint of a smile under his moustache, ‘you’d be interested in a holiday in Scotland?’

Boucher looked at him dubiously. ‘Why?’

‘That helicopter you and Beresford saw went to Faslane submarine base. I don’t know why yet, but I imagine there’s a connection.’

Boucher’s face betrayed his rapid thinking. ‘The stiff up there are all from the 69 Krew, if Strathclyde Police is to be believed. They come from around that area.’ He grinned broadly. ‘I’ll get the first train this morning. I’ve got this feeling that my holiday isn’t going to be so bad after all!’

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart had had a long night. Chesterton had produced reams of incomprehensible notes about the piece of wreckage Yates had given him. The appalling damage at the Birnam meant it was now going to be rather more difficult to keep the news of the Master’s escape quiet. Next time he would be damn sure those in charge listened to his demands for guards who had proved resistant to hypnotism.

And then there was this business about Faslane. God only knew where that fitted in, but hopefully Boucher would get in touch with something useful.

On the bright side, at least Doris had got that promotion at the office she wanted. They would go out and celebrate tomorrow. Perhaps he should buy her a gift – a ladies’ watch to match the one she had given him in Brighton when they first met.

Before he retired for the night – or what was left of the wee small hours – he supposed he had best deposit the day’s reports in his out-tray for Bell to pass on. He slipped into his office wearily, closed the door and flicked on the light.

The Master was sitting behind his desk, looking up at him amicably. The Brigadier drew his gun immediately and opened the door without looking round. ‘Sergeant Benton! Get three men in here immediately!’ He gestured with his pistol. ‘Stand up and keep your hands where I can see them.’

The Master looked hurt. ‘Why, Brigadier, do you greet all your old friends with a gun in your hand?’

He rose to his feet and raised his hands, albeit only a little. The slightness of the gesture was almost cheeky, the Brigadier thought.

‘You’re no friend of mine,’ the Brigadier said slowly, then hearing footsteps behind him, looked round and stepped aside to let Benton and three soldiers into the office. ‘How did you get in here?’

This was supposed to be a secure establishment, with pass checks and vetting. The Brigadier felt disappointed in his men; a rare and unwelcome sen-

sation.

‘Two of your gatekeepers seem to be under the impression that they’ve recently admitted the Prime Minister on a surprise visit.’ The Master put on a remarkably sincere look of total innocence. ‘I can’t imagine why.’

The Brigadier had suspected as much, but in a way it was a relief to hear it confirmed, since at least it meant the Master hadn’t simply killed the guards. However, he didn’t let any of these thoughts show on his face, and kept his expression carefully neutral.

‘And what exactly are you doing here?’

The Master was visibly surprised; or visibly pretending to be surprised. ‘I should’ve thought that was obvious.’ He leaned forward conspiratorially. ‘I’ve come to give myself up.’

CHAPTER 11

George Boucher – he couldn't really think of himself as DI right now, at least not without wanting to hit the Super – had spent the entire day on a variety of trains. There was no way he could afford a ticket on the plane to Glasgow on his salary, so the West Coast mainline had to suffice.

It took about eight hours to get to Glasgow Central railway station, then another couple of hours catching a more local and rickety service out to Garelochhead. From there he had hired a car and taken a room in a tiny hotel at Shandon, overlooking Faslane Bay. After a brief rest, he had driven out to the vicinity of the base.

The place wasn't exactly what he would call a Scottish tourist attraction. A couple of large apartment buildings for the Naval personnel were built on the low hillside overlooking the sea-loch. Most of the buildings were clustered down around the water's edge, where a couple of submarines were moored at the concrete docks. Another was nestled in some sort of floating jetty, with a mass of cables wrapped around it. Boucher deduced that it must be some sort of repair facility.

There was a small helicopter landing field attached to the base and Boucher scanned this from the deserted roadside with a pair of powerful binoculars. There were several helicopters on the apron, most of which were in the dark blue of the navy. Parked between a pair of blue navy Lynxes, however, was a grey and green army Lynx with landing skids instead of wheels.

Boucher couldn't tell from this distance if it was the one he had seen on the roof of the Magnum Bank, but he wasn't going to let that stop him. Rob's memory demanded that he go closer, to find out for certain whether it was the same chopper.

From this point on the road, the gentle slope down to the field wasn't built upon, so he scaled the fence as quickly as he could and dropped to the ground on the other side. In peacetime he knew that he couldn't be shot even if he was caught. True, the terrorists he was after wouldn't hesitate to do just that, but he doubted that the whole base was occupied. More likely it was just a small group of men from one unit gone bad. If he was caught, the naval authorities would most likely be very interested in what Boucher had to say for himself.

* * *

Marianne Kyle was never satisfied with the lieutenant's braid on her uniform sleeves but she accepted it out of practicality. It was a simple fact of life that a WRN commander or captain would be remarked upon far too much.

Usually she was able to issue orders through Voshinin, who had cut a very dashing figure in his captain's uniform. Right now, she was taking the fresh sea air by the quayside. It was something she had always promised herself she would do, as long as she was stationed here. The weather could get rather blustery, but it was worth it for the sheer joy of being able to stroll under the open skies and let the breeze invigorate her. It was even better than dancing.

Some day she would dance here too, out in the open, she hoped; and nobody would dare question her for doing so. It would not be today, nor even this year... but some day.

'Lieutenant Kyle,' a voice called from somewhere behind her.

She turned to see one of her juniors beckoning her from the doorway of the gymnasium. He looked quite agitated, so she jogged across and allowed him to lead her through the main sports hall and up to a small private suite. Although the sign on the door said that this was a WRN sauna, the room was in fact filled with the latest communications equipment. A row of colour TV monitors was spread along the far wall, being watched by a naval rating.

Pointing to the leftmost screen, Kyle's aide said, 'We have a visitor.'

Marianne folded her arms, impressed with the man. She recognised him, of course – the policeman who had followed Voshinin on to the roof of the Magnum Bank, and shot at the helicopter that he was now examining. She admired his dedication. And now that she had the chance to study him at greater length, another thought occurred to her.

'Boucher?' she said aloud.

Her aide peered at the screen. 'You're right, Commander... I didn't even realise.'

'It would seem that fortune favours us, then, if we're right. Have you informed the Master-at-Arms?'

'Not yet.'

Marianne was glad. This young man knew his job well.

'Don't. Take five of our people and deal with him yourselves.'

'Yes, Commander,' he nodded.

'I'll notify the Conclave that we have a position available.'

They weren't stupid, whoever they were, Boucher noted; the helicopter had carried no registry markings at the Bank. That didn't mean it was impossible to identify, though. He had hit the portside door four times as it lifted off, and even if they're repaired the holes, there would be visible signs that repairs had been made.

All the time he crept around the helicopter, his heart was pounding, not with fear at the thought of being discovered but with a strange mix of excitement and anger. He could do with a drink as well, but wasn't quite daft enough to carry his hip-flask while driving.

Up close, the Lynx was quite large compared to the cars that Boucher might usually have to examine in such a fashion and the camouflage paint made it more difficult to detect any signs of the damage he was looking for.

Abandoning his attempt to spot it visually, he closed his eyes, trying to ignore the image of Rob falling and look beyond it to the sparks showing up where he hit the side door of the helicopter. Guided by the scars etched into his memory, Boucher traced his fingers along the metal surface, and felt a surge of emotion when his fingertips brushed a patch with a different texture to the rest of the door.

Opening his eyes, he saw that he had found a small disc of body-filler, an inch or so across. It undoubtedly filled in a bullet hole. Using that position as a reference, it didn't take as long to find the other three patched holes. This was the same helicopter.

He stepped back, trying to calm the urge to go and start breaking heads. Somehow, he felt a little more relaxed now.

That relief quickly passed, as he heard a shout from between a couple of nearby warehouses. He was about to show the oncoming ratings his warrant card, when he noticed that they were carrying Kalashnikovs instead of FN rifles. Realising that UNIT would need to know about this, he decided that giving the alarm to them was definitely the better part of valour.

Ducking low, he bolted for his car.

The Brigadier had seen and heard many bizarre and frankly unbelievable things during his time at UNIT, but the Master claiming to be giving himself up really took the biscuit. Criminals did do so, of course, but the Master was somehow beyond being a mere criminal. They'd probably have to invent a new word for his category of offender.

'That's very thoughtful of you, but you will be returned to Aylesbury immediately,' the Brigadier said with determination.

The Master snorted, keeping his black-gloved hands raised. 'Just a few days ago, you came to ask for my help, Brigadier. Now I'm offering you that help.'

'The help I need is information and you can give me that just as easily from your cell.'

The Master tutted. 'And is that attitude meant to encourage me to cooperate? I assure you, Brigadier, that if I am returned to Aylesbury, I will have escaped – or been killed by our mutual enemies – within the week. Then where would you be when you need advice on time travel?'

'I don't take kindly to blackmail!' As far as the Brigadier was concerned, the Master had already had his chance to co-operate fairly. This turnaround was obviously part of some scheme to get at UNIT. The fact that he personally couldn't see what the Master hoped to gain didn't mean that there wasn't anything.

The Master looked offended. 'Blackmail? Do I have a gun to your head? You have problems, Brigadier, and I can solve them. Then you can lock me up to your heart's content.' With that he smiled and folded his arms.

Lethbridge-Stewart could hardly believe his ears. The sheer gall of the man, asking for his help!

'And what is it you want in return?' There was bound to be something; some scheme.

The Master hesitated momentarily, looking rather embarrassed, then spoke. 'Your protection, of course.' He sat back down, this time in the visitor's chair. 'You see, those men who attacked the detention centre didn't quite have my best interests at heart. From the descriptions given by my late underlings, they were undoubtedly the same group who robbed my bank.'

'The Magnum Bank?' Lethbridge-Stewart wasn't too surprised; it stood to reason that the Master must have the means to fund the mercenaries he sometimes employed.

'Correct. They have already killed my associate, Grant – you may recall him from the legal team at my trial – and it seems reasonable to assume that I am to be next.'

'Vigilantes?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked.

There were always some who didn't think the authorities dealt with things adequately, and many people had been dismayed that the UN Security Council had rejected the petition signed by the representatives of those countries whose heads of state wanted the Master executed. The public had known only of a major terrorist trial, of course, but enough presidents and prime ministers knew the truth to cause a fuss at the closed sessions.

The Master considered for a moment. 'No, I should say. . . rival businesses. They have been using my organisation to infiltrate their people into the underworld. This does rather seem to mirror the problem you came to me about, doesn't it, Brigadier?'

Lethbridge-Stewart couldn't argue with that, much as he wanted to. He settled instead for keeping quiet about his current work.

'I don't suppose your friends told you who they were and where they were from?'

The Master tilted his head. 'They claim to be from Soviet Russia, but that is a lie, of course. I suspect they come from rather further afield than that.'

'Aliens?'

The Master hesitated and Lethbridge-Stewart had the satisfying feeling that he wasn't actually sure.

'All the ones I've encountered were human enough. But as you pointed out yourself, there may be time travel involved.' Even though the Brigadier had been hoping that the Master could and would supply some answers, there was something vaguely reassuring about the fact that this defeated enemy wasn't quite as far ahead of him as he had feared. Then again, though, was that just what he was supposed to think? The Brigadier knew that just because you were paranoid, it didn't mean 'they' really weren't out to get you – and something about UNIT assignments bred paranoia.

'So you can't identify our enemy yet either?'

'Enemy?' the Master echoed. 'And just who is the enemy, Brigadier?'

'One name springs to mind,' Lethbridge-Stewart said acidly.

The Master shook his head sadly. 'When I look in a mirror, I don't see the face of the enemy.'

The Master shoved a file across the table. Lethbridge-Stewart opened it and saw a glossy eight by ten of the body found in that plane crash; the body resembling Jackson's.

'This man, on the other hand... ' He picked up the photo and let it hang edge-on to the tabletop so that Lethbridge-Stewart could easily discern the photo's reflection in the polished wood. 'One of them is an enemy, and everybody has a reflection.'

The Brigadier thought about this. 'You mean there's an identical double for everyone?'

'I very much doubt that. Not for everyone – but there are undoubtedly others.'

Boucher was fleeing for his life, with no doubt whatsoever that there really were people out to get him. The bullets that whizzed past his head were too real, and kept his feet pounding as fast as his heart. He had hoped to make it to his car, but one of the men chasing him had circled round and cut him off from it.

He absolutely had to get away, if he was to do anything about these killers. He had no doubt at all that they were the same people who had killed Rob, and if they were willing to kill one man in cold blood, they wouldn't have any problems with doing it to someone else. Dead, there was no way he could bring them to justice, let alone redeem himself in the family's eyes.

Boucher had been brought up on Saturday-morning cinema, and the scenario of the hunted man – be it Tarzan or Richard Hannay – pursued across country was nothing new to him. Unfortunately, as he'd grown up, he'd

learned to tell the difference between celluloid and real life well enough to know that in reality the good guys rarely won.

He turned left, haring along a broad footpath that led to a footbridge across the next road. Perhaps if he could jump down and flag down a passing car he might just make it. He really didn't have any better ideas. Having left the gun drawer locked in the car, he couldn't even defend himself against his pursuers.

He risked checking their progress and saw that they were gaining. They were younger, in their prime. Lucky bleeders, he thought. A shot drew sparks from the metal handrail of the footbridge, and Boucher decided that he ought to jump now rather than cross the bridge first. That way, the bridge itself might shield him.

He fainted to the right, then vaulted over the bridge. It was far too late and too desperate a situation to worry about whether he remembered his training in how to land properly.

Something felt like it exploded in his right leg as he hit the ground, and for a moment he thought he'd been shot. As he rolled to the roadside, however, he realised that he had simply landed on that leg an instant before the other and done some damage that way.

Limping, and using the pain of loss to fight the pain from his leg, he started under the bridge, looking for a spot at which to cross the road. The traffic wasn't that heavy, and if he just waited until this bus went past... He stepped out into the road, concentrating on staying upright.

There was a sudden blaring noise – a detached part of his mind recognised it as a car horn – and all breath fled him. His whole right side flashed into numbness and the sky suddenly dropped down in front of him.

He could hear a car stop and footsteps approach, overlaid with muffled and fearful cursing. A florid middle-aged driver hove into view, as white as a sheet.

'In the name o' the wee man...'

Boucher tried to speak, but it was no use.

Another car drew up and Boucher heard a new voice. 'Oh, I say,' it exclaimed in horror. 'Just wait there, old chap. I'm a doctor.'

Another face blotted out the sky. This one was wearing a naval uniform and the face under the trimmed dark curls was quite square-jawed, in a Bulldog Drummond sort of way.

'I didnae even see him,' the first driver said. 'He just came out of nowhere...'

'I quite understand,' the naval doctor said absently, not taking his eyes off Boucher's injuries. 'We'll soon get you patched up,' he said with a reassuring smile. 'Be as right as rain in a few days.'

Boucher would like to be able to tell him that he clearly must be newly qualified, as he wasn't a good liar.

'Brigadier,' Boucher managed to say, thought it hurt his chest to squeeze the word out.

'Surgeon-Lieutenant, actually, but –' Boucher assumed the man was working on his injuries, but he couldn't feel a thing.

'No... Tell Brigadier... UNIT.'

The naval doctor was gone now, and it was Rob Thorpe who stood over him. He bent to offer Boucher a hand up.

Williams, Kyle's aide, made it to the bridge, and even managed to refrain from swearing at this turn of luck. From below, he could hear someone sobbing 'ohGodohGodohGod' over and over.

'Will you be all right?' an educated English voice asked. 'I'll just walk along to that phone box at the junction and call for an ambulance.'

'He's deid, isn't he?'

'Yes, I'm afraid he is.'

'Aw no...'

Williams didn't bother listening any more. The nearest ambulance station was on-base, which meant they could simply remove the body. If nothing else, at least it was clearly an accident, should the authorities decide to investigate.

The Brigadier had absolutely no intention of collaborating with the Master's escape. However, the story he told did fit with the other evidence they had gathered – evidence the Master surely couldn't have known about. He had gathered Ian and Barbara into his office for consultation. With the Doctor gone, they were the closest he had to independent expert opinions, and the Brigadier had long since recognised the value of such advice.

'I think you should agree, Brigadier,' Barbara said slowly. 'I mean, we're all working against the same enemy, aren't we?'

That thought had occurred to the Brigadier. In fact, he supposed he was really looking for an infallible excuse to reject it.

'And how am I supposed to justify rewarding an escaped prisoner?'

Barbara gave him the sort of look he was sure she used on pupils who turned in unsatisfactory essays. It surprised him how much he was unnerved by it.

'Well, it's hardly that, is it? You'd be keeping him in custody. The other prison didn't hold him, so you'd be silly to send him back there. At least here you can keep an eye on him.'

'You don't know him the way I do, Mrs Chesterton. The Master may well be Earth's most dangerous enemy, and I'm afraid I can't believe that he doesn't have some scheme at the back of all this. Either there's something he's not

telling us which has prompted this change of heart or he's planning to take advantage of the situation.'

'Yes... I've been thinking about that. It seems to me that he considers these other people more dangerous to him than you are. Perhaps he simply hopes to exploit you, getting UNIT to deal with his enemies on his behalf.'

'Or vice versa?'

She had a point, though. The Master was intelligent and resourceful, but he was only one man. If he was planning to take on a well-organised group, he'd be wise to arrange some sort of back-up.

'The Master has used mercenaries and even alien races as his muscle in the past... I suppose he could hope to use UNIT the same way in this case.'

'Then I don't see why we shouldn't agree,' Barbara said.

Ian nodded. 'Obviously we can't trust him an inch, but maybe we can trust his survival instinct. He needs your protection more than your enmity.'

The Brigadier had heard of similar cases in the past and really it was no different from the police recruiting informants from the underworld. If nothing else, the Master certainly owed the world some good.

'All right.' Lethbridge-Stewart opened the door into the main work office outside. The Master was in there, guarded by Benton. Lethbridge-Stewart was sufficiently used to command not to show any signs of doubts. Confidence would be the first weapon he used.

'In view of the somewhat exceptional circumstances, I'm prepared to offer you protective custody, in return for some cooperation.'

The Master smiled broadly. 'A wise decision, Brigadier. I knew you would see that.' He sprang to his feet, and rubbed his hands together. 'Very well, then, shall we get to work?'

Lethbridge-Stewart shook his head. 'There are some ground rules to be laid out first. No one here is going to call you 'Master', he said firmly. 'Your arrest and trial were under the name Victor Magister, so that's the way it will stay for government purposes. Also, you will be accompanied by at least one of my men at all times.'

The Master gave him a crestfallen look. 'Why, Brigadier, I might almost think you didn't entirely trust me.'

'On the contrary,' Lethbridge-Stewart replied equally forthrightly, 'I trust you to be manipulative, deceitful and almost certainly to attempt to escape. Honesty doesn't seem to be your strong suit,' he added drily.

'Honesty?' the Master echoed. 'Tell me, Brigadier, do you really find the politicians you are subservient to be "right" or "honourable"? Do you really respect even those superior officers who clearly have fewer skills than you do? Of course not! But you play their game – you deceive both them and yourself by pretending to respect them, by calling them "sir", by subsuming your own

desires to follow their whims. . . I do not. If I want something, I take it.' He smiled. 'You tell me – which of us is the more honest?'

The Brigadier didn't want to listen to such ideas, especially since there was a danger they could even be true.

'You can play all the word games you like, but a criminal is hardly honest.'

The Master shook his head sadly. 'Ask yourself, have I ever denied anything I've done? Have I lied about anything? No. I'm proud of my so-called crimes, Brigadier. I think you'll find that in many ways I am the most honest man you've met.'

Marianne Kyle's quarters at Faslane were cramped to say the least, but even they were preferable to the larger rooms at the staging post. The air there just didn't agree with her any more. It may be closer to home, but it wasn't part of her life.

Lots of things close to home weren't part of her life; not since her father walked out the family while she was still a child. When her husband, Geoff, had begun to consider emigrating to Australia, it had felt almost like a similar betrayal. He was, after all, turning his back on her country. Thus, by association, and in view of her position in her country's government, he was turning his back on her.

When she was a little younger, it had begun to feel that she drifted through life waiting for each man to disappoint and betray her. Even the president had got himself killed for nothing, severing the hand that guided her people.

There was knock on her door and she slid it open. Williams was there, holding a scrap of printout.

'What?' Kyle demanded.

She wasn't in the mood for work right now. Sometimes it was best just to find time to let the old wounds scar over.

'A message from Alvarez. Someone here has contacted UNIT.'

That brought Kyle back to the present. 'One of us?'

'Unknown, but probably not. Also, Lethbridge-Stewart has granted protective custody to the Master, in return for technical expertise.'

Kyle considered running a security check, but if it was one of the genuine naval personnel, it would be far too late before they found him. Most likely UNIT would send someone here to investigate. . . She grinned at the thought that the Master might accompany them. He would need to recover his TARDIS and so was surely bound to come too. Excellent! If there was a chance of bringing the Master on to their side. . . She could see no reason – beyond the attack on him – why he should not. They both sought dominion over this world, after all.

'Reward our "friend" at UNIT with a five-minute chat to the prisoner.'

Cheered up, Kyle was in a magnanimous mood. She was also pleased with the Master's ingenuity at inveigling himself in with UNIT. Building a new power base by exploiting his enemies... Exactly what she would have done. Indeed, how else to characterise her relationship with the rest of the Conclave? She must be able to turn him to her side.

Her mood faltered when Carswell replaced Williams at the door.

'Commander.' He gave a slight bow from the neck.

'What are you doing here?' He should still be in London; there was much work to do there.

'My apologies, but this was delivered to my Westminster office last night.'

He handed her a shoebox-sized container in gift wrapping, with her name on the card. Kyle was baffled; it clearly wasn't from any of her people. She opened it and was so shocked that she momentarily allowed her public face to slip.

In the box was Barron's lifeless body, crushed to the size of a doll, but smelling real enough to make her gag. Carswell choked, giving her a moment of distraction to compose herself.

'A message from the Master. Ingenious.' Privately, she thought it was horrifying, but one didn't get very far as a dictator who was squeamish.

'He'll be coming after me next,' Carswell said. 'I'm requesting permission to return to the staging post from -'

'Denied,' Kyle snapped. Was Carswell going to turn out as just another disappointment? She would be in far more danger from the Master, but she would not be running back home. 'We have someone in UNIT, and since the Master is now working with them, we can keep tabs on him.'

'But, Commander...'

Kyle was disgusted, as much because she felt equally frightened as because he was showing it. 'If anyone found out what happened to the other Carswell...' she suggested sharply.

Carswell blinked. 'Are you so cold-hearted?'

'I am merely practical. We are both here to serve our homeland.'

And herself, she added mentally. If Carswell had no ambitions of his own to spur his courage, then to hell with him.

Barbara was waiting for Ian in the UNIT staff canteen when the Master came in with Benton. He noticed her and changed course to sit beside her.

'Mrs Chesterton, I believe I owe you some thanks. I understand you helped convince the Brigadier of my sincerity.'

Barbara shrugged. 'It was just common sense. We're obviously all up against the same enemy.'

'On this occasion, yes.'

He could have gone to almost any authority for help, of course, but somehow the idea of using UNIT appealed to his sense of humour. It was an irony that he would take delight in explaining to the Doctor some day. Before killing him, of course.

‘I am quite surprised. As a friend of the Doctor, I’m sure the Brigadier has told you about my little contretemps with him.’

‘That’s something of an understatement, isn’t it?’ She frowned. ‘There’s one thing he didn’t tell me: Why do you hate the Doctor so much?’

The Master was quite surprised. Most of the Doctor’s friends simply sided with him, regardless of reason. Offhand, he couldn’t think of anyone who had asked this question before. Perhaps it deserved an answer; it amused him to reward this feeble attempt at thought.

‘He betrayed me once. He and another of our people. We had the same goal in those days, but we disagreed on the . . . practical question.’

‘And that’s grounds for trying to kill him?’

The Master grimaced. ‘Humans will kill each other over a pair of shoes, or simply to see how it feels. What right have humans to judge me?’

‘Professional interest, perhaps,’ came answer from the door.

Barbara jumped, even though she recognised the voice.

‘Oh, you startled me. Didn’t you find anything at Faslane?’

‘Nothing but sailors and rain.’ Detective Inspector George Boucher smiled faintly. ‘A complete dead-end, in fact.’

CHAPTER 12

The Master and Benton left the room in silence. Boucher closed the door and smiled apologetically. 'Rough night last night,' he explained. 'With this hangover I probably couldn't even tell you what year this is.'

Barbara tried not to let any schoolteacher-type disapproval show in her tone. 'Perhaps we should try another line, then.'

'Exactly what I was about to suggest.' He helped himself to some strong coffee from the serving area, and drained it in a gulp. 'I was thinking about that Minister, Carswell. Perhaps we should have another go at questioning him; give him a bit of the old third-degree.'

Barbara shook her head. 'They wouldn't let us in last time...'

'This time we'll get a warrant. They'll have to let us in.'

Barbara smiled. This was not precisely what she would call a relaxing holiday, but at least Boucher seemed more his old self again.

'I'll let Ian know.'

Ian was in the communications room with the Master, listening to the tape from West Drayton again. The Master switched off the recording of Victor six-zero's last transmission.

'I see what you mean. There is a quite distinct external interference... ' He looked back at Ian. 'And nothing else was recorded – no further transmissions, nothing on the radar tapes?'

'Not a sausage,' Ian confirmed, surprised by how relaxed he was to be working with the Master. 'Not from West Drayton, anyway, and they were the ones in contact with the plane.'

'Have you tried the NSA station at Menwith Hill? Their communications equipment is rather more sensitive.'

Ian blinked. 'How on Earth do you know about that?'

The Master gave him a pained look. 'Oh, please! How do you think?'

Ian considered just refusing to answer, since the subject was classified, but the Master clearly already knew the pertinent facts and the Brigadier had left strict orders to make the best of his assistance...'

'The Brigadier contacted them; they detected no uncorrelated targets and didn't monitor anything different from the tape you've already heard. Or so they claim.' Ian had seen enough post-Watergate thrillers to know better than to trust the American intelligence services.

The Master rose, folding his hands behind his back, and paced around the lab for a few moments. ‘Then presumably there is no spacecraft involved – at least, not that enter the atmosphere and swallow up aircraft. No, the message is clearly a simple misdirection.’

‘Then the threat must be home-grown,’ Ian suggested. ‘Some sort of mad scientist, perhaps.’

‘Not necessarily, Mr Chesterton. You produced reasonable evidence for some degree of time travel being involved, and there have been... other signs that a more advanced technology than that of Earth is being employed by our mutual enemies.’

Mike Yates was going over the day’s duty rosters when the Brigadier came into his little office.

‘Get on to Rudloe, Mike, and have them prepare the Airborne HQ.’

‘Right, sir.’ Yates suppressed an urge to grin. They must be going somewhere, which meant that there was some lead to follow. ‘Was the call from Faslane anything important, then?’

‘I’m not entirely sure,’ the Brigadier admitted, ‘but it was certainly intriguing. Something about an accident and the victim said, “Tell UNIT.”’

‘Doesn’t sound like a coincidence, then?’ Yates suggested.

‘Exactly. Everything seems to lead up there, Yates, so it’s definitely time we had a dekko for ourselves.’

Mike couldn’t agree more.

The Master was amused to see that Benton had been assigned to watch him for the moment. It was a pity the sergeant was a member of UNIT; another time he might have made an excellent minder.

The Master intended to see if there was anything useful in the Doctor’s laboratory. He knew he would have to build something a little larger and more sensitive than his TARDIS homer if he was to locate his stolen time-ship and this seemed to be the most likely place to start.

Unfortunately, the place was a cluttered mess of half-finished projects and disassembled equipment.

‘Oh, Doctor, you never were very methodical, were you?’ The Master tapped his gloved fingertips on the worktop as he thought. ‘There must be something useful among all this junk,’ he muttered.

He opened a locker and found a pair of handbag-sized black boxes inside. Examining one, he slid open an inspection panel and found that it contained complex circuitry far beyond Earth technology. In fact the design methodology looked almost Dalek in origin. This circuitry was also connected to a small four-ended device that resembled a dematerialisation circuit.

‘Are these the Doctor’s?’ he asked Benton.

‘They are now, anyway. They belonged to some people who came back from the future, but according to the Doctor that future will never happen now and they don’t work.’

The Master nodded his understanding. Some kind of primitive time travel devices from a redundant timeline. The circuitry itself was unharmed, though, so it should be possible to adapt the parts. Decisively, he put both boxes on the worktop and laid out some tools beside it.

‘This could be exactly what we need. If I combine the circuits from both boxes and use the parts from one to phase-shift the other. . . Yes, that should work.’

‘To do what, exactly?’

‘To follow our mutual opponents back to their source.’

‘How will you know where that is?’

‘Ah, Sergeant, you have a knack for spotting the important questions!’ The Master held up his TARDIS homer. ‘This little device detects perturbations in the space-time continuum.’

Which was true, though it was only a part of its true function; he wasn’t about to give UNIT a method to track him.

‘With a few minor modifications it should give us a bearing on the direction of travel the next time someone makes a space-time shift. I am, of course, over-simplifying a little with the “bearing”, but the principle is essentially the same. All we need do then is feed that space-time course into the demat box I shall fit together. Assuming,’ he added pointedly, ‘that I’m not disturbed.’

Barbara led Boucher to look for Ian. He wasn’t in the lab or the main office. Eventually they found him in the communications room.

Ian gave his wife a welcoming kiss and then noticed Boucher.

‘Oh, hello again. I thought you were still –’

‘No luck up there,’ Boucher interrupted. ‘I thought we might try getting a warrant and questioning Carswell.’

‘Anything to get at Rob’s killers, eh?’

‘Rob, yeah. . . Yeah, they go too far when they knock off a copper.’ Boucher realised that both Ian and Barbara were staring at him, and it slowly dawned on him that something was wrong.

‘You mean. . . your nephew, Rob?’

Boucher’s heart sank and anger rose to replace it. It was a stupid mistake, and one which he could hardly blame on his counterpart’s drinking habit. He saw Ian realise the truth first and push Barbara towards the door.

Boucher acted immediately, kicking a chair into their path. Barbara toppled over the chair, crashing into a desktop. Boucher easily ducked Ian’s plucky but

untrained punch, and smacked the heel of his hand into the lecturer's jaw. Ian was propelled back into the radio apparatus, allowing Boucher time to grab Barbara's hand and drag her roughly out the door.

If this woman had worked with the other Boucher, she should have some idea of how much progress the authorities had made in tracking his people's movements.

Ian picked himself up, leaping through the door with an urgency that only the threat to a lover could prompt. Bright spots were still glaring in front of his pained eyes as he looked for Boucher and Barbara. They were almost at the reception area, but some UNIT troops were already showing up to see what all the fuss was about.

One of them made a grab for Boucher, who merely shot him down. The noise didn't even remotely drown Barbara's frightened scream.

Thinking only of Barbara, Ian darted forward, hoping that his speed would surprise Boucher. It didn't. Boucher brought his gun round and the muzzle was suddenly impossibly huge from Ian's view. He knew it was centred right between his eyes. Something slammed into him from the side, and a shot blew plaster from the wall where his head had been.

Mike Yates helped him to his feet. 'Sorry about that, but you were dead meat standing there.'

'No apologies needed,' Ian said with feeling.

The main doors were already swinging, and he and Yates charged through them. Boucher was shoving Barbara into a beige Range Rover, while a fresh-faced young man in the driver's seat gave covering fire, forcing Yates and Ian to duck back inside.

There was a screech of tyres on gravel and Ian flew out in time to see the Range Rover drive off. A UNIT soldier had thrown himself onto the bonnet before it got up too much speed and was wrestling with the driver for control of the wheel. But the driver was skilled and slewed the car sideways, throwing the soldier off.

Another couple of guards took potshots at the tyres, until the Brigadier appeared.

'Cease firing!' he shouted. 'You might hit Mrs Chesterton.'

Though it allowed the Range Rover to get away, Ian was glad of the Brigadier's concern.

Yates and the Brigadier then made for a jeep parked nearby. Ian followed and all three sped off in pursuit of the Range Rover.

As there was no question of shooting on an open road, the Brigadier concentrated on just keeping up with the fugitives as they headed towards London.

Ian was worried about Barbara, of course, but he was also strangely calm now that they were in pursuit. Boucher obviously didn't mean to kill her, or he would simply have done so in UNIT's communications room. He wondered what they wanted with her. Information on the real Boucher, perhaps, or on UNIT.

At first it was easy enough to follow the Range Rover along the M4, but things became more difficult when they reached the suburbs of London. Suddenly there were plenty of places for the fleeing car to hide, plenty of sidestreets to turn down, and the driver seemed to know the area back-to-front. Lethbridge-Stewart had immediately notified the police to be on the lookout, of course, but Ian wanted to keep the car in sight himself. It was his wife, after all.

And within half an hour, they lost it.

They had been sitting outside the hostel for only a few minutes when a woman emerged and started up the street towards a small roundabout. She was dark-haired, approaching middle age, and fairly slim.

'She'll do,' Boucher said to the driver.

The freckle-faced young man with the military haircut nodded. He started the engine and set the Range Rover in motion. With a sudden flash of foreknowledge, Barbara realised what Boucher had in mind, though she couldn't think why. She struggled against her bonds, but they wouldn't loosen enough even for her to release the safety belt.

'No!' she screamed. 'You can't -'

The solid slapping crunch of Range Rover powering into human flesh at fifty miles an hour cut her off and she recoiled as much from the sudden flare of blood across the windscreen as from the whiplash of the impact.

Boucher was out of the vehicle almost before it had stopped and grabbed the woman under the arms. Barbara tried not to be sick as he bundled the ruined body into the back seat beside her. Barbara had seen death before and this woman was very definitely dead. The smell of unwashed fabric and fresh blood beside her was suddenly too much and Barbara found herself vomiting painfully on to her own clothes, her head spinning.

The Jeep's radio buzzed and Lethbridge-Stewart snatched it up.

'Report from the civilian police, sir,' Benton's voice said. 'A Range Rover answering the description you gave was seen in Hillingdon.'

That wasn't too far away, Ian realised with hope. He had never failed Barbara yet and had no intention of starting now.

'On our way,' the Brigadier answered, taking a left turn.

* * *

Suddenly Barbara was floating. She realised that she was being carried away from the Range Rover. She must have blacked out while she was being sick. She wanted to struggle, to try to break free from her captors, but she could not find the strength to do more than twitch her hands feebly.

Someone was tugging at her left hand and she could feel her wedding ring being pulled off. That doubled her resolve and she focused her concentration on it, trying to clench her fist so that the young man couldn't get the ring free from her finger.

'No,' she snapped. 'I won't let you do thaaahh –' She bit her tongue as he forced her fingers apart and tore the ring free. It felt like losing a part of herself. The pain when he tore off her earrings was mild by comparison.

He dropped her on to some moss-covered ground and hurried back to the Range Rover. It was parked a few yards away, on a patch of waste ground between some unattractive grey tower blocks. She could see the thief shoving her ring onto the finger of the dead woman.

Boucher walked around the Range Rover, splashing petrol over it from a jerrycan. He tossed some inside the vehicle too, making sure to thoroughly douse the upholstery and the dead woman in the back seat. When the can was empty, Boucher joined his driver at a safe distance, and took a small grenade from his jacket pocket. He pulled the pin and, with the skill of a professional cricketer, tossed it in through the Range Rover's window.

There was a dull crack and the car exploded into flames. A wave of heat washed over Barbara, and then Boucher crouched before her.

He grabbed her ankles and grinned, and for the first time in her life Barbara regretted the good fortune that had returned her and Ian to Earth after their travels with the Doctor. Somehow the sound of the flames, and the sight of them behind him, seemed appropriate. She tried to turn her attention inwards, to persuade her mind to flee and hide from Boucher's preparations.

Then he simply pulled off her right shoe and walked back to the burning vehicle. He paused momentarily before carefully placing the shoe near the open back door, in a safe spot between some patches of burning petrol.

Barbara let out a long shaking breath and failed to stop herself from crying.

Ian hadn't associated the smoke with the Range Rover at first, but as the police car which had spotted it preceded the Jeep on to the waste ground, Ian's heart felt like stopping. Vaguely aware of the Brigadier and Yates calling to him to be more careful, he jumped from the Jeep.

He ran forward, fixated by the black and twisted skeleton of what used to be a beige Range Rover.

It was the oddest sensation: he felt frozen in mid-step, though he knew he was still moving. All the sounds of the world around him had faded and he

couldn't even feel the breath he was taking. It was as if the world had simply stopped, caught in the wink of a camera shutter and preserved forever as cold grey tones in a forgotten album.

No colour, no sound, no movement. No life. Just an empty moment in time, observed while the mind tried to evade what was placed in its path.

Ian stumbled and finally came to a halt. Before him he could see Barbara's forlorn shoe and the lifeless blackened bundle in the back seat of the car.

CHAPTER 13

The night was cold, threatening snow. Even the central heating didn't help much in a small attic storeroom with the windows fully open. Ian Chesterton didn't really feel anything, standing there on the sill. He looked down at the gravel driveway outside UNIT HQ. The edges were lined with those little whitewashed stones so typical of the kerbs in military bases.

One of the other teachers at Coal Hill had once tried to interest Ian in bird-watching, back in a previous life. Ian hadn't been impressed, though he did admire the way certain birds launched themselves from high ledges, seeming to defy gravity even before they spread their wings.

For once, he could imagine how such a bird must feel when young and preparing to leave the nest for the first time. It would be so easy to fly away from the side of the building. There would be that blissful moment of weightlessness which he enjoyed so much in the diving pool, the wind in his hair, free flight through the cool winter. . . Then nothing. No loss, no heartache, no anger remaining. So easy.

What else was there? Being blamed by his son for Barbara's death, perhaps. He had momentarily thought that blaming himself was as bad as it could get, but that would be worse, for then he would have lost John too. Or was he to help the Brigadier's men to arrest these people? It sounded like the obvious thing to do, but then he would just end up paying the taxes that fed and sheltered them in jail. That would just be more pain.

Or did he turn vigilante, like some cheap Hollywood character? Be responsible for more deaths? How was he supposed to live with that on his conscience?

Barbara had always said he was the practical one; now there was an irony. Whichever path he took, no matter how well he hid himself away, the pain and the guilt would find him and gnaw at him, because it was part of life now. If he was to flee and hide from the jabs and blows that assailed him on all sides, he would have to flee and hide from life itself.

Whichever way he turned, something stung him about Barbara's loss, or added its weight to the burden that was slowly crushing the life out of him, or. . .

A brief flight and then blessed relief. Peaceful sleep, perhaps with Barbara, though he had never been as much of a churchgoer as she had. It was flight

of both kinds, he knew; it was cowardice and evasion, and a refusal to deal with the facts. In an odd way, it was a gesture of survival, he thought; not of his body, but of his sanity. Going on with the pain would drive him to a breakdown, as his actions that afternoon had proved.

So why was he still standing here? The stones three floors below were ideally placed. One good skull fracture – he wouldn't even feel it.

The doubts and fear crept up on him unexpectedly, outflanking the mental defences he had erected against second thoughts. Ian had no fear of death, but once before, he had been paralysed temporarily, his legs merely heavy dead flesh that responded to nothing. It was a dozen years ago, but the effects of that first shot from a Dalek weapon had never faded from his memory. What if he survived the fall? Endured some serious injury, perhaps even permanent paralysis? Loss of independence, physical pain, and less chance of a way to do anything about it. That was a more disconcerting prospect than simple oblivion.

He had taught disabled pupils, he had disabled friends, so he knew he shouldn't fear something that so many people clearly coped with... But should and could are two different things, and Ian did fear that. He feared it more than death, more than the loss and more than the guilt.

Intellectually he knew he could try something else – hang himself, open his wrists, or whatever – but his heart said otherwise. This had been the one moment he could have simply gone through with it, knowing that it was honest and heartfelt, but it had slipped him by.

He ducked back inside the room, and collapsed into the sheet-covered chair, tears streaming down his face.

Down in the lab, the Master had completed as much of a complex circuit as was possible with the parts to hand. He had expected Ian to return from the stores with the rest of the parts by now. Was the man so foolish that he had got lost here in UNIT HQ?

Sighing at the seemingly endless human capacity for getting in the way, the Master put down his tools and went in search of Ian, a guard hovering behind him. Turning a corridor, he saw Benton was coming towards him with a pile of reports.

The Master stopped him. 'Sergeant Benton, have you seen Mr Chesterton?'

Benton hesitated, as if unsure whether to answer. 'I saw him going upstairs. Said he had some things to deal with.'

'Oh, I see...' The Master nodded. Whatever could Chesterton be dealing with upstairs? The answer came to him quickly, and he moved quickly in the direction of the staircase.

‘Hold it right there,’ warned Benton. ‘You’re going nowhere unaccompanied.’

The Master sighed. ‘Mr Benton, am I right in assuming there is no way out from that room?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Then I hardly need an escort to go and help him there, do I?’ With that he turned and took the stairs two at a time, hoping he wasn’t too late; he could hardly expect Lethbridge-Stewart to co-operate if he let Chesterton get himself killed so quickly.

He could feel the draught coming in even before he reached the top landing. The attic was in darkness, but there was enough pale light seeping in from outside to pick out Chesterton sitting with his head in his hands.

Ian hadn’t even noticed the Master’s presence. All he could see was one tiny patch of light on the wall directly before him and Barbara’s shoe lying half-melted somewhere between his eyes and brain.

He finally registered the Master’s presence when the dark Time Lord sat in front of him and snapped his fingers a few times in front of Ian’s face. Ian didn’t see much of the rest of the room, though some part of him knew where he was. Even that part refused to focus on how or why he’d come to be here. It just wasn’t possible – he wasn’t that stupid. . .

‘Perhaps you should talk,’ the Master suggested.

Ian felt very strongly otherwise, but somehow found himself doing so anyway. Perhaps the Master had hypnotised him, he thought. How was he supposed to tell?

‘When I was eighteen, I knew this girl at university. One day, she got an offer of a job in another town, but was torn between it and me.’ He laughed mirthlessly. ‘Being the knight in shining armour that I am, I knew that I couldn’t let her ruin her chances of getting on, so I pretended to lose interest in her.’ He looked out of the window, not seeing anything. ‘Once she was gone, I realised that I’d fallen in love with her – why else put her so far ahead of myself? That hurt enough, but about a week later, I got up one morning to find her face staring up at me from the front page of the local paper. “Local beauty dies in car crash”, it said. She had been in a coma for three days, then. . . slipped away.’ He didn’t feel the need to explain that he could still see the page. It probably showed on his face. ‘I didn’t think it was possible to feel worse than that. And you know what? When I read the story, I found that it wasn’t her at all. It was some other girl and the paper had got the photographs from two stories mixed up.’

‘Then you should be glad that she wasn’t dead. Someone you care for being alive is hardly what I’d expect to be traumatic.’

'Oh, I was,' Ian agreed. 'Very glad! Until the nightmares started. When I got close to any girl later, I would have nightmares that she was killed in a car crash, but this time I was with her, so that I knew it was no mistake.'

It was a stupid thing, but he supposed it had a certain twisted logic to it. The human mind could be all too complex at times, and as twisted and intertwined as the lifeblood's veins.

The Master nodded understandingly, without any of the scoffing that Ian had expected. 'And you had this nightmare about Barbara?'

Ian nodded. 'That was how I knew I loved her,' he said quietly. He was afraid that if he didn't whisper, his voice might break up. 'We were still in the TARDIS, travelling with the Doctor. We had met the Daleks, and Voord, and Zarbi. . . ' Those were enough terrors for a lifetime's supply of nightmares. 'But when I woke up in a cold sweat because I had dreamed of her being hit by a car, then I knew I loved her. Loved her enough to be afraid of losing her; afraid of feeling the same way I did when I was eighteen.'

The Master folded his arms. 'And now you feel the same way?'

'No. This is worse.'

'Anger at the loss?' the Master asked.

Ian didn't want to think that way, but. . . 'Yes. Can't we talk about something else?' He wondered how the Master had judged his hidden mood so easily. Then again, the Doctor had always been adept at that game. Perhaps all his people were. 'Or better still, not at all.'

The Master shook his head wearily. 'You still have obligations here, Chesterton.' He paused, his tone lowering. 'Your anger will be a powerful weapon, Ian, but it must be harnessed and used properly.'

Ian was perplexed. 'Properly?'

'But of course! That anger can be as lethal as a bullet, but, like any other kind of ammunition, it must be conserved and accurately directed towards the enemy. The same enemy who murdered Barbara.'

'Revenge, you mean?' This was more like what Ian had expected to hear from the most notorious terrorist in the past decade. He knew the other style couldn't last. 'Is that what happened to you? Lost someone and decided to make everybody else feel the pain?'

'Do I seem that weak to you, Mr Chesterton?'

Ian wanted to leave the Master where he was, to go and find someone more understanding to talk to. Either that or find a pub to wipe his mind in. Something kept pulling him back, though, determined to prove his point.

'Do you even understand pain as humans feel it?' The Doctor did, if his goodbye to Susan was anything to go by.

The Master smiled, but the expression didn't reach his eyes. 'Pain is a universal constant, Chesterton. Everyone understands that.' He paused in his

work on the circuit board. 'Not everyone chooses to accept it.'

'You think I should refuse to accept Barbara's death?'

'No, but. . . You should, perhaps, refuse to accept it as being meaningless. If you let it prevent us from completing the construction of this equipment, then the people who killed your wife will have won and her death really will have been for nothing.'

Ian wasn't really in the mood to be consoled, even though he knew that he needed it. 'And what difference does it make to you?'

'For the most part none,' the Master admitted. 'But remember that these people are out to kill me, so I do have something of an interest.'

'Frankly, I wish they had killed you instead of Barbara.'

He would have done anything to claw back the words before the Master heard them. He winced inwardly, knowing that it was too late.

The Master didn't seem offended. 'Your candour is refreshing. I understand, of course.'

'I'm sure you do.'

The Master didn't bat an eyelid at the reproach in Ian's words. 'Naturally I can't agree with you on your preferred choice of victim. But, believe me, I'm touched by your wife's sacrifice. And in return, I feel we owe it to her to waste no time in completing our work to track the enemy back to their origin.'

'Really?' Somehow he doubted the Master's motives. Right now, he doubted everything, his own life most of all.

'Yes, really, Mr Chesterton. There are some observers whose attention it is unwise to attract, and these people have unwisely attracted ours.'

Benton had finished carrying the files, leaving the Master's other guard on watch at the foot of the stairs, and now knocked on the door of the Brigadier's office.

'Sir?'

'What is it, Benton?'

'Maybe nothing sir, but the Master was just looking for Ian. It seems he's got lost or something.'

'Lost?'

'Last I saw him he said he was going upstairs to take care of something.'

Lethbridge-Stewart felt uncomfortable thoughts trying to find a way into his brain. On the one hand, he had scarcely expected Chesterton to actually work that much under the circumstances, but when someone so obviously pressured and distressed vanished like that, it usually wasn't a good sign.

'And where's the Master now?'

'He went upstairs too. I left a guard outside.'

Lethbridge-Stewart was off and running at once. By the time he passed the guard and reached the attic, the Master was a powerful silhouette at the door, watching Chesterton impassively.

The Brigadier was about to warn the Master to mind his words, when the Time Lord nodded to him.

'It's all right, Brigadier. I understand the situation. Why don't you have Sergeant Benton find a place for Chesterton to stay tonight. I've made sure he's all right.'

Lethbridge-Stewart shivered at the thought that a suicidal man had been, however briefly, left in the Master's care. He was probably forcing Ian to jump.

'What have you –'

'Brigadier,' the Master chided gently, 'I am far better versed in psychology than you are. I've kept him safe, as a gesture of goodwill, so to speak. To help convince you that our pact is genuine. Remember that it was his wife who helped forge this alliance...'

The Brigadier was doubtful, but the Master had a point. He had nothing to gain from killing Ian, and his protection from his hunters to lose. He leaned in closer towards the Master.

'Very well, but if he dies tonight, he won't be alone.'

'Don't worry. I know what I'm doing.'

There had been a sensation of dizziness and the sort of sensory jarring that one sometimes had upon waking suddenly from the dreams of a particularly deep sleep. The tiniest movement seemed to cause the surrounding environs to crash violently against the senses.

Barbara was almost glad of the sudden falling sensation in her stomach, as it gave some purely perceptual idea of orientation. Wondering if she had anything left inside her to throw back up, she carefully raised her head to look around.

She was no longer in London, that much was obvious. For a moment, it occurred to her that she was dead and in some sort of purgatory. The thought that she hadn't even had time to say goodbye to Ian dismayed her; what must he think? But then she got a grip on herself; she had never had much time for such nonsensical thinking, and firmly told herself so.

No, she had obviously been moved to some other place, probably while she was unconscious. That certainly seemed a much more believable proposition. That being the case, either she could get back, or Ian would find her. Somehow he always had in the past, when they travelled with the Doctor. She smiled in spite of herself and resolved to make it as easy for him as possible.

The dizziness had already passed, but there was a faintly unnerving vibration in the air. It wasn't anything audible as such, and certainly wasn't

an earthquake, but there was some sort of discomfoting sensation that she couldn't quite put her finger on. If she couldn't identify it, she supposed it didn't matter that much. There didn't seem to be anything harmful nearby and she suspected that it was probably just some sort of machine in the distance; a generator, perhaps.

She was inside a small bare room, so maybe it was even the air-conditioning. The room was not unlike a prison cell; plain concrete walls, floor and ceiling, with a small sink and a cupboard. There were no windows and a square light fitting was inset into the ceiling.

Although she felt sure she was in a cell, it seemed foolish not to check the door just in case. She had once stayed in student accommodation in France which was just as basic, so there was a reason to hope that this was merely very primitive open accommodation. To her considerable surprise, it opened easily on to a narrow corridor. Identical doors stretched away on either side.

There were no windows out here either and she began to suspect that the whole building must be built of the same unadorned concrete. Everything here was completely functional: wire-caged light bulbs, dusty pipes and conduits, noticeboards full of arcane rules and regulations. . . It felt clear to her that she was in some kind of utilities complex. Perhaps a very unwelcoming military barracks or a power station.

Momentarily dizzy again, she put a hand against the wall to steady herself – and immediately snatched it back with horror. The concrete was quite warm to the touch, like a paving slab on a hot day. But the light bulbs here certainly weren't that strong.

Barbara heard footsteps approaching. For a brief moment she wanted to stay put and announce herself to whoever it was, but the urge passed instantly as she realised that if she had been brought here against her will, then the people coming were probably enemies, like that other Boucher.

She slipped into a doorway instead, leaving the door open just a crack, to peer out. Something about the oddness of this place reminded her of her travels with the Doctor and, if pressed, she would probably have confessed to half-expecting a couple of Voord or Robomen to come round the corner. Or Venusians, perhaps; something about the warm wall reminded her of the buildings in the city of Bikugih on Venus. She wasn't sure whether to be relieved or disappointed when the squad of men who did appear seemed as human as she was.

They wore simple olive combat fatigues that could belong to any of half the armies in the world, with black leather webbing that formed a Y on their backs. The rifles slung over their shoulders were Kalashnikovs like those that Boucher's – the new Boucher's – men had carried. She recognised them easily enough from TV news reports from trouble-spots around the globe. They all

wore some sort of armband, but on the arm furthest from her, so she couldn't see what was on it.

The men marched past stiffly, clearly bored with their uneventful patrol, and vanished through an intersection of corridors. Barbara wondered if she could somehow be in Russia; the scale of the base and the grim military lack of decor were exactly the sort of thing that she'd expect to find in some sort of Russian headquarters. Of course, all her knowledge of such things came from films and TV; you didn't need to be James Bond to teach O level history at the local comprehensive.

Ian might know, from the people he sometimes worked with at the RAE college. If only he were here. . .

The Brigadier and Benton had escorted Ian to one of the unoccupied bachelor officer's rooms, leaving the Master free to return to his work at the lab. He had wasted enough time with Chesterton as it was.

The Brigadier was trying to make sense of the complex bits of gadgetry which the Master had assembled on the work benches. He obviously didn't like the look of it at all. The Master thought he probably suspected it to be some sort of bomb.

'What on Earth is all this?'

The Master put down the screwdriver he was using on what looked like a cross between a disembowelled TV set and some sort of modern art sculpture.

'If I'm allowed to complete it,' the Master began pointedly, 'it will be a temporal instability receptor.'

'A what?'

The Master sighed. 'You know what a motion detector is, Brigadier?'

'Of course. One of those burglar alarm things that goes off if someone moves in the room.'

'Very good. Now, this device is basically the same thing, except that it detects movement in the space-time vortex. If someone is moving objects through time, it will set off this alarm.'

'And then we can track them back to where they're coming from?'

'Precisely. As Mr Chesterton said earlier, it would be easier if we could simply adapt a TARDIS's time-path indicator.'

'If you'd care to supply one. . .'

'No, thank you, Brigadier. I have no intention of either walking into the enemy's trap or allowing you to seize my TARDIS.'

'Well. . . let me know when you've got it working.'

'Of course.'

Lethbridge-Stewart stood for a few moments, then left the lab. The Master was glad, as being watched while working was far too much like being back at

the Academy. He was adjusting the connections of a small circuit-board when the telephone rang. He lifted it immediately. 'Yes?'

'Is Mr Chesterton there?'

For a moment, the Master considered simply saying no, but his curiosity got the better of him. Knowledge was power, after all. 'Who shall I say is calling?'

'It's Dr Henderson.'

'Hang on a moment, Dr Henderson,' the Master said blandly. He cradled the receiver in one hand for a few seconds, then spoke into it in a perfect match for Ian's voice. 'Ian Chesterton here, what can I do for you?'

'I've got some good news,' the voice at the other end said. 'We've completed the autopsy on the body from the Range Rover and it isn't your wife. We've matched her up to a woman reported missing from a shelter of the homeless near the site where you found the car.'

'Thank God,' the Master said, flooding Ian's voice with relief. 'And thank you, Dr Henderson.'

'Don't mention it.' Henderson rang off, and the Master looked at the receiver momentarily before hanging it up. He could tell Chesterton the good news, of course, but... Chesterton had redoubled his efforts since his wife's death, fuelled by the natural desire for revenge. If he should become more relaxed, that efficiency might be impaired.

The Master had seen people fight – and caused them to fight – for many reasons. He had seen people fight for duty many times, but that often led to weariness and despair. Someone fighting for a personal cause, though; that was a different matter. People fighting for their family and personal values did not give up. That was a nuisance when they opposed you, but here he had the chance to use such a cause for his own gain, and he was not going to squander that.

The man who cares about only one thing, the Master had once heard, is the most dangerous. And such a man was also the most useful.

Ian returned to the lab with two mugs of strong coffee on a tray. Somehow he had found that he was performing such simple tasks on autopilot, as if they were a symptom of grief.

'Did I hear the phone ringing a couple of minutes ago?'

'Hmm?' The Master looked up. 'Oh, yes. The NSA station at Menwith Hill reconfirming our own discoveries.'

'I thought the Brigadier had already tried them?'

The Master nodded. 'Lethbridge-Stewart is a professional man, but as a scientist I've learned that for the result of an experiment to have any real value, it must be able to be repeated.'

'So you thought you'd double-check?'

Ian understood; as a scientist himself, it was a fairly basic rule.

‘Exactly. Now what I suggest we do next is –’

‘Haven’t you ever been in love? Been married? Had a girlfriend?’

Ian regretted the question almost as soon as it was asked. It wasn’t exactly subtle, and the Master looked at him with a vague suggestion of a sigh.

‘If I say yes, I could be lying to make you feel better, or to appeal to the human sense of the romantic. If I say no, I could be lying to avoid embarrassment. How would you know whether you could trust my answer? Love is a powerful master, Mr Chesterton, and quite ruthless in its own way. No other emotion can so completely dominate the human will, to the exclusion of all others. I am not human and nor am I one to be mastered’ He sighed. ‘You should get back to bed. Lethbridge-Stewart will have me sent straight back to prison if he catches me interrupting your rest.’

Ordinarily, Ian would probably have laughed. As it was, perhaps recognising that fact was enough.

‘You’re probably right. I wanted to say thanks.’

‘For what? I’m only being selfish, Mr Chesterton. Keeping you sane keeps the work from being further delayed.’

‘I see. . . Well, I’ll try not to interfere with your schedule again.’

Ian turned away, oddly touched by the Master’s apparent humour. In so doing, he didn’t catch sight of the look of disdain that followed him as he left the room.

CHAPTER 14

Lethbridge-Stewart saw Ian framed in the attic window when he closed his eyes. He shivered to think of how Doris might react if he were ever killed in action. . .

He had never really thought about that side of things before. He had in the past wondered how he might cope if Doris or his daughter, Kate, were to die unexpectedly, and he knew that somehow he would muddle through. He always did. He had never really thought much about how his death might affect them, though. Ironic really, that was one of the very things that had finally driven Fiona to the divorce court.

Chesterton seemed a pretty sensible chap in every other respect, so his suicide attempt was doubly shocking. Might he even be driven to such a tragedy? He was a soldier, willing to die for Queen and country – or, in this posting, for the planet – but that was different. To be willing to die of a broken heart was surely worse.

Lethbridge-Stewart didn't think he was capable of such a thing; the shock of seeing Chesterton try had reinforced that impression. But not everyone had his resolve, least of all Doris or Kate. They were strong in their own way, but he would rather spare them that dilemma.

Perhaps he should stop seeing Doris, he reflected. It really wasn't fair to risk causing her pain if he was killed as part of a job she didn't even know about. The secrecy that surrounded UNIT would only serve to increase her pain. Yes, that was the best course of action; he would maintain his distance from her. Just in case.

The Master had put his feet up on the Doctor's desk, and was engrossed in a battered copy of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Ian was on the other side of the room, turning a pen over and over in his hands, obviously not even seeing it.

Bond was reminiscing to an agent about a Captain Boris, when a chime sounded from the detector the Master had constructed, forcing him to put down the book. He was on his feet immediately, judging the location and scale of the transference from the glowing traces on the TV screen which was incorporated into the set-up.

Ian was at his side almost immediately. 'Is it them?'

‘Yes. A space-time disturbance.’ He unrolled a map, and started plotting co-ordinates on it. ‘As I thought. The bearing suggests that the locus is in the Faslane area.’

Ian wasn’t surprised either. Everything of late had been pointing to there. So that was where he felt they should go next. If Boucher was anywhere, he’d be there.

‘Any idea where they’re going, or coming from?’

The Master looked puzzled. ‘It’s very strange, Chesterton. There seems to be no co-ordinate shift, and yet the scale of the transference is quite pronounced.’

‘You mean you can’t track it?’ Ian didn’t know whether to be offended or simply dismayed.

‘I mean,’ the Master said irritably, ‘that there is nothing to –’ He snapped his fingers. ‘Ah. Ingenious. I should have thought of that from the beginning. It’s the scale of the phase-shift we want, not its polarity!’

He gave a wolfish grin, and grabbed the cannibalised black box.

‘Come along, Mr Chesterton, we have a long journey ahead of us.’

‘Where to?’

‘Faslane, of course.’

The airborne HQ was an EC-130H Hercules whose interior was fitted out as an airborne battlefield command and control centre. Where an ordinary Transport Command Hercules has either passenger seats or cargo space, this one was packed with computers, radar and communications equipment.

Lethbridge-Stewart found it vaguely nostalgic to be back on board. Although he was very much an infantry officer with both feet on the ground, this aircraft had once been UNIT’s only British HQ.

In fact, had anyone gone through official records, they would have found that UNIT’s official HQ was on Salisbury Plain, nearer to Rudloe Manor and the Navy’s experimental facilities at Copenacre. In truth, the Wiltshire base was really only a central depot for the wide variety of specialised equipment that UNIT might need to call on.

Typical red tape and bureaucratic slowness still afflicted UNIT despite all this. The Cabinet Overseas and Defence Committee had promised to get a hold of one of the Russians’ new laser weapons from their secret development facility at Plesetsk if C19 could help with the budget, but there had still been no sign of the thing being delivered.

At least Lethbridge-Stewart could enjoy a small measure of revenge. He should deliver reports in triplicate to the Joint Intelligence Committee, who would pass it on to the Overseas and Defence Committee. As it was, Carswell was a member of the latter, and Lethbridge-Stewart was not going to com-

promise security by giving his own plans away. He thought it was the sort of thing that Monty would be proud of.

A few quiet words had ensured that the reports were being carefully misfiled at the Defence Communication Network offices back at Rudloe. This, of course, was DI55's cover office.

Corporal Bell was scribbling on a pad when the Brigadier came back into the main section of the aircraft from giving the pilot his flight plan. Before boarding, he had exchanged his tunic and peaked cap for a thick UNIT sweater and beret, which he felt would be more practical if there were to be trouble.

'I thought Private Walsh was on duty today.'

Bell shook her head primly. 'He's down at the infirmary getting patched up after trying to jump on that Range Rover yesterday.'

'Oh, of course.'

The Brigadier felt guilty about forgetting which man had been injured. He had been more concerned with keeping the Master under observation, dealing with Chesterton and getting medical treatment for the man who had been shot. He normally prided himself on knowing the medical condition of all his men and reminded himself to do better.

Yates was already manning the duty station at the rear of the compartment. 'We're cleared to taxi,' he said.

The Brigadier took a seat and instructed Yates to close the ramp and start the engines. Yates pressed a large button on the wall and the ramp that hung down from the tail began to rise. It had only risen a few inches from the ground when the Master hopped nimbly on to it and walked in, followed by Ian and Benton.

'Sorry sir,' Benton began. 'I tried to tell -'

'It's all right,' the Brigadier interrupted, with a glare at his new passengers. He had hoped to leave the Master safely guarded at HQ. 'What are you doing here?' he asked. 'And Chesterton, you should be resting.'

'Brigadier,' began the Master, 'if you expect me to amicably accept that you'll keep an eye on me, then you must expect me to do the same. I wouldn't want you to deal with our enemies without me having my share.'

The Brigadier didn't bother to reply to that. He knew well enough by now when the Master was merely trying to provoke a reaction from him.

'Besides,' Ian added, 'there was some sort of transference detected by this box thing. According to Mr Magister here, it was centred on Faslane.'

The Master stowed the box in a secure cupboard for takeoff and sat across from the Brigadier. 'Everything is leading back to Faslane. The infiltrators' helicopter, the space-time transference... Even the gang which was scapegoated for the raid on the Magnum Bank came from that area and there must be a reason for that. Something specific to that place.'

‘Yes, those thoughts had occurred to us as well,’ Lethbridge-Stewart admitted. It wasn’t pleasant to be agreeing with the Master, but it would be far more foolish to ignore the evidence just because he had mentioned it.

‘It might be a good idea for you to come along after all. If we find anything there, you’re most likely to be able to tell us whether it’s useful for this space-time business.’

The Master nodded. ‘Naturally.’

Lethbridge-Stewart spent most of the flight trying to think of what to say to Doris, if he could bring himself to stop seeing her. He had never been an indecisive man, but then he wasn’t used to facing decisions of this nature.

A platoon of men vetted by DI55 was waiting at RAF Shandon, outside Helensburgh, when the airborne HQ landed. The Hercules barely stopped before the end of the old wartime runway. Being largely out of range of the Luftwaffe, the place had served as a training school during the war, but was still owned by the MoD and maintained a caretaker staff.

Normally the Brigadier didn’t like using regular troops since, apart from being under other people’s command, they didn’t have the same attitude as UNIT men, who were more experienced in dealing with alien threats.

Since the opposition in this case was human, however, there was less risk of them being too shocked to do their duty. Leaving Yates to give the men their assignments, Lethbridge-Stewart borrowed one of the airfield’s Jeeps, and had Benton drive him to Faslane.

When the Brigadier found the infirmary, he was greeted by a naval nurse who seemed puzzled as to what an army officer might need her services for. Before he could explain that he was looking for someone, a rather pleasant voice called out to the nurse, and a doctor approached. At least, the Brigadier assumed he was a doctor, from the white coat and stethoscope draped over his uniform.

He was surely not yet thirty, with dark curly hair and very naval sideburns. He had the sort of square-jawed but sheltered features that made Lethbridge-Stewart think of the boat race, though he didn’t know why.

‘Oh, hello sir,’ the young man said cheerily. ‘You must be the Brigadier from UNIT?’

‘That’s right, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart.’

‘Oh, the name’s Sullivan – Harry Sullivan. I called your headquarters. . . .’

‘Ah,’ Lethbridge-Stewart said, pleased. ‘The very chap I wanted to see, then.’

He was actually quite surprised to have found the right person so quickly – if anyone here was the right person. Things were usually far more complicated.

‘Yes. . . I say, do come into the lounge.’

Sullivan led the Brigadier into a small annexe with a fridge and a tea urn. A couple of couches were positioned along the walls, and there were a few boardgames on the tables.

‘It was about that road accident.’

‘A road accident?’ the Brigadier echoed. ‘And the victim told you to call me?’

‘Well, yes.’ Sullivan looked as baffled as the Brigadier felt. ‘It’s a bit of a rum do, right enough.’ He poured himself and the Brigadier some coffee. ‘There I was, driving up from Helensburgh after a day’s leave, when I saw this other driver stopped just ahead, standing over a body – someone he’d just hit. I wanted to see if I could help, so I stopped to take a look. Before the poor chap died, he said “Call UNIT, and tell them.”’

‘Tell them what?’

‘I haven’t the foggiest. He pegged out right there and then. I went and called an ambulance and the body was brought back here.’

That was what Lethbridge-Stewart was waiting for. If they knew who it was, perhaps they’d have some idea of what he meant. In truth, he knew inside who it was, but he also knew that he had to be sure. Generalities and assumptions were never good enough.

‘Can I see him?’

Sullivan nodded. ‘We have a couple of freezers in the mortuary.’

He opened the door, and led the Brigadier back out, and through the main hall of the infirmary. A couple of wards branched off and there was a short corridor to an operating theatre, but Sullivan went through a different door. A dingy corridor led to a morgue with a pair of autopsy tables in the middle of the brightly lit room. Eight freezer drawers were set into the far wall, and Sullivan pulled one open.

Lethbridge-Stewart looked down. The drawer was empty. Sullivan was flustered.

‘Just a moment. I supervised the body myself. It was put in here...’

‘Could another doctor have removed it?’ Sullivan’s insignia marked him as a Surgeon-Lieutenant and the Brigadier knew that a base this size must have higher-ranking doctors on call.

‘Not without filling in the paperwork.’ He shook his head. ‘I’m afraid I don’t understand this at all.’

The Brigadier had a very strong feeling that he understood it. He took out a photocopy of a file photo of DI Boucher, and handed it to Sullivan.

‘Was this the man?’

‘Yes, it was.’ He sounded faintly astonished. ‘How could you possibly have known that, sir?’

That was a question that Lethbridge-Stewart was unsure whether he should answer; he didn’t want to give anything away to the enemy. On the other

hand, the opposition already knew that Boucher was dead and his double uncovered. . . Besides, given that they wanted their double of Boucher to take the place of the original, the last thing one of them would do is call UNIT to warn that the real Boucher was dead.

Pleased with his reasoning, the Brigadier drew Sullivan away from the drawers and spoke in a low voice.

'This man whom you say is dead just abducted and killed a woman from my headquarters. More accurately, a double of him did. The people in charge must have removed the body so that the original DI Boucher of the Flying Squad wouldn't be known to be dead.'

Sullivan shivered slightly as he said, 'That's all a bit creepy, sir. I mean, doppelgangers walking about the place. Besides, I know he's dead, so they would have had to get rid of me too, wouldn't they?'

'They might yet, Sullivan. But Boucher worked in London and it's unlikely that you would run into him again.'

Sullivan clearly didn't really believe his story, but then he didn't seem to disbelieve it either. The Brigadier decided to press on with his attack.

'I'd like you to help me, Sullivan. If you could keep an eye out around the base for anything unusual or out of place.'

Sullivan opened his mouth to answer, hesitated and then finally nodded. 'There's no harm in it, I suppose. . . Where can I reach you?'

'For the moment, out at RAF Shandon, or, failing that, through the Defence Communication Network at Rudloe Manor.'

He noticed that Sullivan became rather more attentive when he mentioned the latter. Presumably he realised that a foreign agent or other impostor wouldn't be reachable through one of the country's most secure networks.

'All right, sir,' Sullivan said cheerily, 'I'll give it a go.'

Ian had worked mechanically, fitting circuits to the strange black box under the Master's directions. It was now a little larger, having been blended with its counterpart, and had three of those sprung handgrip things that hung from the ceiling of tube trains for standing passengers to hold onto in order to keep their balance.

In his own mind, though, he was not soldering circuits and assembling electronics but repeating a mantra to keep his thoughts from plunging back to the depths that had driven him to the attic window. It was hard enough even to accept that he had been that far gone. Ian had always thought of suicide as a coward's way out, and the sheerest stupidity. He knew he was smarter than that. So how could he reconcile that view with having wanted to jump and fly free from his pain?

More to the point, if he couldn't reconcile things, how could he get round them and live the rest of his life?

The ramp at the end of the compartment lowered and the Brigadier came aboard the EC-130H.

'As I thought,' he announced. 'The real Boucher was killed up here.'

'We all knew that, Brigadier,' the Master said pointedly, finishing off a few connections.

Ian finished what he was working on and the Master closed the box.

'What are you doing with that thing?'

'There's been a space-time transference, Brigadier,' the Master explained, busily transferring some bits and pieces from the detector to the black device. 'If I can just program the results into the demat box here, it will be able to transfer us to wherever these infiltrators are coming from.'

'Us?' the Brigadier asked suspiciously.

'Someone will have to go across. As the best-qualified person, I –'

'As the best-qualified person,' the Brigadier echoed crisply, 'you will be needed here, where I can keep an eye on you.' He looked at Ian. 'Can you work that thingumajig, Chesterton?'

Ian had been trying to avoid being forced to have an opinion on anything right now. Still, he found himself nodding 'yes' to the Brigadier. Although the circuitry inside was horrendously complex and far in advance of current technology, the actual controls were quite simple.

'Good, then you can go.'

Ian was quite glad of that – he'd like to see where murderers had come from, and why.

'How many people can this thing carry?' continued the Brigadier.

The Master shrugged. 'Three. Certainly not more than four – assuming you want them to return safely.' He tapped the control panel on the box. 'I have programmed the demat box to transfer you to as close as possible to the source of the enemy's transference.'

'How close is close?' Ian asked.

'Within walking distance. A mile, perhaps two. When reactivated, it will return you to your point of origin, which in this case is right here.'

'Here's hoping you don't feel the need to take off,' Ian said.

The Brigadier regarded him for a moment, then turned. 'Captain Yates, you and Benton get kitted up.' He looked back to the Master. 'Will they need any special equipment or protective clothing?'

The Master shook his head. 'I shouldn't think so. These infiltrators are as human as you are and show no ill-effects.'

Ian was glad to hear that, but he doubted that his casual wear was likely to be suitable for wherever it was. 'I'd better change too,' he suggested.

Sergeant Benton had gone over to the airfield canteen to arrange some grub for the crew of the airborne HQ. He knew that the Brigadier hadn't eaten since breakfast and he was pretty well famished himself. If he was going to follow the infiltrators, he'd best be fed and fit.

Benton recalled the Doctor once – several times, actually – telling him that he had given Napoleon the quote about an army marching on its stomach. As a member of an army, Benton knew that you didn't have to be either a general or a Time Lord to know that.

Carol Bell was at a payphone in the corner of the mess, looking worried. Benton had known her for some time now and wondered what she was upset about. He hoped it was something he could help out with.

Bell was hanging up the phone as he reached her, and turned at the sound of his footsteps.

'Oh, it's you, Sergeant.'

'Yeah. . . You looked unhappy, Carol. Is something wrong?'

'No. It's just. . . My brother's had flu recently, and I've been checking up on him, you know.'

That, Benton could understand – he had a kid sister himself, and would do exactly the same for her.

'Well, I hope he gets better soon.'

'What about you? I thought you were on duty.'

'Well, I am, but nobody on the plane has eaten today, so I thought I'd see if I could rustle up some grub from the mess here before I leave.'

Bell patted her stomach. 'I am a bit peckish, now that you mention it. . .'

Ian had changed into borrowed combat fatigues and collected some instruments. He had a small Geiger counter slung over one shoulder. Yates had a pair of binoculars. The Brigadier unclipped his gun belt and handed it to Ian.

'You may need this, Chesterton.'

Ian took it reluctantly and put it on, saying, 'Let's hope not.'

The Master made some swift adjustments to the demat box's controls.

'Since it is particularly important that you return with information on Kyle's origin, I'm programming a timer to bring you back here automatically, three hours after you arrive. You can come back any time beforehand, of course.' He paused. 'Oh, and don't get separated – unless any of you feel like staying wherever it is.'

Ian took the demat box and looked at it uncertainly. There was only one main control, to activate the transference. Yates and Benton took hold of the attached handgrips and Ian pressed the button.

Immediately, all three men reeled. Lethbridge-Stewart had a fleeting image of them starting to collapse as they winked out of existence.

George Boucher felt much happier back among his own men. Something about the decadent population he had so recently dealt with in London made him yearn for those who knew how to take orders. Not that he had them enslaved, but the chain of command was a reassuring structure that gave him a common bond with the others. He took orders from above and passed them on down.

In a way it was like an extended family, with everyone in their place and no squabbling teenagers. Over there in the other place, though. . . How this 'DI' Boucher could have commanded respect and followed the wishes of his superiors was a mystery. It seemed he worked outside the chain of command, doing as he pleased, with no troops to be directed at all.

No wonder crime was so prevalent: the left hand had no idea what the right was doing. He chuckled at the thought that he should be worried about their laxness, since it made the job of his people that much easier.

Somehow he just knew that the majority of the population would be glad of the changes the Conclave had planned. Their lives would gently become so much more ordered. . .

He had been in the Security Force since leaving school, like his father before him. Covert infiltration wasn't really his forte, though; he was a marksman. These days, however, everybody had to take their turn at infiltration.

There were so few people left, they had little choice of what work to do. Here there was no one for a marksman to shoot, but there was always some sort of work for those trained by the Security Force. He was glad his father had put him on that training course, as it had guaranteed him a permanent position no matter what.

He enjoyed it too. Not the interrogations or executions – they were just a fact of life that went on regardless – but the challenge of puzzle-solving and the verbal duels with suspects or informers. These things were all very stimulating in a way that simple brutality could never be.

Boucher had made his way from the gateway along to the barrack block-houses. They weren't decorated at all, apart from the occasional warning sign or regimental insignia. He had been surprised at first. Usually the troops would add personal touches to any posting. He soon came to realise, however, that no one wanted to make any sign of associating this staging post with home, no matter how temporary. They had deliberately left the walls bare. Boucher couldn't blame them. He had scarcely considered Copernicus a home for the past few years and had been looking forward to returning here.

When he did return, he found it hadn't justified the anticipation. This would never be anyone's home again.

The guards had put Mrs Chesterton in an unoccupied billet while she was still unconscious. It wasn't as secure as Boucher would have liked, but they had no cells here. They didn't need them, since the only enemies able to exist here were the occasional unfortunates who were contaminated by one of the toxic pools and they were shot on sight. The last pool had been safely buried a few months ago, so even that shouldn't be a danger now.

The room in which the woman had been placed was empty. Boucher sighed. Why were the rank-and-file security troops so bloody useless? You'd think they could have spared somebody to watch over her.

Still, a total stranger with no idea where she was posed little danger to the staging post or the operation. And her civilian dress would be spotted easily. Boucher turned on his heel and stalked off down the corridor.

Ian's head spun more than it had after his stag night at Pages Bar and a wall of grit pressed against his face. There was a high-pitched howl of wind from somewhere above.

'Are you all right?' a pleasant voice he recognised asked. Captain Yates, wasn't it?

'I'm not sure, but if I'm standing up, this is a hell of a sandstorm.' He opened his eyes slowly, and winced. Something in the air stung them and he blinked furiously just to be able to keep them open. Looking directly upwards was like looking into churned muddy water. Reddish clouds billowed and dissolved, revealing only a dirty ochre haze through the gaps. The landscape around him was broken and undulating, with dunes of grit piled against black rock.

He rolled onto his back and took in deep breaths of sulphur-tasting air until the queasiness went away, although a part of him didn't want to fight it. The nausea seemed appropriate for the emptiness he felt inside.

Reasonably certain now that he wouldn't be sick, Ian sat up, then stood and checked the box that was attached to his belt. The device the Master had given him was now covered in coarse grit, but seemed otherwise unaffected. He just hoped none of the grit had got inside the casing; wherever this was, it didn't seem like a place he would want to be trapped.

Partly reassured, Ian looked around for Sergeant Benton. It was difficult to see much through the haze of floating dust, but he made the other man out after a moment. Both the UNIT men were stumbling around as uncertainly as he was and he went over to join them.

'Well, we're not in Kansas any more. Do you think the demat box is all right?'

Yates and Benton looked it over.

‘Seems OK, sir,’ Benton said dubiously.

‘Here too,’ Yates agreed. ‘I thought you were the expert, though.’

Ian repressed a wince; if only that were true. ‘This whole thing’s beyond me. The Doctor might have been able to make some sense of all this, but...’

‘Yeah,’ Benton said with feeling. ‘If the Doc was here –’

‘Well he isn’t, is he?’ Yates interrupted. He turned to Ian. ‘Do you have any idea where we are? Or when?’

Ian knew they were going to ask, and wished he had the answer. The ground looked like something from a natural history film about Iceland he had once seen. In truth, he hadn’t paid much attention to it; those nature documentaries were more Barbara’s sort of thing. She would be fascinated by this, he knew, and the thought stung. He hurriedly pretended there was still grit in his eyes. There were certainly no recognisable landmarks that Ian could see.

‘Maybe Iceland. Do either of you have a compass?’

Yates nodded, pulling out a sturdy pocket compass. Ian and Benton sidled round to look at it. The needle spun jerkily, pointing in seemingly random directions.

‘I’ve never seen that before,’ Yates murmured.

Ian knew that the other two men would be expecting something constructive from him and forced himself to concentrate. He had to remember that he was supposed to be the practical one.

‘Perhaps we’re near some sort of magnetic anomaly, like a lodestone. Maybe if we walk a short distance, we’ll get a better compass reading.’

Harry Sullivan flicked through the paperwork in the infirmary’s office, looking for any sign of what had happened to the body he had brought in. He was supposed to be off duty now, and had been looking forward to finishing his day off with an early night. He had only been in this posting for a couple of weeks, but already he wished he was back on the good old *Ark Royal*. Now that had been a fine way to spend his first year as a fully commissioned officer fresh out of Dartmouth Naval College. However, being in the services meant he had to go where his superiors felt he would be most useful and right now it seemed they wanted a fresh young doctor at Faslane. In any case, rumour had it that the *Ark Royal* would be mothballed sometime in the next few years, so Harry supposed that they wanted to staff it more with crewmen who were near to leaving the service.

Of course, this Scottish shore posting had had its good points: Esther Bland had wasted no time in coming down to show him the local sights when he had a day off. Thank God she hadn’t seen the mess of that poor chap by the

roadside, he reflected. Not the sort of thing a young lady should be looking at.

Really, though, he wanted to think about what this Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart had told him. It had been a pretty odd story, to say the least, but Harry wasn't accustomed to high-ranking officers making up such things. No, the Brigadier had certainly believed there was something fishy going on here.

In truth, Harry supposed that really he was accepting the story because... Well, because it was a change from the norm. And he'd always wanted to do a bit of the old James Bond act. Bond was a commander in RNVR, so Harry vaguely supposed that he might get a similar chance in future. Preferably without the diabolical masterminds hell-bent on world domination and torture, though; Harry preferred the more social aspects of Bond's lifestyle – vodka Martinis with beautiful agents... That must be better than rooting through old medical files.

Eventually he found it: a burial order signed by one Dr Williams. Now he was getting somewhere. He lifted the office copy of the base telephone directory, looking for Williams.

Curiouser and curiouser, he thought. He quite liked mysteries.

Ian, Yates and Benton had been walking for some time, but the compass never stopped its crazed spinning, no matter how far they went. Ian could no longer even convince himself that they were still on Earth, let alone try to tell the two soldiers that.

Yates suddenly stopped and cocked his head to one side.

'Do you hear that?'

Ian looked up instinctively as he listened out. 'What is it I'm listening – No, wait, I think I do hear something.'

A distant rumble had joined the keening wind. It wasn't mechanical like an engine, but a drawn-out buffeting of some large unpowered object swooping through the sky.

The clouds split apart and Ian felt his jaw drop in surprise as the source of the noise hurtled overhead. Far from being a Dalek saucer, or anything equally alien, he recognised the soft curves of the Americans' NASA space shuttle. The shuttle's landing gear and open wheel wells were a distinct pale contrast to the black silica fibre and silica carbide tiles of its lower hull. It was gone in a second, leaving only a wake of churned cloud.

'We must be somewhere in America,' Benton suggested. 'Some sort of desert test range; like Ranch 51, where they kept the Nedenah.'

Ian wasn't familiar with Ranch 51, but had made his own contacts during his year at NASA. 'Or Corman AFB, where they traded for Tzun technology back in the 1950s.'

‘Who?’ Yates asked.

‘More aliens. According to NASA, they were some sort of warrior race who modified themselves with other people’s DNA – including these Nedenah you mentioned.’ He frowned, finally remembering something that had been troubling him. ‘I was told your friend the Master had some dealings with them.’

Yates looked surprised to say the least. ‘I wouldn’t have expected NASA to be so free with that sort of information.’ There was definite hint of disapproval in his tone.

Ian smiled. ‘Well, I did have some previous experience with alien life, remember. They wanted some advice for their SETI projects.’

‘And what did you tell them?’

“‘Don’t.’”

‘Understood,’ Yates agreed with a smile. ‘Right then, I suggest we follow that shuttle to its landing site. If there are people here, that’s where they’ll be.’

Ian nodded. ‘If there are people here, they’re the ones who killed Barbara. I’d rather like to meet them.’

He stopped to take the Geiger counter from his shoulder and made a slow turn, taking a background radiation reading. The needle swung across the dial, and the crackling it made reminded him of frying meat – not a pleasant image in this context. He suppressed a shiver, telling himself not to worry; the levels were high but not so high as to be unsafe.

All he could think about, though, was the sickness and pain he had felt when he last encountered high radiation, in the Dalek city on Skaro. At least then the Doctor had come up with a suitable treatment, but he knew he had been dying then. Worse, he had watched Barbara and seen that she was dying too.

That had been before he knew he loved her, but even then watching and being unable to help hurt him more than the actual damage to his own cells. He occasionally wondered at what point she had noticed that he’d fallen for her. He was fairly certain it was before he realised it himself, and it was later still before he knew she felt the same way. Women seemed more attuned to other people’s feelings in that regard.

‘Well?’ Yates asked, looking concerned.

Ian couldn’t blame him. ‘The background radiation here is about ten times what’s normal for Earth.’

‘Is it dangerous?’

‘It’s radiation – of course it’s dangerous.’ Ian calmed himself. ‘Well, not in the way you mean, no. Aberdeen has a higher than usual radiation count. But it is odd, though, and fits in with the readings I got from that crashed plane.’

‘You mean the plane had been here?’ Benton asked.

'That's right, though don't ask me how.'

Yates nodded. 'Perhaps the Master can answer that when we get back.'

Yates led the way onwards, up to a ridge of jagged basalt. On reaching the top, he dropped to the ground, gesturing for Benton and Ian to do the same. They did, wriggling forward on their stomachs.

As he peered over the top, Ian wondered what had so surprised Yates, and peered over the top. The sight that met his eyes stunned him.

There was a shallow valley below the ridge. Through the haze, Ian could make out a smoothed runway that took up most of the length of the valley. Embankments built up around the edges gave the impression of a newly constructed airfield. He thought it looked like something out of an old John Wayne war movie about the Seabees. On the far side, wide concrete dishes were set into the valley floor. Metal structures, like the skeletons of high-rise buildings, stretched upwards from these basins. Launch pads, Ian realised; they were exactly like the NASA launch towers in Florida.

As they watched, a small group of aircraft tractors and emergency rescue vehicles were converging on the now-silent space shuttle. There was no sign of anything wrong, so Ian assumed this was merely a safety precaution.

'That's odd,' Yates murmured. He was observing the proceedings through a pair of binoculars.

'What?' Ian asked.

'The markings on it.' Yates handed Ian the binoculars. 'The prototype shuttle has an American flag on it, doesn't it?'

'Yes, of course it does.'

Ian quickly adjusted the binoculars and looked the shuttle over. Yates was right; in place of the Stars and Stripes on the shuttle's sides and port wing, there was a quite different symbol. It was an upward-pointing arrow, with two smaller arrows emerging from the sides, not unlike the cruciform black Luftwaffe insignia during the war.

'It's definitely not the Enterprise, but I can't see the name on it.'

Where the NASA shuttle's sides bore the words 'United States Of America,' this one simply said 'Conclave'. Ian had no idea what that was supposed to refer to, but realised they couldn't possibly be in America anyway. He scanned the surrounding area with the binoculars and soon paused.

Low blockhouses and bunkers were set into the slopes on both sides of the valley. It was a whole village of prefabricated buildings, linked to each other by long covered corridors and all huddled round a central concrete building the size of several aircraft hangars. If it weren't for the materials used, Ian might almost have thought it was like a medieval town.

‘Take a look at this,’ he said, handing the binoculars back to Yates. ‘What do you think?’

Yates examined the village silently for a few moments.

‘Some kind of forward base? Barracks and stores surrounding a central headquarters?’

He waved Ian and Benton back, as a pair of soldiers came out of a low blockhouse and squinted up at the launch tower. Both soldiers carried Kalashnikov AK-47s and wore armbands with the same arrowhead symbol that was painted on the sides of the shuttles.

‘That’s your answer, then,’ Ian whispered. ‘We must be somewhere in Russia.’

Yates shook his head. ‘Those aren’t the right shade for Russian uniforms and the webbing looks more like Second World War German.’

‘I’ll take your word for that.’

‘Hey!’

The sudden cry came from somewhere off to their left. Ian looked round, startled, and saw more soldiers appearing from a rough path. Kalashnikov rounds clattered across the rocks without any further warning.

‘Run,’ Yates commanded, firing back with his automatic, forcing the soldiers to scatter.

Ian was already scrambling back down the ridge, wincing at the amount of tell-tale dust that was being kicked up. Yates and Benton followed him, as a siren began to wail somewhere in the prefab complex.

The trio hurled themselves down the slope, then rolled to their feet and made for some nearby boulders which would offer some cover. But as they ran, the demat box started to emit a sudden beeping. The timing couldn’t have been worse, reflected Ian. This was going to make things easy for their pursuers.

Now he had the unenviable choice of either stopping for the transference and being shot or running on and risking not getting transferred back.

There was, of course, no choice at all.

Benton had halted at the foot of a ridge, allowing Ian and Yates to grab the demat box’s handles.

Two guards breasted the ridge and Ian hoped that his yell for the demat box to operate was only in his mind. The guards fired, and everything went black.

CHAPTER 15

Even with 'Ring Of Fire' playing on the radio, the Master was growing rapidly annoyed with the Brigadier's intransigence. He had not given himself up just to take over the Doctor's position as a doormat.

'I should have gone.'

'And not come back?' the Brigadier suggested. 'For all I know you could easily be behind this whole scheme.'

'Brigadier,' the Master said with exaggerated patience, 'if I wanted to escape, you would never have seen me again after I left Aylesbury.' He drew on his cigar. 'As you point out, you have no way of knowing where that transference leads to, and yet you blindly send three of your own men into who knows what!'

'As you were so keen to go, it can hardly be that dangerous,' the Brigadier reminded him.

'True. . . Unless my apparent eagerness was a double-bluff, of course. Or do you mean to say that you're foolish enough to trust me?'

The Brigadier's moustache quivered. 'Everyone does some foolish things in his time. I expect I won't be an exception.'

The Master quite liked that. The Brigadier was inferior, of course, but a worthy and honourable adversary all the same.

'Besides,' Lethbridge-Stewart went on, 'you still need something from me. I'll admit I'm not entirely sure what it is, but you can't risk losing it, can you?'

The Master was momentarily thrown. Was it possible that the Brigadier had guessed the truth? 'I have my reasons, if that's what you mean. Believe me, I'm not staying just for the company.'

Abruptly, before the Brigadier could give his inevitable retort, a very dusty and grimy Chesterton, Yates, and Benton materialised at the rear of the compartment. The trio promptly collapsed, and the Master leapt forward and deftly caught the demat box before it hit the ramp; if it broke, he might never get his TARDIS back. He gave the device a quick check while the Brigadier and Corporal Bell called for help for the three men.

Barbara tried venturing outside when she found a door that led out of the building, but hastily returned inside; the air was filled with windblown grit that stung her eyes, and tasted of warm sand. She had eventually found her

way to the uppermost floor in the building. Though it was at the top of the stairwells, and there were no further stairs that she could find, the top floor seemed essentially to be at ground level. Surprisingly small windows were set in deep recesses in the walls, with thick glass separating the inside of the building from the dust storms and shattered rock outside.

The landscape looked like it could be terrestrial – perhaps Iceland, or one of the stony South American deserts – but the sky told a different story. There surely could never be a sky full of dust and grit like that on Earth. Even in the sandstorm she had once faced in the Gobi desert, the blown dust was low-level, not mixed in with the highest clouds.

She knew from her history books that a volcanic eruption on the scale of Krakatoa could produce something of an effect like this, but surely scientists would have detected warning tremors from a volcano about to blow – and that would have been on the news.

There were a pair of doors at the far end of the hallway, which had glass panels she could look through. Monochrome TV monitor screens were arrayed on consoles all around, and at the centre, was a large colour projection screen of the sort Barbara had seen in newscasts from Cape Kennedy. In fact the room was very reminiscent of NASA's ground control, though the rows of workstations were slightly curved to leave a circular space in the middle. An extrusion like a glass crow's nest was mounted about the central area, connected to a higher gallery by a catwalk that passed overhead. She could just about make out more TV monitors clustered inside the glass structure, and it seemed reasonable to assume that it was a position from which the technicians' superior could keep an eye on the most important displays.

Although it was clear to her that the answers to many of her questions lay inside, she knew she daren't go in. The consoles were all manned by people in uniform and there was nowhere to hide. She edged away from the door. At least she could get out of this building, make herself harder to find.

Opposite the stairs was an enclosed bridge leading to another section. From what she could see through the window, it was not unlike some kind of power station. A little curious as well as cautious and afraid, she hurried across the bridge, thanking God she didn't meet anyone coming the other way. This was something that had puzzled her since she woke up here: there seemed to be very few people about to operate such a large complex. Where was everybody?

Williams, the youthful sandy-haired aide who had chauffeured Boucher, was marking positions on an Ordnance survey map atop the chart table, while Marianne Kyle collated the day's reports from her people.

Marianne liked certainties in life; she dreamed that someday there might be

some she could rely on, even if she had to create those certainties herself. The old saying held that there were only death and taxes, which sometimes made her laugh and sometimes made her cry. At home, the economy was hardly an issue. There was only the certainty of death.

The prospect of being able to start again here was a better one. This was a relatively prosperous place which held the promise of a very comfortable life for her. She wondered what her counterpart here would have done for a living, had she existed. A successful military and political leader like herself? If not... perhaps something in the media. A Hollywood producer? Marianne quite liked that idea. It wasn't too far removed from constructing propaganda statements, and she knew she'd be ruthless enough to reach the very top in whatever she undertook.

But right now she had other concerns. Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart himself visiting the base was the most disturbing event that Kyle could recall happening since I-Day itself. At first she had thought that Boucher might have been followed, but surely in that case Lethbridge-Stewart would have come in with guns blazing. More likely the original Boucher had called in to report where he was going, and UNIT were checking on his movements. It would probably be wise now to supply some sort of false trail that would lead them elsewhere.

Had Magister accompanied them? Perhaps she could still win him over. With Barron dead, there wasn't much chance of her plans being so foolishly altered again, and it should be possible to convince Magister that she had not betrayed him. She sneered involuntarily at the thought of Barron; he had been just the sort of self-obsessed fool that her father and husband had been. He'd actually believed he'd meant something to her. She knew the truth had hurt him – she had been hurt that way herself – but it didn't matter.

Someone else being hurt never mattered.

Barbara had had to dodge guards and technicians a little more often when she reached the other building – which the warning signs dotted around clearly announced was a nuclear power station.

The second she saw the first radiation symbol she had wanted to leave, but darkly decided that this whole complex was so close it wouldn't make any difference. In any case, she tried to tell herself, here they would try to keep the radiation in, not release it like on Skaro.

She slipped between the thickest doors, and found herself in a cluttered circular room as wide and high as a gasometer. Computer banks lined the walls, cramped with dials and meters, and wide consoles covered in tiny switches were arrayed below them. Through the metal grate floor, Barbara could see that cables as thick as the trunks of small trees hung down from the circular catwalk above and into a pool below. The water made it difficult to see, but

the cables seemed to be securely fastened into sockets on the top of a smooth concrete disc even further down.

Slim pillars suspended the circular catwalk, and steep metal stairs led up to it. Curious in spite of her common sense, she ascended. The catwalk was lined with copper, and held a large metal globe in the centre. It looked rather like a large diving bell, with thick windows and a door set into the side.

Barbara peered through one of the windows, shading it with her hand to stop reflections getting in the way. The interior was also cluttered with electronic apparatus, but in the centre there was something she could scarcely believe.

She had to know for certain that her eyes weren't playing tricks on her, and so she pulled open the door and went inside.

The central console from the TARDIS was spread out in front of her.

She was momentarily stunned. Could the Doctor be involved? That was too horrifying to think about. He had been irascible, devious at times, but she couldn't believe he was capable of working with these people.

Then she remembered what the Brigadier had told her, that the Master also had a TARDIS, and that others did too. She looked around, her fears about the Doctor's involvement receding slightly. This was a TARDIS control column, but the globe was not a TARDIS. It wasn't bigger inside than out, nor did it have the indented walls or the ever-present hum of power.

She came to the conclusion that this console must be a discrete unit, separated from whichever TARDIS it had belonged to in some way. But why?

'Your curiosity does you credit, Mrs Chesterton,' a very cultured voice said from the other side of the console. 'It's the best way to learn, but round here that can prove inconvenient.' She looked up and saw Boucher watching her, a pair of soldiers by his side.

Boucher had totally abandoned his attempt at his counterpart's working-class accent, and was now wearing a uniform that reminded her uncomfortably of the Nazi brownshirts she had seen in newsreels as a child.

'Who are you really?'

'Company-Leader Boucher, of the Republican Security Police. You won't have heard of us, of course.'

'Russia isn't really my strong-point.'

Boucher looked puzzled for a moment. 'Oh, of course – no one has told you where you are yet. I'm afraid this isn't Russia.'

'Where then?'

'We're in what used to be the Gareloch.'

Barbara didn't believe a word of it. The charred rocks outside bore no similarity whatsoever to the Scottish countryside she knew from so many childhood holidays.

‘It doesn’t look much like Scotland to me. Frankly, it doesn’t look like anywhere on Earth.’

Boucher laughed, which wasn’t at all the reaction she had hoped for.

‘We are on Earth – just not your Earth.’

‘What?’

There was a gleam in Boucher’s eye which suggested he was enjoying surprising her.

‘You’ve made a rather unusual journey, I’m afraid. This is Earth, but in a parallel space-time continuum to the Earth you know.’

Barbara was baffled for a moment, but then her mind cleared. The TARDIS had once jumped a time-track, allowing herself, Ian, Vicki and the Doctor to see alternate versions of themselves. And here was an alternate version of Boucher, on an alternate Earth. . . Now she understood! But should she let them know that? One thing she had learned in her travels was that people were more likely to spare ignorant enemies than intelligent ones.

‘I’m not quite sure what you mean,’ she said finally.

‘I’m not surprised,’ Boucher shrugged. ‘To be honest, I get a headache just trying to think about it.’

‘So here we are,’ Yates said, concluding his story.

Lethbridge-Stewart hadn’t understood half of it, of course, but it was clear that Yates, Benton and Ian had indeed been to some sort of enemy base.

‘It seems quite clear to me,’ the Master announced. ‘There was no change in your spatial or temporal co-ordinates, yet you travelled elsewhere.’

‘How is that possible?’ Ian asked.

‘A parallel space-time continuum,’ the Master said simply, ‘occupying the same space-time co-ordinates as this Earth, but in a different dimension. Sideways in time, if you like, rather than forward or back.’

Benton scratched his head. ‘You mean some sort of mirror universe, like in that *Star Trek* episode when Spock had a beard?’

The Master sighed. ‘Succintly put, Mr Benton.’

Suddenly, Lethbridge-Stewart snapped his fingers.

‘Just a moment. I’m sure the Doctor said something about “parallel space-time” before. . .’ It was a few years ago, before the Master first started causing trouble. ‘Of course! When he went missing from Eastchester!’

‘The Inferno project,’ Benton said slowly. ‘I remember that.’

‘Yes. . .’ It was all becoming clearer in the Brigadier’s mind now. This would show the Master that he wasn’t quite past it yet. ‘He, the TARDIS, and Bessie all disappeared during some experiment. A power surge from the nuclear reactor caused it. When he came back, he said he’d been sideways in time,

to a parallel Earth.' He shook his head as the end of the story surfaced in his mind. 'But he also said that world was destroyed.'

The Master pursed his lips. 'Dresden was destroyed by fire, yet some survived in the ruins. Perhaps there are an infinite number of possible Earths.'

'All different. . .' mused Benton.

'Some vastly so,' agreed the Master. 'Perhaps there is an Earth where the dinosaurs were never wiped out by the K/T impact.'

'The what?' Ian interrupted, but the Master continued regardless.

'And some that differ only slightly from your own. Perhaps there is a world, Brigadier, where you have left UNIT, and I am no longer in your charge!'

'Then they could be from anywhere,' the Brigadier murmured, ignoring him. 'Any one of these wretched other Earths.'

The Master shook his head. 'D'you think so? The world Chesterton and the others describe would be consistent with the aftermath of massive volcanic and tectonic activity. There is also the question of why someone from one parallel Earth should visit our Earth. I imagine the answer is quite simply that their attention has been attracted here by the Doctor's visit to their world. Presumably the survivors traced his journey back here, just as we have tracked them.'

'How is that possible?' Ian asked. 'Surely their technology would be no more advanced than ours.'

'Who knows, Mr Chesterton? But I intend to find out.'

'So do I,' Lethbridge-Stewart said pointedly. He looked along the cabin to where Corporal Bell was listening for any word from HQ on the general situation. 'Corporal Bell, get on to HQ and have them send up the Doctor's report on the Inferno project.'

'Yes, sir.'

Bell sounded a little strained. Lack of sleep must be getting to her, he supposed.

CHAPTER 16

Harry Sullivan had joined the Navy expecting a bit of adventure and comradeship. Strong friendships were forged through shared hardship, and though he wasn't altogether keen on the hardship part, it did seem like a natural progression for someone who'd made his schoolfriends on the rugby field.

He certainly hadn't expected to be waiting around in the morgue after dark for someone to come and erase the last record of Boucher's death. It wasn't that he was unnerved by the eerie surroundings – it was just that he had always had the distinct feeling that man was not meant to be awake at such an ungodly hour.

Harry was pretty sure someone would come; the so-called Doctor Williams had done too thorough a job to leave this loose end hanging. Even if the chap was a blackguard, he was still a naval blackguard, so he would have to complete the job. Then Harry could prise some answers out of him.

That part was worrying him the most – how would he set about getting the truth? He could hardly go around jabbing him with scopolamine or sodium pentothal, after all. Still, perhaps he wouldn't need to. Perhaps Williams would co-operate once he knew that the game was up.

There was a gentle scraping at the door. Harry had been tempted to leave it unlocked – after all, who would break into a morgue? – but leaving an official door unlocked might alert his quarry that something was up. Harry pressed himself into the wall behind the large metal cupboard that held the autopsy tools and chemicals as the door slowly opened.

For a moment nothing happened. Harry began to worry that his quarry had smelled a rat and left, but then there was a soft footfall and a pen-torch's tiny spot of light played across the desk. Someone with his back to Harry began rifling through the papers.

Harry silently came out from behind the cupboard and switched on the light.

'All right, I think you'd better leave that alone.'

A youngish sailor in a Chief's uniform spun round. He had sandy hair, and chiselled features that were set in grim determination.

For a moment Harry thought that the man was going to give himself up, but then the young sailor's eyes narrowed. He lashed out with one foot, slamming Harry back against the metal cupboard with a force that would have done

justice to Bruce Lee.

Harry was affronted as much as injured; that was hardly a sporting move! Recovering, he sent the man reeling with a right uppercut – strictly Queensbury, of course – and darted outside. If he could just find some ratings on patrol, he'd soon see to this Williams person.

Two armed ratings were already approaching along the road from the welding workshop, and Harry gestured behind him.

'Thank God you two are here. There's a madman loose in –'

'Kill him!' a voice shouted from the morgue doorway.

Harry didn't have to look round to work out who was calling, but he stood wide-mouthed in surprise when the ratings aimed their guns straight at him.

Harry dived sideways as they fired and the shots went somewhere over his head. He knew he should be trying to work out why the ratings were doing this or considering the implications if all the base's security was involved. Perhaps that was something he could concentrate on while he ran for his life.

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart had always prided himself on running a tight ship, so Corporal Bell's news was doubly unwelcome.

'What do you mean, it's gone?'

Bell nodded. 'That's what they report. I'm sorry sir... If you like, I could go back down to HQ and check for myself.'

'No, we may not have the time for that.'

It was at moments like this he wished he had taken that posting to Belfast instead. There, the opposition couldn't hop between worlds willy-nilly.

They were standing in the middle of the command cabin aboard the airborne HQ. The rest of the signalmen were scrutinising their panels, but the Master and Ian were listening intently to the exchange.

'That file could help us enormously,' Lethbridge-Stewart reiterated. 'If this is the result of someone infiltrating UNIT, as this fake Boucher did, we're being systematically denied important information.'

'Most inconvenient,' the Master agreed, 'but not necessarily what the thief had in mind.'

'How do you mean?'

The Master straightened in his seat, un-steeping his fingers. 'We need to know why the file was stolen. If it was simply to prevent us from exploiting the information therein, then it has probably been destroyed. However, the enemy may have taken it because they need something that the file can offer.'

'In which case,' nodded the Brigadier, 'we might be able to track it down and take it back.'

* * *

Harry Sullivan reached the main gate and halted uncertainly. The guards there were also armed, but were they in with the others? There was no way round them, so he decided to test the water.

‘Hey! Help!’ he yelled.

‘What’s happening?’ one of them asked.

Harry was relieved that they didn’t start shooting.

‘Two of your chums are trying to kill me. They’re in with a man who was trying to cover up a death.’

The guards exchanged baffled looks, and Harry couldn’t blame them – it was an odd occurrence to say the least. He turned at the sound of running footsteps, and saw the two murderous ratings turn the corner, guns raised.

‘You there!’ the first guard shouted.

The two ratings exchanged looks of their own, then bolted back round the corner.

‘You two stay with him,’ the guard barked, indicating Harry. ‘The rest of you come with me.’

They ran off in pursuit of the two ratings. Harry looked suspiciously the remaining two guards. If they had gone bad too they could easily murder him now and think up an excuse before the others came back. . .

‘Do you have a telephone?’ he asked one of them.

‘In the gatehouse,’ the guard replied, casually. ‘Help yourself.’

Harry beamed at the man. ‘I say, thanks.’

Now, he thought, would be a really good time to call the Brigadier. If ratings trying to kill an officer wasn’t an unusual occurrence, he didn’t know what was.

Lethbridge-Stewart hung up the R/T handset and nodded decisively. Now that Sullivan had confirmed where the enemy were – or a faction of the enemy at least – he could take the fight to them.

‘I’ll get support from the marines, and instigate a full security sweep of Faslane. Anyone who can’t pass muster will be placed under arrest –’

The Master started clapping his hands slowly, forcing the Brigadier to break off and shoot a murderous look at him.

‘Congratulations, Brigadier. You’ve thought of the one strategy that will prove to the enemy that we are on to them, and will force them to set their plans in motion.’ He stood up. ‘But if that is your decision, I’ll be on my way.’

‘You’ll do no such thing! Don’t tell me you’ve got a better idea?’

The Master turned, cocking his head to one side. ‘More of a concern, perhaps. Just how do you plan to be able to tell the infiltrators from the innocents? Assuming that you still haven’t acquired the sense to simply sterilise the base by treating everyone as the enemy, many of them will pass muster.

They have the same genetic codes as any other human, and many of them may be direct counterparts of people from this world. They will have the same fingerprints, even friends and family who don't realise that the original has been replaced... So how are you going to tell who's who?

The Brigadier sat back stiffly. 'I had hoped that perhaps you might be able to come up with a way to make that determination. I'm sure the Doctor could.'

The Master snorted. 'Oh, it's simple enough to do.' He held up a small Petri dish filled with dust and grit. 'This material was brought back from the parallel Earth in your mens' clothing.'

'So?' The Brigadier couldn't see what the state of the laundry had to do with anything.

'I think I understand,' Ian said. 'The parallel Earth's background radiation is higher. If we could take readings from everyone on the base...'

'Unfortunately, even the most harmless of leaks from the the nuclear reactors or warheads aboard the submarines could give false readings,' the Master interrupted, sharply. 'However, this material's radiation signature will be slightly out of phase with the normal reading for the same type of emissions in this world. Once we know the scale of the phase shift, we can use that as a basis for detecting the enemy whether they display excess radiation or not.'

The Master smiled with false apology. 'Sad to say, Brigadier, the necessary equipment doesn't exist on Earth, and nor does the technology to build it.'

'What about your TARDIS? Surely you must have equipment there?'

The Master hesitated. 'I hardly think I can allow you –'

'You can't, can you?' Ian said slowly.

Both men looked at him, surprised that he'd spoken.

'What's that you say, Chesterton?' the Brigadier asked.

'I was wondering. If the Master has a TARDIS, why didn't he just escape in it? I'm sure he could slip away from these enemies of ours quite easily. So why hasn't he?'

The Master tutted. 'Because there are rules and order to these things. First, they must be taught a lesson.'

'Maybe so... But then why not use equipment from your TARDIS? There's only one logical answer I can come up with – you haven't got one.'

The Brigadier shook his head.

'Of course he has, it's –' He broke off, frowning. 'Or at least he had.' He turned back to face the Master. 'They've stolen it, haven't they? That's why you're willing to help us – because you want my men to help get your TARDIS back for you!'

The Master chuckled slightly. 'What do you want me to say, Brigadier, "it's a fair cop"? I rather think of it as a fair trade.'

'Hardly. You're telling us now you have nothing to offer.'

‘Not at all!’ The Master folded his hands behind his back. ‘I can offer you some advice. Taking the war to the enemy is a reasonable course, but you must think in larger terms.’

‘Must I?’

‘But of course. The source of these infiltrators is the parallel Earth. They don’t have anything like our phase-shift devices, so the equipment they use must be fixed in their dimension.’

The Brigadier suddenly realised what he was driving at.

‘If we can destroy that equipment, they won’t be able to travel here.’

Benton caught a sign of movement out of the corner of his eye. It was Carol Bell, descending the ramp. He saw her counting out some coins in her hand as she hurried across the tarmac.

He wondered what she was doing. The airfield’s little NAAFI was closed at this hour, and she’d hardly be calling her brother this late either. Even so, as he followed her out, he could see that she was indeed heading for the little phone box by the mess.

Benton wasn’t nosy by nature, but he did like to think of himself as being pretty alert. Carol was behaving a little oddly of late, and with all this fuss about people not being who they seemed... He thought it was better to be safe than sorry.

Carol had already dialled by the time he reached her. There was no light to cast his shadow, but he felt very self-conscious. He hoped he wouldn’t scare her too much – he didn’t want her to think he was some sort of pervert creeping around.

‘Hello?’ she said into the receiver. ‘You... you wanted to know if there were any developments?’ There was a long pause. ‘Yes, he called the Brigadier. They’re going to send someone in to run a search for you –’

Benton yanked the door open, and slapped his hand down, cutting off the connection.

Carol yelped in fright, which made Benton feel guilty, but then took a shaky breath. ‘Sergeant... I didn’t realise it was you –’

‘No, I don’t suppose you did.’ Benton shook his head sadly. ‘I think you’d better come back with me, Carol.’

‘John, I –’ Her eyes were filling with tears now, but there was also a hint of relief in her expression, as if she were glad to be caught. Benton wished someone else had seen her go, wished someone else had to do this in his place.

‘Now, Corporal.’

Barbara was in a constant state of tension as Boucher escorted her through the complex. If he was some kind of secret policeman, who could tell what

interrogation techniques he might use. Was he taking her to be beaten, or to be blasted by high pressure hoses, or –

She shivered, trying to rein in her mind as it galloped away with all the horrors of the past's tyrants. By keeping him talking, perhaps she could judge his mood. Surely he must have something in common with his counterpart back on her world? Perhaps she could make some sort of connection. . .

'What happened to the Earth? A nuclear war?'

Boucher shook his head, letting out a long breath.

A new energy source. One of the British Republic's top scientists, Professor Stahlmann, discovered a highly energised form of gas trapped under high pressure deep underground. A labour complex was set up to drill for it at Eastchester. Unfortunately, the pressures were too much.' His eyes were distant. 'The Inferno Project cracked the Earth's crust like an eggshell.'

'There was a volcano?'

Barbara recalled something similar happening at the Daleks' huge mining area in Bedfordshire. They too had attempted to penetrate through to the Earth's core, with disastrous results.

'More than that.'

Boucher stopped, in the middle of a corridor that was lined with coolant pipes and inspection valves.

'The gas pockets ruptured. Great Britain was destroyed within hours, Europe by the following day. The explosive decompression of the gas pockets sent shockwaves strong enough to shift faults all around the world. Further eruptions around the Ring of Fire took care of the rest of the world within thirty six hours after that.'

Barbara found herself nodding politely. She didn't know what else she could do as Boucher continued.

'Luckily most of the Conclave managed to get to Copernicus base with their staffs. The British leader was killed in the destruction, of course. Marianne Kyle, Commander of the Republican Security Force, was the most senior survivor of his administration, and got an instant promotion to the Conclave when she reached Copernicus. We all lost our families, our friends. . . Everything.' He looked hard at her. 'Can you blame us for wanting a new home?'

Barbara shook her head. 'But why the crimes and murders? Surely you could just have –'

'– Turned up out of the blue, with no ID? Yeah, right. Besides, the remaining population here are the cream of the planet; the strongest leaders, the most brilliant scientists, the most worthy soldiers. . . Can you imagine telling a president that he's homeless and should become a roadsweeper?' He shook his head. 'No, they all want to keep their rank and position, but in your world. So, those who already occupy those positions have to go.'

‘You sound as if you don’t approve.’

Boucher glanced nervously upwards, and she suddenly knew he was afraid of being monitored.

‘My job is to provide security for them, and that’s what I do. No more, and no less.’ His face clouded. ‘Come, you have an appointment in the infirmary.’

Barbara was suddenly chilled. ‘What for?’

‘You’ve been wandering lost around a nuclear power station. I think you’d best be checked over.’

‘How dangerous is it?’

‘That depends where you’ve been.’

How could she tell him about Skaro? Even in her own world, nobody in this century had heard of the Daleks.

‘I’ve been to many places...’

After calling the off-duty Mike Yates to report back to the airborne HQ, Lethbridge-Stewart listened with growing horror to Corporal Bell’s words. People had tried to insinuate themselves into UNIT before, but the idea that someone who had been on his staff all along could turn against him... It was a personal insult.

Bell tried to stop the tears coming – she was a responsible adult and a soldier, after all – but couldn’t.

‘They’ve got my brother,’ she managed to say. ‘If I didn’t help them, they said they’d kill him.’

‘And did that include stealing the Doctor’s report on the Inferno project?’ He tried to keep the anger out of his voice. She had obviously not volunteered to be a traitor, but he expected greater strength from his staff.

Bell nodded. ‘They wanted to know how the Doctor reached and left their world.’

Lethbridge-Stewart saw a sudden glimmer of hope. Bell might have made an error of judgement, but she wasn’t stupid.

‘Did you take a look at the file – at what it said?’

‘Yes,’ she nodded, hastily wiping the tears from her eyes. ‘The Doctor said he thought it was a power surge from the nuclear reactor that caused the TARDIS to go sideways in time.’

Ian spoke up. ‘Then that was a nuclear plant we saw. It must be the source of their travel.’

‘Now, if we can destroy or disable it...’ the Master added.

‘Surely they’d build another?’

‘That depends, Mr Chesterton. Perhaps we can do something about that too.’

'Perhaps we can,' interjected the Brigadier sharply, before turning to Captain Yates. 'I've squared things with the naval authorities. Take a platoon and meet up with Surgeon-Lieutenant Sullivan.'

'Right sir. Where will you be?'

'In this other world, with another platoon.'

The demat box can only transfer up to three people,' the Master reminded him. He had taken the box from its recharging socket. 'But as it happens, I think it only needs one.'

He kicked a chair towards Yates and Benton, and hit the activation button.

Lethbridge-Stewart rushed towards the Master, cursing himself for not being more alert to treachery now they knew the Time Lord's TARDIS was waiting on the other side of the veil.

Chesterton was also moving, but the Master was already starting to fade as the Brigadier slammed into him. Chesterton's hand reached past him for one of the box's grips, and Lethbridge-Stewart could feel his own arm pressed against the box.

Then everything spun into blackness.

CHAPTER 17

The metallic globe materialised in its copper cradle at the nuclear plant and Marianne Kyle emerged, as unconcerned as if she were stepping off a bus.

The Earth – her real Earth – no longer felt like home. It had been desiccated, stripped to the bone. It reminded her of those animal skulls lying among the sand dunes in desert films. She dreamed of it that way sometimes; the Earth as a dull stone ball, being picked clean and bleached by the elements. Soon it would be the same lifeless skull that the Moon was.

When her dreams merged, animal fur was worn away from the Earth. She had used to collect teddy bears as a child and now they too were gone, turned to ashes and smoke along with the people who had bought and sold them. Along with everyone.

Sandobal had once told her that he thought she was more concerned with hitting back at those who had disappointed her in the past than with truly attempting to further the aims of the Conclave. Perhaps he was right, but that didn't lessen her achievements. She wasn't certain that he had meant it as a criticism anyway. Yu would have meant it that way, but Sandobal was a little more respectful than the Chancellor of the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. He was attracted to her, of course, and she found it rather sweet. If she hadn't had her eye on Magister, who knows what she might have done?

At least she could look back on what she'd achieved on the Conclave with pride. She imagined how humiliated Boucher must be at having had his cover blown so quickly. If something like that had happened earlier in the operation, when there was more threat to the people who travelled to the other Earth, she might have had him killed. As it was, it really made little difference.

She looked forward to questioning the woman he had brought home, though. Someone who had been working closely with UNIT would be able to give them an insight into what they could expect the Brigadier to do next. This was especially important now that Corporal Bell had obviously been caught. No doubt the authorities would execute her for – No, they wouldn't, would they? It was difficult, sometimes, to remember how different things were over there.

She wondered whether it would be better to take advantage of that laxness when she took up permanent residence or change it to something more fitting. Either way, it would be an intriguing – and profitable – challenge.

* * *

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart tried not to breathe in the acrid air, until he realised that the whole atmosphere around here was equally hot and thick. Chesterton sat up groggily a couple of yards away.

'Are you all right?'

'I'm not injured, if that's what you mean. The Master?'

Lethbridge-Stewart looked around briefly, just to confirm what he already knew in his gut.

'Gone. And he's taken the demat box with him. I wonder why? He won't need it if he's found his TARDIS.'

'To stop us getting home?'

The Brigadier couldn't blame Chesterton for thinking that way, but he prided himself on a more pragmatic mind.

'He could have just smashed it, and not bothered carrying it away. No... either he still needs it, or isn't entirely sure that he can recover his TARDIS.'

He patted himself down, wishing he was armed. He hadn't had time to grab a gun.

'Do you remember the way to this power station place from here?'

'I think so,' Ian said doubtfully. 'But what good can we do there?'

'I've no idea,' Lethbridge-Stewart admitted. 'But without the Master and the demat box, it's our only chance of getting home. I'm no expert, but the air here doesn't taste too healthy.'

It was, in fact, like trying to breathe in oven cleaner. Dragging an unarmed schoolteacher into hostile territory with no equipment at all was not what the Brigadier considered a reliable strategy. Privately he doubted they would get very far, but he was not going to give up without trying his damndest.

Mike Yates quite liked trying to be a diplomat, but hated the difficulties it caused. At the moment, he was explaining to Commodore Bennetts, CO of Faslane, why UNIT troops should be allowed to conduct a search of the base. Harry Sullivan was with him, acting as a go-between, though his enthusiasm was more notable than his experience with such matters.

'It's certainly an unprecedented situation,' Bennetts was saying. 'Our own security details are trained specifically for shore installation work. They are the ones who should conduct any necessary searches.'

'I understand that, sir,' Mike said, hoping to be a model of compromise and politeness. 'Lieutenant Sullivan here says that two of those security men tried to kill him last night.'

Bennetts turned to Harry, who suddenly looked as if he'd rather be elsewhere.

'Is that correct, Sullivan?'

‘I’m afraid it is, sir. I was waiting in the morgue, to catch a thief who was interfering with paperwork. He attacked me, and when I ran out to find two ratings, the thief told them to shoot, which they did.’

Bennetts puffed on his pipe for a moment. ‘Would you recognise these ratings again?’

‘No,’ Harry admitted, ‘but I’d recognise the thief again.’

Bennetts nodded and Mike fervently hoped he was about to agree.

‘All right. Since your UNIT people are supposed to be some kind of anti-terrorist squad, I’ll allow it. It can’t do any harm, anyway.’

Mike was constantly surprised by how many people out of the loop thought UNIT was an anti-terrorist team. They’d hardly believe the truth, though, and Mike had no intention of letting the Commodore think he was some sort of nutcase.

‘Thank you, sir,’ Mike grinned. ‘Oh, can I borrow Lieutenant Sullivan? If he can identify one of the men we’re looking for. . .’

‘Absolutely. I’ll see that you get all the co-operation you need.’

The fact that the two humans had accompanied his transference had given the Master pause for thought. On the one hand, they were superfluous if he could get his TARDIS back, but on the other, they might also be useful if anything went awry. It was always wise to have a contingency plan in mind. What was it they said on this planet – worry was the due paid to disaster before it happened? He preferred to think of it as taking out insurance. In this case, Chesterton and the Brigadier would be his premium. He may as well use them if they were here anyway.

The planet was rather more hostile than the Master had expected – corrosive atmosphere, heat, storms. . . No wonder they preferred to try to take over the other Earth.

The Master had been waiting for several minutes before a guard finally turned the corner of the wall behind which he was crouched. He immediately stepped out into the open, his hands up.

‘I surrender.’

‘Who the hell are you?’

‘I am the Master and I believe Marianne Kyle will wish to see me.’

The guard was obviously confused and stepped forward to search the Master for weapons. The Master didn’t move, other than to lower his hands to shoulder height.

‘I’m not armed,’ he lied.

The guard, of course, could hardly expect an attack from such a short distance, but the Master was guessing that they hadn’t heard of jeet-kun-do, or the one-inch punch.

The impact was sufficient to catapult the guard several feet. The Master quickly scooped up the fallen Kalashnikov, and took the pistol from the unconscious guard's holster. He walked quickly back into the rocks, tutting softly at the man's incompetence.

'She's clear,' the nurse said.

Barbara sagged with relief. She was still worried about what was going to happen to her here, but at least she wasn't in for a recurrence of her past radiation problems. She had got over it eventually, but she didn't know whether she could again. It had been hard on Ian too; he had almost given himself an ulcer worrying about her. So it had seemed at the time, anyway. He hadn't lost his characteristic humour and outlook, though, and she was glad of that. It would have been a far more serious loss if he had.

'Good,' Boucher said. 'Is she fit for interrogation?'

Barbara's fear slammed back into her with full force.

'I don't see why not.'

From the base of the solid rocket booster exhausts to the uppermost peak of the rust-coloured external tank, the shuttle was as tall as an eleven-storey building. This shuttle bore the same insignia as the one they had seen land and also carried the word 'Conclave' on the sides and starboard wing. With the clearer view, they could now see that this one also had an individual name just aft of the flight deck windows: *Victory*. Ian wasn't sure if this was the same shuttle he, Yates and Benton had seen yesterday, but it was certainly the same design.

Puffs of white vapour emerged intermittently from vents on the huge external tank.

'They must be preparing a launch.'

'What makes you say that?' the Brigadier asked.

'The vapour coming from the tank. The low temperature of the liquid oxygen being pumped in condenses the air and that's what's being forced out of the vents as the fuel level rises.'

Lethbridge-Stewart's eyes narrowed calculatingly. 'How long?'

'Until they launch?' Ian hazarded a guess, but the American shuttle he'd seen at NASA still hadn't been launched yet. 'The fuel NASA uses for its rockets is volatile stuff. Assuming that this is the same mixture, they generally launch within three hours of completing fuelling.'

The owners of this other shuttle seemed much more practised at it than NASA did, and he got the impression that this was a task grown into a comfortable habit through routine.

‘If this is only some kind of forward base, then that shuttle is probably heading for their main base, wouldn’t you say, Chesterton?’

‘I suppose. . . If this world was destroyed as the Doctor reported, some sort of space station or Moon base could be where people survived.’

‘Then that’s most likely where the Master will be heading. They wouldn’t leave his TARDIS lying around down here, so whether he joins forces with them or stows away, he will try to be on that shuttle.’

‘Then the question is, do we follow, or go for their dimensional transference set-up in the power station?’

Always assuming that was where it was.

The Brigadier smiled to himself and Ian could see that he was quite relieved to be faced with a relatively straightforward tactical problem.

‘Our duty is quite clear: their dimension-hopping set-up. If they’re stuck here they’re be harmless, so we must either get back through to our world or at least prevent them from doing so.’

Ian sighed. ‘Well, if you’ve any ideas, now might be a good time to air them.’

‘First we should attract one of those patrols you were chased by, and take their weapons.’

‘I don’t think that will be necessary,’ the Master’s silken tones said from behind them.

Lethbridge-Stewart winced inwardly before turning, just in time to catch the Kalashnikov that the Master threw to him. Ian dropped the pistol that was tossed in his direction, then stooped to pick it up. The Master smiled mockingly and drew a small laser pistol with a dish-shaped muzzle from a pocket.

‘If you’re quite rested after the ordeal of transference, I believe I’ve found an entrance to the complex.’

Marianne Kyle didn’t know exactly why things felt out of kilter, but she was certain that they were. Maybe it was because the staging post was so empty now, with all but the most essential staff having made the transference. New personnel would arrive from Copernicus soon, but even that was rather thinly staffed these days.

She made her way to the infirmary, a highly chromed and rather chilly room filled with instruments that looked as much like torture devices as medical equipment, and could be used as such with a little imagination. They had never needed to, but it was nice to have the option.

As it was, the only prisoner they were currently holding was the woman from UNIT. Marianne was curious about her; she must be the closest thing available to her opposite number. She would have to die, of course, but –

No. Marianne had a better idea. This place, or even Copernicus itself, was remote and escape-proof. A perfect prison for those whom one wanted out of the way but might be too valuable to kill. They could make whatever life they desired of this planet and its lunar complex. . . She would put that to the rest of the Conclave when she boarded the *Victory* to give them her final briefing. This Barbara Chesterton could be the first inmate.

Boucher rose as she slinked into the room and she waved him to sit.

'Is this her?' The woman wasn't that impressive – striking, but not beautiful. A little too. . . sensible, perhaps.

'Yes,' Boucher said, sounding troubled. 'Commander, there's something odd going on here.'

That was all she needed. Like what? 'Pray tell, then.'

'She claims not to be a member of UNIT,' he stated bluntly. 'As a matter of fact, she claims to be a history teacher whose husband is temporarily advising UNIT.'

Marianne didn't believe that for a moment. This woman had been working with Boucher; they knew that for a fact.

'She must be lying then.'

The nurse, her hair pulled back from a cadaverous face, shook her head. 'We've given her both the standard dose and the quinine. She is not lying.'

Marianne silenced the nurse with a glare. If she had wanted the nurse's opinion, she would have demanded it.

'Could she be resisting the drug?'

Boucher consulted the notes he'd been making on a clipboard. 'Not according to the polygraph readings or the test control answers.'

Marianne hesitated. If it was true, she would be a laughing stock – outwitted by a civilian! The shame was crushing. On the other hand, who knew what training in resistance techniques UNIT gave its members. 'Put her aboard the *Victory*. I'll arrange a more thorough session at Copernicus.'

And if she was telling the truth. . . She could always die from the treatment before Marianne's embarrassment became known.

The Master had led the two humans to a small side door in a building quite far from the central power station. Inside, however, the place was a warren of tunnels carved out of the warm rock, so that the personnel here could go between buildings without braving the oven-like atmosphere outside.

Lethbridge-Stewart could understand that well. Even in the short time he'd been here, his lungs felt as if they'd been sandpapered. The lack of guards was something he understood rather less well.

'Isn't this all rather easy?' he asked. 'If this is their most strategic installation, where are the guards?'

The Master paused. 'This world was destroyed, remember. Any of these people here must have survived in a space station, or perhaps a lunar base. There can't have been more than a couple of hundred at the very most. Also there is no one else here on this ruined planet for them to guard against.'

He had a point, the Brigadier realised. 'Then that's why they're trying to infiltrate our authorities. They don't have enough people to try an invasion.'

'Precisely, Brigadier.'

The Brigadier, the Master and Ian slipped between the thick doors and found themselves in a cluttered circular room as wide and as high as a gaseometer. Computer banks lined the walls, cramped with dials and meters. Wide consoles covered in tiny switches were arrayed below them. Through the metal-grate floor, Lethbridge-Stewart could see that cables as thick as the trunks of small trees hung down from the circular catwalk above and dropped into a pool below. The water made it difficult to see, but the cables seemed to be securely fastened into sockets on the top of a smooth concrete disc even further down.

Slim pillars suspended the circular catwalk and steep metal stairs led up to it. The Master ascended nimbly, the others following. The catwalk was lined with copper and left a circular space in the centre. Metal ribs, lined with more copper, hung down from the rim of the central gap, curving in towards the centre.

'Interesting,' the Master commented. 'I wonder what goes in it?'

'In what?' Lethbridge-Stewart asked.

The Master pointed at the coppery ribs. 'These supports are designed to contain some sort of large globe. Going by the diameter of this central gap, I'd say some kind of travel pod. It probably protects them from that blackout you experienced.'

'Then where is it?'

'Presumably in our world.' He looked down at the concrete plug below. 'This is directly above the nuclear reactor housing. The cables connected to this support structure would suggest that they're using the reactor's power to travel.'

'That's what the Doctor wrote, isn't it?' Ian put in.

Lethbridge-Stewart nodded, recalling the Doctor's experiences at Project Inferno in Eastchester. 'When the Doctor broke through to a parallel Earth, he had the TARDIS console linked to the reactor of Project Inferno. He said some sort of power surge sent him through.'

The Master straightened from his examination of the cables. 'And how did he get back?'

'The same way. The parallel Earth also had an Inferno Project and he used their reactor.'

Lethbridge-Stewart felt a sudden resurgence of hope and the Master snapped his fingers.

‘That’s why your file was stolen, Brigadier. There probably needs to be a reactor at both ends of the journey – one here, and one at Faslane.’

The Brigadier thought hard. ‘That area of the Scottish coastline must be chock-a-block with both British and American nuclear-powered submarines,’ he muttered. ‘Finding out which one they have won’t be easy.’

There was a further thought that he didn’t like to voice – was the submarine in question only nuclear-powered, or was it nuclear-armed as well?

‘On the security monitors from the bank, she mentioned taking my TARDIS to a “redoubt”,’ the Master supplied.

Ian frowned. ‘Aren’t all our Polaris submarines named Re-something?’

Lethbridge-Stewart didn’t show any sign of the shiver he felt creeping up on him. ‘HMS *Redoubt*. That’s where they’re centred. We should get in touch with Captain Yates at once.’ He stopped, rather sheepishly. ‘If we can get back, that is. What do you think?’ he asked the Master.

There was no answer. In fact, there was no Master. For the second time this morning – if indeed it was morning – the Brigadier found himself fuming at the Master’s sudden disappearance.

‘Where’s he gone now?’

Ian looked round. ‘I never noticed. But he didn’t betray us before. Maybe he’s found one of his enemies to kill.’

The Brigadier was surprised to hear Chesterton say such a thing so casually. Would Doris become so unemotional after his death?

‘Well I hope he does it quietly. The guards might be few, but they do exist.’

‘I get the impression he’s quite experienced at this sort of thing.’

Lethbridge-Stewart couldn’t argue with that.

Ian pointed to another exit. ‘I didn’t see that before; maybe he went that way.’

They moved off through the exit.

The Master could hear them chattering away as he slipped out into the main corridor. They were fortunate that the place was understaffed – in any other circumstances their noise would alert every guard in the area.

Assuming that there was no enemy left on this world, it was unlikely that there would be purpose-built cells for holding prisoners. So, if he was in charge of locking up a pair of prisoners, where would he put them?

Somewhere secure, but not sensitive. Unused officers’ quarters perhaps? The layout of the complex was well signposted and the Master was able to find his way to the barracks area. There was a typically drab corridor, with very basic rooms. Most of them had a few personal belongings. No doubt

with the staff shortage, even the enlisted men would be occupying vacant single quarters.

There were a couple of bare and empty rooms and the Master nodded to himself. With professional ease, he moved to the nearest room that had personal belongings inside, picked the lock and entered quietly.

Once Barbara had been wheeled away on a gurney, Boucher and Kyle made their way to the one room that was permanently fully manned: the launch control centre on the top floor. From the crow's-nest position, they looked down at the technicians running safety checks on the *Victory*. 'Do you want me to go back to the *Redoubt*?' Boucher asked.

'No, Williams can handle the preparations to leave the IDPF net. You take charge here and prepare things for the next group. I'll –'

She broke off as the door below opened, and the Master came in. Boucher reached for his gun but she stopped him, as the Master raised his bare hands.

'Not quite the welcome I had been expecting,' he said. He stepped forward. 'I'm sorry I couldn't be here earlier, but the late Mr Barron misled me over your intentions. There are no hard feelings, I trust?'

'N-no,' she stammered, for once lost for words. 'I'm glad you decided to join us. . . .' She only wished she knew how he had done so.

'Better late than never.' His eyes glittered brightly. 'I imagine you're rather confused as to how I got here?'

'That would be a reasonable assumption,' she said, a little dizzily.

He had come all this way for her after all! And knew that Barron had been working alone. Her fears about things being out of kilter were obviously unfounded.

The Master lowered his hands. 'In fact, that's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. This nuclear reactor is rather crude, after all.'

'You can help us improve it?' Boucher asked, rather more sceptically.

'Naturally. But first I wonder if you and one or two of your guards would care to follow me. I have something rather interesting to show you.'

CHAPTER 18

The Brigadier and Ian found that the exit led to a long passage, which eventually brought them to a small infirmary. Looking at the instruments scattered around, Lethbridge-Stewart was glad he wasn't ill. He got the impression that any treatment here would make him worse, not cure him.

The equipment was all very modern, though; perhaps even more modern than that back in the real world. He knew, of course, that this world was equally real, but somehow he couldn't keep thinking of it in that way. The English language was still English here, the radiation symbol was the same and even the Kalashnikovs were still Kalashnikovs. Probably the cannons wouldn't be any different, but he'd find himself hard put to view this world's as being as real as his own.

He explored the infirmary, reluctant to touch anything. It was empty, though a cup with the dregs of some coffee in it suggested that someone had been in here very recently. If whoever it was had simply gone to the toilet, they could return at any moment. He looked for Ian to call him back and saw that he was walking round a curtained-off area.

'What's this?'

Ian shrugged. 'I think there's a patient in there.'

He gently eased the room divider aside and looked in. The Brigadier could see his face pale.

'Good grief,' Ian exclaimed, shaking his head and walking inside. The Brigadier followed and understood Ian's shock when he saw who the patient was.

They were looking at a man, half propped and half suspended in some kind of coffin-shaped alcove. The face in profile was that of the Master; the high brow, the nose, even the silhouette of his distinctive beard. But something was definitely amiss. He seemed unable to move amidst the restraints that held him in the alcove.

The Brigadier reflected on how fitting it was that the Master's treachery should bring him to this pass. Then the figure turned his face towards them and Lethbridge-Stewart had to fight down the urge to recoil. As the shadowed side of his face came into the light, he could see that the skin had been carefully peeled off. Dozens of tiny scars crisscrossed the exposed flesh that was bare all the way up to the crown of his head.

Needles, glinting like the fangs of tiny imps, were embedded regularly into the flesh, while a network of slim tubes disappeared into puckered wounds around the side of his head and neck. Thicker tubes and electrical cables emerging from slits in his coverall like spilled black entrails were plugged into the surrounding equipment.

The left eye was off-white, dead, but the right one gazed out unblinkingly. The Brigadier felt an unaccustomed chill. He had been a soldier long enough to know that some things would crack even the strongest resolve; worse than this, he had learned that there was a type of calm that came only through suffering so intense that the body and soul became desensitised to the horror.

He had never really believed that part until the calm gaze of the single eye fell on him.

‘My God,’ Ian whispered. ‘What have they done to him?’

‘And in such a short space of time. . .’ The Brigadier’s words trailed away.

‘We have to get him out of here,’ Ian said. ‘He needs treatment.’

‘He may be beyond that, I’m afraid,’ the Master’s distinctive voice said quietly from behind them, startling Ian and the Brigadier.

He joined them, his features and clothes undamaged. Lethbridge-Stewart glanced briefly at the Master. He wasn’t sure what he expected to see reflected in the Time Lord’s face, but he was pretty certain that encountering a tortured and abused version of oneself would have had some sort of effect.

The Master hid it well. Nevertheless, there was something in his hooded eyes that struck an almost physical blow. It wasn’t easily identifiable as anger, or pain, or fear. All that the Brigadier was certain of was that whichever emotion the Master was currently feeling, it was blazing with incredible power.

‘Then this isn’t you?’

The Master hesitated. ‘Not exactly, no.’

‘Another double.’

‘Everyone has their alternate, Brigadier. Or had, before the planet was destroyed by fire and earthquake.’

Was this how the people of this world treated its criminals? Lethbridge-Stewart turned back to the shattered man, asking, ‘Who are you?’

There was silence for a long moment. ‘I don’t remember,’ the voice answered finally. It was very distant, and somewhat slurred, nothing like the Master’s usual smooth tone.

‘His name is – was – Koschei,’ the Master said, as much to himself as to the two men.

At the sound of the name, the broken figure looked at the Master, who flinched from its gaze.

‘I never expected to see you,’ it whispered.

‘No,’ the Master said quietly, ‘I don’t expect you did.’ He leaned sideways to examine the connections that were wired up to Koschei. ‘Any more than I expected to see you. . .’

He turned, and only now did the Brigadier realise that others had come in with the Master: two uniformed guards flanked Boucher and a delicate porcelain figure with expressive eyes and cropped hair. She could only be this Marianne Kyle, whom the Master had spoken of.

Ian immediately lunged at Boucher before the Brigadier could stop him and received a gun-butt in the stomach for his trouble. The Master looked on with an amused expression, then nodded to Koschei.

‘It’s a rather crude job, but effective. And no longer necessary – I can supply all the relevant technical details.’

He took the demat box from the Brigadier and handed it to Kyle. ‘This is what I’ve brought you. I’ll explain it when we reach Copernicus.’

The Brigadier was astounded. ‘You’re helping them, after what they did to you – to him?’

‘Did you really think there is anything of that failure in me?’ asked the Master, smiling insolently at Ian and the Brigadier. ‘In our universe, Koschei died, out on the galactic rim. Now there is only the Master.’ He nodded to Kyle. ‘Consider them a gift, my dear. A token of my esteem.’

Kyle took the demat box with awe, then cleared her throat.

‘Victor will be accompanying me to Copernicus. Hold these two for the moment.’

‘And this?’ Boucher indicated Koschei.

‘Is still a useful back-up.’

Ian lunged at Boucher, half trying to punch him and half trying to grab his throat. Boucher easily deflected the confused attack, trapping Ian’s arm in a grip that felt like it might shatter the bone.

‘Don’t press your luck, Mr Chesterton. It can only stretch so far.’

‘You bastard. I tried to kill myself because of you!’

And Ian wished he knew how to deal with that. He wished he knew how to convince himself that it was a one-time-only occurrence, and that he wouldn’t feel that hideous need again sometime in the future.

‘Because of me?’ Boucher echoed. ‘Yes, I imagine you’d like to believe that. But it’s not true, is it? You want to blame someone so you don’t have to blame yourself, because you want to be convinced that it’s not your own fault that you lost her. It doesn’t work, does it?’

Ian tried to tear his eyes away from Boucher’s sardonic gaze but found that he couldn’t. All he could think about were the layers of blame that clouded his mind – blaming himself, blaming this imposter detective, blaming Barbara. . .

Boucher nodded to himself, and released Ian's arm with a flourish, sending him reeling backwards. He regarded Ian with an expression veering somewhere between professional disdain and sympathy. Ian felt stung by it and turned away, trying to hide from that gaze. It was almost like having one's soul judged by the Devil to decide which part of hell is most fitting for you.

'At the heart of it all, what you're really looking for is not blame, or a target, but reassurance that everything is all right. And it isn't.'

'It's not like that –' Ian's words sounded hollow even to his own ears. He tried to walk away, but the guards prevented that.

'Everywhere you turn is either blame or a worthless attempt at reassurance which only serves to remind you of your pain, and you know that it will be with you as long as you live.'

'No!'

'Then the only escape you have left is death. All you can hope is that you will rest peacefully, that the pain won't follow you into eternity. That is how it works!'

Ian had gathered his breath by the time the guards tossed him into a spartan room. It was fairly empty but at least it had a window. It reminded him of the time he had spent as a prisoner in Salem. While the door was locked from the outside, Ian dragged himself over to the small grilled window. Through it, he could see a flare of brighter light illuminating the dust clouds.

Fire brighter and hotter than that emitted by the sun spilled from the *Victory's* conical engine nozzles, forcing the shuttle into the sky with deceptive ease. At first it seemed to be rising quite slowly on its pillar of smoke, but it soon vanished into the dust clouds above and was lost to Ian's sight.

He could feel his hopes leave with it and felt foolish in the extreme. Yates and the others had warned him about the Master, but he had allowed himself to hope that the Time Lord's aid would somehow lead him to justice for losing Barbara.

Now he was left with nothing. Except Boucher. He was still here and he had killed Barbara. Ian clung to that spark as a shipwrecked mariner would cling to a lifebelt.

The *Victory* turned over on her back to jettison the SRBs and then righted herself to pull out of Earth's orbit. The Master relaxed back in what should have been the mission specialist's seat, at the rear of the cockpit.

'Interesting. We should be in free fall by now. Or did you get hold of some gravitational technology as well as a TARDIS?'

Kyle nodded. 'That unfortunate wretch down in the complex's medical centre was not the only visitor to our planet. We managed to recover two alien

vessels after a pitched battle about twenty years ago. I will show you around when we reach Copernicus.'

'Which should be in about three days.'

'Actually,' she smiled, 'more like six hours. We've learned more over the last five years than in the fifty beforehand.'

'Necessity being the mother of invention?'

'If you like. To make regular journeys to the Earth, we knew we would have to improve turnaround time. Fortunately, we had the best of materials to study.'

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart promised himself that the Master would not have such an easy time of it when they got him back into custody. It did him good to think that they could get him back into custody.

First, though, they had to escape. That other Master, Koschei, could be a useful source of information if he was being squeezed for information by Kyle and her people. If he had been forced to help them develop their transference technology, as the Master had helped UNIT, then he might know its weaknesses. He might also have a TARDIS.

The Brigadier had never really spent much time imprisoned before and it wasn't a pleasant experience. He had been trained to withstand the standard prisoner interrogation techniques, of course, but was very much of the opinion that it would be better to make his escape before it came to that. That was what captured officers were supposed to do.

The room he had been locked in was very bare, but clearly not a purpose-built cell, so perhaps there was some weakness in its adaptation for that purpose which he could exploit.

First he ought to make a thorough search for anything useful, especially anything metal that could be used as a tool. He hoped Chesterton had the sense to do the same.

There was nothing under the bed or in any of the small cupboards, but the shelf brackets looked promising. If he could use a bit of metal as a screwdriver and get them away from the wall, he might be able to sharpen one into some sort of blade. He kept looking, even going as far as to lift the cistern lid in the small toilet cubicle.

Lying in the cistern was, of all things, an automatic pistol sealed in a polythene bag. Baffled, and wondering if this was some sort of trick, Lethbridge-Stewart lifted the gun out. There was something else in the bag too and it took him a moment to realise that it was one of the Master's gloves.

The glove surely must be a message, to let him know that the Master had put the gun there... What sort of game was he playing?

* * *

The Copernicus base was quite extensive. A smaller launch facility for the shuttles was centred in the crater itself, while cliff-like buildings surrounded the rim. A landing area had been constructed along one of the larger rays that extended from the crater across the lunar surface.

The approach to land was very fast, since there was no air to slow the descent, but careful use of the shuttle's manoeuvring thrusters brought it down safely. A small tractor-type vehicle towed the shuttle to a blockhouse, from which a boarding tunnel extended to mate with the oval hatch on the shuttle's port side.

It had been some time since the Master had experienced low gravity, but he suspected that he was more familiar with it than the inhabitants of the base were.

He took Kyle's arm and walked her into the base. Like everything he had seen in this world, it was built for functionality. All the walls were thick metal or carved out of the rock. It looked as if it was meant to withstand a nuclear attack, and perhaps it was.

'Why did you build your main government headquarters up here?'

'Partly to ensure that it couldn't be attacked by subversives. The Conclave had a monopoly on space research, so no one could fire a missile to here.' She smiled demurely. 'It's also literally ruling over the Earth. The Moon is seen from every part of the inhabited world – a reminder that we are watching.'

'Or were.'

'As you say. We have a smaller world now, but yours isn't that different.'

'The Earth is hardly my world, Marianne.'

'It could be.'

'Oh, I didn't mean I don't own it. Merely that it is not my home.'

'But it still could be your home, if you wanted it as such. As consort to one of the Conclave...'

The Master chuckled softly. 'Ah, the famous human heart at work. Marianne,' he said softly, 'I think we both share the same lover. The most desirable and beautiful of lovers that any sentient being could possibly court.'

'Power,' she said, smiling.

He nodded, with a raised eyebrow. 'Can you deny that? Has there ever been any human who has driven you more, or drawn more from you, than you willingly gave?'

Kyle thought of her husband, whom she had turned over to the Security Force for jeopardising her own advancement. She had loved him very much, but it wasn't enough. Nothing could match the satisfaction of watching someone carry out your plans, even if it cost them their own lives.

As a child, she had read voraciously. Many of the stories concerned people willing to die for the ones they loved, but the real world wasn't like that. Peo-

ple died for their principles, or their payment, or their country. You couldn't make people love you, but if you could set those principles and control that payment or country, they would live and die for you. If it was good that a few would do the same for love, then surely it was still better if many did so because they had to.

'No,' she said finally. 'Nor do I need any.'

'Precisely.' He cocked an eyebrow at her. 'Two people with a common desire may, of course, form a friendship, however. Or a partnership.'

'We do seem to have a lot in common.'

She paused as two jumpsuited men greeted them.

'Why don't you get some rest? I have a report to deliver to the Conclave, then I will introduce you.'

The Master nodded agreeably. 'I shall look forward to it.' He hefted the demat box. 'As I'm sure the Conclave will also.'

Feeling peculiarly light-headed, Barbara momentarily thought she was aboard a ship and getting seasick. She was certainly still in a medical area of some kind, though it was larger than the one she remembered being in.

'Ah, you're with us again.'

The cultured voice belonged to the same striking woman who had spoken with Boucher. Kyle, wasn't it?

'I half expected to wake up dead,' she mumbled, the drugs still affecting her speech. 'What do you want with me?'

'The Conclave will want to ask you some questions.'

Barbara's heart sank at the thought of yet more questions. She just wanted to hide from questions.

'Who are the Conclave?'

'In your world, the UN Security Council might be the closest equivalent. To ensure world peace, the leaders of the five continents formed a sort of super-cabinet, based at Copernicus. The leader of the Republic of Great Britain represents Europe; the President of the American Confederation represents the Americas, of course; India, White Russia, and the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere all have their own representatives.'

Barbara thought about this. The Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere had been an intention of the Japanese before the Second World War... And could the American Confederation mean... The South won the American Civil War?'

'Yes.'

'What about the Second World War, against Hitler?'

'Ah, the war your world had. Here the British Republic and Stalin divided up Europe between them. There was no war with Hitler.'

Barbara tried not to think about the incredible ramifications of Kyle's casual words – she felt so dizzy. . . 'I'm not still in the infirmary?'

'No,' Kyle admitted, and Barbara had the impression that the woman was enjoying her discomfort. 'You're at our home.'

Kyle pointed to a window. Outside, the night sky was crystal clear, with the stars shining brightly. The Earth was up there too, in a patch of darkness where the reflected light from it drowned out the starlight.

The Master was quite impressed with the base here. For a twentieth-century culture, it was a truly remarkable achievement and one which the divided and supposedly free nations of the Brigadier's Earth could never hope for. They just didn't have the strength of a single will and purpose to do something like this.

Marianne had brought him to a central area, where the Conclave were waiting. He dismissed Nkome and Roshan as possible threats. They were too old and had no power base. Sandobal could prove troublesome, as he clearly had some sort of feelings for Marianne, which might get in the way of the Master's plans if he moved too soon. Yu was the most problematic. He commanded the largest population and the guards from those regions might just stay loyal to him in a confrontation, even though Marianne held command of the security forces.

They had opened a large armoured window overlooking the crater below and the Master could see a protected terrace a safe distance from the shuttle launch site. There were some very different vehicles parked there.

'The vacuum on the surface was the best preservative we could find for the inorganics,' Yu said. 'All the delicate stuff is looked after in the labs, but out there there is no danger of contamination.'

Marianne cut in. 'We acquired these after a pitched battle in Wales in 1959. The occupants were quite ferocious, but eventually we managed to overwhelm them by force of numbers.'

The Master nodded, running his gaze over the artefacts that were parked on the smooth rock apron. Most of them had been dismantled, but the angular construction and long necks were quite distinctive and he recognised the pair of Bannermen fighters for what they were.

'So that is where you got your artificial gravity and faster drives. Stolen from the Bannermen.'

Marianne nodded. 'Unfortunately, we had only salvaged parts from the two ships, which means we can run only two enhanced shuttles. We have two standard shuttles in reserve. Copernicus Base has to settle for local gravity; but it's better than nothing.'

'And Koschei?' That was the question he really wanted to ask.

‘A decade ago, the Earth was attacked by a force which used robotic animals as its foot soldiers. It also ensnared him in his TARDIS with a web-like substance. Somehow he got free, and managed to give us some help to defeat it, but the TARDIS was ruined. Only the central controls were salvageable.’

‘You have a very strange idea of a reward,’ the Master said drily.

‘We tried to heal him as best we could,’ Kyle offered, quickly, ‘and we were content that the TARDIS was unusable. Still, we brought them up here anyway, for further study. We had no idea, however, that the machine could be used to go, as it were, sideways in time.’

‘Then how did you discover it?’

He could guess from what the Brigadier had told him, but he wanted to hear it from her. That would be one more small sign that she bore him respect.

Kyle went to a panel and switched on a small TV set.

‘The Inferno Project was monitored at all times of course.’

‘Of course,’ the Master agreed. One could hardly expect even human dictators to trust their workers. They were primitive, but not totally stupid.

‘Imagine our surprise when we saw this.’ She pressed a switch, and the TV screen sprang to life. The screen showed the rather spartan interior of some kind of garage. Boxes of tools and spare parts lined the walls and the floor was bare concrete. After a moment, something very strange happened. Three things materialised out of thin air: a TARDIS console, the Doctor’s ridiculous black-and-yellow car, and the unconscious body of the Doctor himself. The Master allowed himself a small smile at the sight.

The scene soon changed and the Master now found himself watching the Doctor being interrogated in a small office by Sergeant Benton and the Brigadier – except that this alternative Brigadier had no moustache and had a patch over his left eye. It was quite enjoyable, actually. The Master reminded himself to congratulate the pair the next time he saw them; whoever would have thought they had it in them to be such fine bullies.

Before long, he watched as the Brigadier’s alternate self was shot dead and Doctor, the car and the TARDIS console vanished again.

‘Interesting,’ the Master commented. ‘So you decided to experiment with the console from Koschei’s TARDIS –’ he wasn’t stupid enough to say ‘my’ – ‘and a nuclear reactor.’

‘Koschei was rather less cooperative about that, I’m afraid.’

‘But,’ Yu put in, ‘my technicians soon changed that. As you saw.’ He pointed to the demat box the Master had brought. ‘What exactly is it you’re offering us?’

‘Some more of these,’ the Master said, holding up the box. ‘To begin with, of course. With this technology you could travel directly from here at Copernicus to anywhere on our Earth. You will no longer need a reactor at either end of

the journey, let alone both. I imagine that's something you've been trying to achieve yourselves.'

'We tried it with an aircraft carrying a small isotope, but it didn't work and our man was killed. That is what alerted UNIT to us.'

'I think I can improve on that,' the Master said slowly.

'And what do you want from us in return?' The Master could see the canininess in Yu's eyes, and mentally noted that the man was not the ill-educated thug he appeared to be.

The Master smiled graciously and sat down. He raised a hand, forefinger upwards. 'I think the Presidency of the Conclave would be a good place to start.'

The search of Faslane was going very slowly, but Mike Yates didn't intend to rush things and risk alerting the conspirators. So far everyone they had checked had proved legitimate, but Yates knew that this was not actually conclusive in this case.

'Sir?'

Harry Sullivan had returned to the commodore's office, having spent some time going over the photographs in the personnel files. 'Have you found your attacker?' Mike asked.

'Yes, I do believe I have,' Harry said, a little breathless after the dash up from the file room. He handed over a photo of a youngish CPO with sandy hair. 'His name's Williams all right, but he certainly isn't a doctor.'

Mike looked at the attached paper. 'Chief Petty Officer assigned to HMS *Redoubt*.'

'HMS *Redoubt*?' Commodore Bennetts echoed. 'That's one of our bombers.'

'You have aircraft here?' Mike was confused.

'No, sorry. It's one of our ballistic missile submarines – a Polaris boat. She's berthed in the IDPF net. It's a new floating degaussing apparatus that should render a submarine magnetically neutral.'

'To avoid detection?' Mike suggested.

'Exactly.'

An undetectable Polaris submarine in the hands of the enemy was not an option as far as Yates was concerned.

'Then, sir, I think our only option is to try to retake the submarine by force.'

'No,' Bennetts said. 'The use of force is too dangerous – what if there's a reactor leak, or a problem with one of the missiles?'

'Then what do you suggest?'

'If they're still posing as naval crew, they'll still respond to orders if they aren't suspicious. If I can get a skeleton crew of men we can trust ready, then maybe we can lure the enemy out on some kind of drill and replace them.'

Mike didn't like this at all, but he didn't have the authority to override the Commodore's wishes either.

'How long would that take?'

'A couple of hours.'

'Then let's hope that's not too long.'

CHAPTER 19

Two uniformed guards were standing by a door near the lab to which the Master had been assigned. Curious, he tried to get a glimpse of what was inside.

It was a sterile room, with a large hatchway sealing it off from the lunar surface. Presumably they brought things from the captured spacecraft in that way. Most of the objects in the room were broken pieces of circuitry, though there were a few larger objects as well, such as portable field generators. Most interesting to him was the dark Rolls-Royce that sat in the middle of the room: his TARDIS. The Master raised his hands wearily as the guards motioned him away from the door.

Yu tutted softly, wagging a finger. 'The guards have orders not to allow you in there.' He glanced pointedly at the Rolls. 'We don't want you leaving too soon.'

'I wouldn't dream of it.'

'As a token of faith, perhaps you could construct another of these devices.'

'Certainly.'

Marianne was glad of the Master's company. She generally didn't trust anyone of her own people, let alone some alien from a dimension she intended to rule, but the Master had proved his usefulness. His sense of purpose was something she admired.

'Everything you might need will be provided.'

'But of course.'

Marianne was glad; he trusted her too.

'Yu and I are going to your Earth now, but I will be back soon. Are you sure the dome is comfortable enough for your work?'

'It's perfectly satisfactory, thank you.'

Marianne looked at the demat box. 'How quickly can you duplicate this?'

'A day or so.' He paused before speaking again. 'First, I have some other business to attend to – to further promote the success of your plan, of course.'

'Other business?'

'Yes. The woman, Barbara, is an associate of an enemy of mine, as well as having further useful local knowledge.' He cocked an eyebrow at Yu. 'If she was suspicious of your friend Boucher, she may have made some sort of plans with the Earth authorities. I should like to question her myself.'

Marianne beamed sweetly. ‘One of my men will accompany you – in case she attempts any hostilities towards you.’

‘Gladly.’

The room into which Barbara had been roughly shoved was bare and cold; she wouldn’t like to think of this as a place to recover her health. Still, it could have been worse – at least the guards had shown no lustful urges. The lack of any form of mental stimulation, however, made her stay so dull it was actually disorienting. Judging time was quite impossible.

When the cell door slid aside and the Master and a muscular guard stepped inside, she tensed – but at the same time she was almost pleased at the diversion. The guard kept tapping his baton against his palm, but had at least left his gun holstered. Barbara relaxed slightly, not that the lumpy bunk allowed much comfort.

‘I suppose it’s time for the third degree? That is how you get your kicks, isn’t it?’

The Master smiled. ‘Indeed it is.’

He looked sideways at the guard, then stepped back and slammed the heel of his hand behind the man’s ear. The guard grunted breathlessly and collapsed to the floor. Barbara was too astonished to move, as the Master scooped up the baton and tossed it to her. He took the man’s pistol for himself.

‘Yu expects me to start working on some new technology for him in a few minutes, so we don’t have much time. Are you fit enough to walk in a space suit?’

‘I think so,’ Barbara said, though she had no idea why he would want her to.

‘Good.’ He smiled, knowing that humans were a little more efficient and co-operative when given some pleasant incentive. ‘Your husband and the Brigadier are both on the Earth below – this Earth.’

Barbara gasped, overjoyed at the news. He was coming for her, as she knew he would.

The Master continued. ‘If we’re to get out of here and rejoin them, I’m going to need your help. . .’

Lethbridge-Stewart had checked over the gun he had found and discovered it to be loaded and in perfect working order. So all he had to do was wait for someone to come to interrogate him.

He hadn’t really noticed how much time had passed since his incarceration, but it had surely been several hours at least when he heard footsteps outside and the key being turned in the lock.

The Brigadier sat up quickly and shifted across to the side of the door. He would still be visible when the guard came in, but the moment needed to turn to face him should be enough for the Brigadier to make his move.

The door opened and an armed guard came in. The Brigadier grabbed his wrist, pulling him off balance, and clubbed him over the head with the gun. The guard crashed into the back wall of the room. The Brigadier dropped to one knee as he slid out of the room, shooting the second guard before he could react. Both men had carried Kalashnikovs, and the Brigadier appropriated them.

The ring of keys was still in the door, so the Brigadier used them to unlock Ian's door. He didn't see Ian at first and instinctively ducked as the lecturer tried to jump him.

'Sorry Brigadier,' Ian said. 'When I heard the key in the door, I thought it was one of them who had shot you.'

Barbara pressed herself flat against the rocky wall of the crater, her pale pressure suit blending in with the ashen surface. As she watched, two suited soldiers marched along the edge opposite her, moving from the dome to the launch gantry. They didn't look in her direction, which was a considerable relief to her. She noticed that they weren't armed and tried not to think about the result of a bullet hole in a space suit. Ian might be the scientist of the family, but she knew that exposure to vacuum would be fatal.

She stepped out from the wall once the soldiers had passed and a few steps with the assistance of low gravity brought her to her destination. A large circular airlock door was set into the near-vertical slope. It should have been the work of mere moments to slice through the retaining bolts with the small laser cutter the Master had given her. However, Barbara was taking no chances about slipping with the unfamiliar tool and took her time to make sure it was done safely.

At the moment Barbara opened the outer airlock door, pressure alarms started to sound.

The Master was hard-pressed to keep a straight face. The fact that the alarms had sounded meant that his plan was working. There was such satisfaction in schemes that succeeded.

The two guards were looking baffled, unaware which airlock in the base had been breached. The Master cursed inwardly. He had hoped that they would see what was happening and react immediately.

A transparent airlock beckoned before her and she could make out the twinkling lights of computer banks in the room beyond. A uniformed man was

tending the equipment. The engineer was unarmed, but any struggle he put up or shots she fired would make enough noise to bring down the whole base on top of her, even if she could bring herself to attack him in the first place.

Then she thought of the people who had died because of these people, and of her own abduction. Luckily his back was turned, so she eased the inner door open with agonising slowness. She gently extended a leg through the door, putting her weight on it to emerge as silently as possible. The suit creaked loudly.

Barbara lunged forward, bringing her head down. The solid crown of the space-suit's visored helmet slammed into his forehead, as much by accident as design, and sent him stumbling backwards.

Now the alarms in the lab went off, and guards turned to see Barbara examining the Master's TARDIS. Alarmed at this security breach right under their noses, they started opening the inner door, heedless of what the Master was doing.

He shot them in the back with the gun taken from the guard who had accompanied him to visit Barbara and pulled the door open as they died. Wasting no time, he opened his TARDIS door and ushered Barbara inside.

A moment later, it vanished with a smooth rushing sound.

Marianne was preparing her things for the journey to Earth. She had only one small teddy bear remaining from her collection and she was determined to take it with her when she took up permanent residence in London.

She almost dropped it when the alarms blared. Running through low gravity was always tricky, but experience had taught her to do it well, and she was at the lab just behind Yu and a couple of guards.

'What's happening?'

'Your friend has gone!' Yu snapped. 'He freed the woman from Earth and conspired to steal that TARDIS.'

Marianne was stunned. How could he have done this to her after she had offered him a share in the rule of the Earth? 'Alert the staging area. Put all guards on alert. He'll have to link his TARDIS to the reactor.'

'I've already issued those orders. Some of us can remain objective about things,' Yu said pointedly. 'We'll be too late anyway.'

'Not necessarily,' Marianne said slowly. She pointed to the workbench. 'He's left his little box behind...'

Two guards were down, one in the corridor and one in the other room. In spite of both National Service in Malaya and his travels through many trouble

spots with the Doctor, Ian had never got used to the sight of corpses of any species, and sincerely hoped that he never would.

The Brigadier ignored them, and opened the door to the axis corridor.

‘Out you go, Chesterton.’

Ian didn’t need telling twice. ‘Where to?’ he asked.

‘That transfer point at the reactor. If we can ambush the occupant – or preferably just sneak on board, if it’s unoccupied. . .’

A cry rang out behind them. ‘The prisoners!’

A soldier was standing at the corner of the building. Two other men quickly joined him. The Brigadier had raised his Kalashnikov and fired before Ian even realised what was happening. The first man fell back wounded, dropping his gun, but the others leapt into cover. Alarms started sounding from speakers all along the tunnel.

‘Run!’

The Brigadier gave covering fire while Ian made a break for the main building. The guards kept their heads down as the pair dashed over to the power plant.

Boucher heard the shooting from below and wondered what the hell was going on. Had more UNIT men found a way to get here? He went across to the telephone on the wall and lifted it. ‘Control, what’s going on? You shooting at a primord?’

‘No, sir, it’s the prisoners. They’ve killed their guards and escaped.’

Boucher felt his face harden as his question was answered.

‘Call out all the remaining troops.’

The Master’s TARDIS materialised just outside the power station’s main door, still in the form of a Rolls-Royce. The Master emerged, followed by Barbara.

‘I suggest you wait inside.’

‘You’re going to save them?’

Could she have misjudged him? She only really had second-hand knowledge of his crimes, after all.

‘Not specifically, no.’ He ignored her sudden crestfallen look. ‘But I have some unfinished business with those who used. . . Koschei. Possibly I’ll run into Chesterton and the Brigadier on the way. If so, I’m sure the Brigadier will waste no time in forcing me to rescue them at gunpoint.’

The covered walkway opened out onto a wide expanse of open ground between here and the power station. Ian and the Brigadier hared across the open ground. The effort was stinging Ian’s lungs and he wondered how the

Brigadier kept up the pace. Ian had always thought of himself as pretty fit for his age, but this was proving him wrong.

The guards ran out just as the Brigadier and Ian reached the far side. The Brigadier turned, loosing a long burst at the guards. They dived for cover, but re-emerged when the Brigadier's Kalashnikov ran dry and he had to reload. Abruptly, the ground ahead of them exploded into shrapnel and two of them were blasted off their feet. The others ran for it.

Looking up, Ian could see the Master standing on a catwalk above.

'I suggest you open the door, Mr Chesterton,' he called above the sound of the wind. Then, as if to emphasise the urgency of his words, he fired off another burst at the guards.

The Brigadier was surprised, to say the least, but was glad to see that Chesterton had the presence of mind to do what he was told, even though it was a command from the Master's lips.

The door fell open and both men stumbled through. Ian heaved it closed again and they listened to the cacophony of shots hitting the metal on the outside. Lethbridge-Stewart looked around for a way up to the join the Master, but by the time he found the stairwell, the Master was already descending.

'Come along, Brigadier, we don't have any time to lose.'

'What are you doing here? Didn't you get your TARDIS back?'

'I did, but I have unfinished business here.'

'You mean Koschei?'

The Master nodded. 'He may be a weak fool who hasn't realised his true potential as I did, but he still has the potential within him. By denying him that, they're rather denying me, wouldn't you say? I think he deserves his chance at revenge.'

Koschei was sedated in his alcove in the infirmary, but the Master had enough medical knowledge to revive him.

'I knew you wouldn't leave,' the ravaged Time Lord said, a little more strongly than before. 'Not with this injustice to right.'

The Master refrained from scoffing – he did want this man's help. Surely he understood the desire for revenge?

'They killed Ailla, they took my TARDIS... But it was damaged.'

'So they tried to take mine,' the Master said grimly, 'which is perfectly operational. But don't worry, it's safe.'

Koschei hesitated, then spoke again, asking exactly what the Master had expected him to ask. 'And Ailla? In your reality?'

'She lives, as far as I know,' the Master told him neutrally. 'I travel alone, now.' It was tempting to tell him about her betrayal; her siding with the Doc-

tor, to prevent him from achieving omniscience. But it would mean nothing to this shadow of himself.

‘I’m glad to hear that.’

‘I came here to ask if you are strong enough to help us.’

The side of Koschei’s face that remained smiled. ‘To shut down the dimensional gateway?’ He coughed. ‘I should think so. All you need to do is remove and destroy the space-time element from my TARDIS’s console. After that, it will no longer function.’

The Master nodded. He should have thought of that himself, but then he hadn’t known quite how much of Koschei’s TARDIS remained.

The Brigadier leaned forward. ‘We could take you with us, get you out of here...’

Koschei shook his head. ‘Yu and the Conclave did a very good job on me. Disconnect me from this abomination and I’ll be dead in minutes.’

The Master was puzzled. ‘Surely you still have the ability to regenerate?’

Koschei let out a long wheezing breath that was almost a laugh. Even the Master was chilled.

‘It took them several attempts to perfect this. I imagine it was the first time they had been able to try again with a prisoner who died under interrogation.’

‘I imagine so,’ the Master agreed. This was an interesting idea which he might have the good fortune to try on the Doctor some day. He turned away from his broken self.

‘Come, Brigadier; we must find that TARDIS console.’

‘Wait,’ Koschei said.

The Master turned back.

‘What I said about disconnecting me...?’

The Master nodded.

‘It wasn’t just a warning.’

The Master blinked, the implication obvious. ‘Are you sure?’

‘Would you choose to live in such a state?’

The Master had never seen such pleading in a Time Lord’s look before. Had it been anyone else, it would have been amusing. But this was still somehow himself. A version of himself who was as lost as Chesterton had been.

The Master nodded slowly as Ian and the Brigadier turned away.

CHAPTER 20

This time when they entered the reactor room there was a large metallic sphere sitting amidst the copper ribs. The Brigadier assumed that this must be the thing these people travelled between worlds in.

The Master quickly ascended to the upper level and circled round to the door. Inside, numerous cables were connected up to a lonely TARDIS console. The Master recognised the configuration of the controls immediately – it was the one he himself had used until he returned from Exarius after his attempt to take control of the superweapon there.

The Master quickly ducked under the console and opened a panel. Inside, among all the skeins of wiring and glowing instruments, a short crystalline fuse was held by two small clamps. The Master pulled it free and slipped into his pocket. He paused a moment. ‘Just to be on the safe side...’ He opened another panel and removed what Lethbridge-Stewart recognised as a dematerialisation circuit, just like the one the Doctor was always trying to repair.

‘Right then, Brigadier. Your Earth is now safe. From these people, if not from me...’ He hesitated. ‘The demat box. I left the demat box in their lab!’

‘Then they could still use that?’ The Brigadier’s morale dipped. All this might have been for nothing.

‘Maybe... but we know where they’re going and we can follow their transferences.’

‘Thank heavens for small mercies,’ the Brigadier muttered as the Master left the sphere.

Immediately a volley of gunshots echoed through the reactor hall from somewhere above them. Lethbridge-Stewart caught a glimpse of a bald head poking out from a higher catwalk and recognised the distinguished features instantly.

‘It’s Boucher!’

‘Boucher?’ Ian echoed. Lethbridge-Stewart saw a new sparkle in his eyes, and wasn’t sure he liked it at all. ‘You two get out of here. I have a score to settle with him.’

Before the Brigadier could tell him not to be so stupid, Ian slipped out of cover and opened fire on Boucher. Boucher ducked back as sparks erupted all around his head. Realising that it would be all for nothing if he wasted

the opportunity Ian was giving him, the Brigadier followed the Master as he swung himself below the catwalk.

Boucher fired again as he registered a flicker of movement in another part of the hall below. He ceased firing when he realised that there was only a narrow lip of steel catwalk there and that the escaped prisoners had swung down underneath it. He admired that, was surprised that a man from as decadent a military as the Brigadier would take such a risk. He wished he could have known him on the same side.

The question now was where were they going? He jogged around to the fire escape door. If he took several steps at a time, he might just beat them to the exit.

Ian saw Boucher bolt for the door above, and scrambled atop the metal sphere. It was high enough to take a shot at Boucher.

The shot took Boucher in the shoulder, pushing him through the door and forcing him to drop his own AK-47. Driven by a huge adrenaline rush Ian launched himself from the top of the transference sphere.

When he caught the edge of the catwalk Boucher has been on, it felt as if his arms were going to pop out of their sockets, but somehow he pulled himself up. The Kalashnikov dropped to the floor far below, but he didn't dare try to catch it. Once he was safely on the catwalk, Ian checked the pistol that he had lifted from the Brigadier in the confusion. It was fully loaded.

Afraid and excited, jubilant and horrified, Ian burst through the door, keeping low. Boucher was on his knees on the far side of a curved landing, white-faced and leaning against the wall for support.

He didn't look quite the ruthless killer now, but then Ian didn't feel quite the ruthless killer himself. Still, this was the man who had killed Barbara. . .

Ian felt his finger squeeze the trigger; saw Boucher jack-knife, with blood exploding from his chest and bubbling up through his mouth. He heard the thud of the lifeless body as it fell onto the concrete floor. He felt as if he'd killed a part of himself.

He didn't even realise that he'd blinked, until his eyelids flicked open and he saw that Boucher was still kneeling there, rubbing at the swelling side of his face. Ian shook his head at the thought of the image he had conjured. Killing in cold blood would just be carrying on Boucher's work.

Ian lowered the gun slightly, but not much; he didn't want to risk being overpowered if Boucher was faking his weakness.

'Get up,' he said disgustedly. 'Killing you would be a mercy, and I'm not feeling particularly merciful today.'

Boucher stood shakily, glaring defiantly back. 'Too weak to go through with it and still you try to sound tough,' he scoffed.

'I agree,' the Master's voice said from behind Ian.

Ian hesitated; if he turned, Boucher might jump him, but if not the Master might have a gun on him right now. A shot boomed past Ian, then another. Boucher was knocked off his feet by an impact in the chest, the second shot blasting a red and grey splash from the side of his head before he had even hit the ground. The Master stepped past a stunned Ian and gave the body a cursory glance to make certain he was dead.

'You're a fool, Mr Chesterton; this man was your enemy.'

'He was unarmed,' Ian snapped back, as much troubled by his own intention to murder Boucher as by the Master's having actually done it. He only hoped the Master didn't realise that.

The Master shrugged. 'That's his business. The enemy is the enemy, whether they happen to have a gun in hand at a given moment or not. It's the thought that counts, so to speak.'

Ian had heard that argument before, many times. It didn't ring any more true now than it had in the past.

'You can thank me later. For now I suggest we rejoin the Brigadier and meet Barbara at my TARDIS.'

Ian looked at him disbelievingly. 'She's alive?'

'Your late friend there brought her here on the day you believed she died.'

Ian tried to gather his thoughts into some semblance of order. The Master had said 'you believed,' not 'we believed'...

'You knew Barbara was still alive and you didn't tell me?'

The Master nodded slightly. 'The autopsy proved it was a different woman; someone missing from a homeless shelter, I believe.'

Ian tried to think of something to say. 'Why didn't you tell me?'

'You didn't ask.'

Ian could feel the anger swell, and was powerless to stop it. A small voice in his mind screamed out that he should be elated at the news, but it was too small to be heard.

'If I had told you, would you have rushed in here?'

'Of course not! They might have killed her to prevent us interfering.'

He'd almost lost her. Had lost her. Hadn't he lost her?

'Precisely. In seeking revenge, our work progressed so much faster. That would not have happened if you had been concerned for your wife's safety.' He voiced the thought that had occurred to him at the time: 'The man is most dangerous who cares about only one thing.'

'And if they'd killed her?'

The Master looked surprised that Ian had even asked that question. ‘What difference would it have made? As far as you were concerned she was already dead, so you could scarcely lose her more. At least this way you have a nice bonus to return with. Congratulations.’

Ian had no idea what he was supposed to say to that. No idea how to convey the pain he had gone through, because some feelings just weren’t designed for words to handle adequately.

‘You seem very angry that the love of your life has been spared.’

It wasn’t like that at all, Ian wanted to say, but he didn’t know how he was supposed to explain to this unfeeling alien. Besides, he could see in the Master’s dark eyes that the Time Lord knew exactly what he was angry about.

‘Is this what thrills you – using and discarding people, because someone once did it to you?’

‘Using and discarding, yes,’ the Master admitted. ‘As for my past. . . whatever gives you that idea?’

‘People often pass on their experiences. A man beaten by his father will beat his own children. A woman betrayed in love will betray others. And someone who was used for another’s purpose will use others.’

‘Then you should be more wary of your friend the Doctor. He is the one the Time Lords like to send to do their dirty work, after all.’

‘And what about Koschei? I imagine there was a Koschei in our universe once? One who was sent places by his masters?’

The Master’s eyes hooded over. ‘There was once. He. . . died. Long ago.’

‘Died?’ Ian echoed. Now he was on to something, he was sure. ‘As a result of doing his masters’ bidding? Perhaps he was betrayed by them?’

The Master laughed. ‘What a fertile imagination you have, Mr Chesterton! Now really. . . don’t you think it’s time we left? I’m sure your wife will be most anxious to see you again.’

Ian found the Brigadier waiting when they reached the incongruous shape of the Rolls-Royce that was parked outside. The Master opened its driver’s door with a strangely shaped key and ushered them inside.

‘Don’t we need the reactor to get home?’ the Brigadier asked.

The Master harrumphed. ‘The people here were basing their travel on incomplete knowledge of the accidental effect on an incomplete TARDIS, Brigadier. With a fully functional TARDIS, and knowing the phase shift, we can travel relatively easily.’

‘Oh, I see.’

‘Really?’

‘No.’

The Brigadier went inside with a sigh. Ian followed, pushed past him, and was overjoyed to see Barbara standing there. She looked as astonished, relieved, and ecstatic as he felt. Ian hugged Barbara closer than he'd held anyone, or so it felt. He knew he should try to make light of things, and prove to her – and the others – that he could still take the bad times as well as the rest of them, but. . .

He couldn't. He had simply grown too accustomed to her presence, and then too shaken by her loss. And so he held her, face buried in her hair, because he wanted to see, hear, feel and smell the life in her; and because he was half afraid that, if he let her go, he might lose her again. Apart from that he was shaking so much with relief that he wasn't entirely sure he could stand on his own.

In a strange way, the rest of the world vanished for Ian just as it had when he'd encountered her apparent death. There was nothing except Barbara herself. Here the focus of his remaining senses was brightly alive and that brightness was what drowned out everything around it.

CHAPTER 21

Marianne surveyed the *Redoubt's* control room for a moment, then turned back to the duty officer. Being stuck in this world was hardly a problem – it was much more hospitable than what remained of her own world. This vessel should be of interest to some of the powers here – enough to buy her freedom at least.

'Make preparations to leave port. Have us disconnected from the IDPF net. We should be magnetically neutral by now.' She didn't want the military being able to track her so easily once the *Redoubt* submerged.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Yu,' she called.

She knew he wouldn't have much choice but to respond, if he didn't want to be left here. He was anything but a field commander and so wouldn't be able to easily persuade the others to follow him. It was a mild compensation that the situation meant her tormentor would obey her commands, but one she appreciated nonetheless.

'Get down to the missile compartment and run a full check on the integrated monitoring board. I want to be sure all our missiles are fully operational.' She stayed him momentarily with a raised hand. 'Oh, and remember, though, that I retain the firing keys.'

'That isn't wise,' Yu complained, with a false note of concern. His heavy features contorted into a frown. 'If anything happens to you –'

'If anything happens to me,' she snapped back, 'the fire control staff in the SMCS will not obey you; so you had better hope that my safety is assured.'

It was a pity that only Yu would see her true strengths and worth, but perhaps that would be enough. He had been her most vocal opponent, so it was only fitting that he should be the one she dazzled with her success.

She so much hoped that someone could see her strengths.

Just once would be enough.

Mike Yates had been expecting to encounter at least some resistance, either in bureaucratic form from the naval authorities or in combat from the intruders. There had been nothing, however, and for this he was rather pleased.

Commodore Bennetts hung up the phone he been talking on. 'We're ready to go. I've got a skeleton crew mustered for the *Redoubt*.'

'Thank you, sir,' Yates said. 'How are you going to get them on board?'
'I don't think we are. They've slipped their moorings. We're too late.'

'There's a small field medical kit in that cupboard,' the Master said.

Barbara nodded, and went to fetch it. Ian looked around. It was quite a while since he had been inside a TARDIS and he wasn't sure whether the minor differences he noted between this and the Doctor's machine were the result of hazy memories or the fact that it was a different model.

The white walls with their circular indentations were the same, as was the immensely complex hexagonal console. There was a chrome cylinder at the heart of the console, however, rather than the illuminated transparent one that he remembered. Where the interior door was in the Doctor's ship, here there were a pair of strange cylinders and beyond was a T-junction with a row of computer banks along one wall. There was just a wall where the Doctor had used to keep the fault-locator equipment.

Perhaps every TARDIS was different, according to their owners. The Doctor's TARDIS had been full of knick-knacks that were as out of place as the Doctor was, whereas this one seemed entirely purposeful and highly efficient. In some way he couldn't quite put his finger on, the Doctor's ship had become a welcoming home, but this TARDIS was unmistakably just a soulless machine.

'Where are we going?' Barbara asked.

'The demat box also leaves a temporal trace. It has been used, so we shall follow it to its source. We should materialise within ten yards of its arrival point.' He turned to the two men. 'If we're going where I expect we're going, we'd best be prepared. Come with me.'

Ian was reluctant to leave Barbara, but she nodded for him to go with the others. He sometimes wished he had some of her sense. The Master led the Brigadier and Ian deeper into his TARDIS. It reminded Ian of his own exploration of the Doctor's machine, when they were searching for the source of the fault that had rendered them all unconscious after leaving Skaro. In place of the uniform hum that filled the Doctor's TARDIS, the interior of this one sounded somehow harsher. Tiny clicks and whirs were barely audible beneath the hum.

'Here we are,' the Master said finally, and opened a pair of doors.

Inside was a grey metal room with equally grey metal racks. Every rack was filled with weapons – or, in some cases, unrecognisable gadgets which Ian assumed were weapons. There were swords, flintlocks, revolvers, automatic pistols, rifles, submachine guns, grenades, laser pistols, disruptors. . .

'I never saw an armoury aboard the Doctor's TARDIS.'

'I'm not surprised,' the Master muttered.

* * *

Mike Yates stood on the quayside, watching as HMS *Redoubt* pulled away from the U-shaped IDPF platform that floated out in the loch. Bennetts was whistling up some anti-submarine warfare aircraft from around the coast, but had admitted that once it submerged it would be almost impossible to find. Unless the IDPF net had failed, which Bennetts hadn't considered a good option either.

The young surgeon-lieutenant, Harry Sullivan, stood beside him with Benton.

'If we could only board, somehow,' Yates wished aloud.

Benton pointed along the quay. 'There's a little motorboat there, sir. I dunno how fast it is, but maybe we could make it?'

'Just the three of us?'

Yates considered it. All they really had to do was stop the submarine from submerging until the Commodore could do his stuff. Even three men might manage that.

'The loch is several miles long,' Harry said enthusiastically. 'They don't submerge until they reach the end of it, so we could board by one of the emergency escape hatches.'

Yates liked that kind of thinking.

'Let's go.'

There was a smooth rushing sound that rose and fell in pitch, and a thick bulkhead door materialised in the curved wall of the *Redoubt's* inner hull.

The occupants of the Master's TARDIS scrutinised the picture on the scanner screen. Metal pipes and thick cables zigzagged between the two rows of eight broad cylinders that filled the room from floor to ceiling. Further conduits were wrapped around each cylinder, like ivy wrapping an oak tree, with electrical junction boxes in place of birds' nests, and a large circular inspection hatch was jutting out. It was almost the image of a mechanical fairy forest, with every trunk made of metal and plastic instead of living wood.

The whole area was painted white, though there was lettering and signs in every colour, and black pipes ran through the room.

Each of the hatches on the sides of the cylinders had a number stencilled on it, but Barbara was more concerned by the yellow and black radiation warning symbol that was also stencilled on each hatch.

'Where are we?'

'I could be wrong,' Ian began, 'but I'd guess we're aboard HMS *Redoubt*. These look like the sort of tubes that would hold the missiles.'

'Quite right, Chesterton,' the Brigadier agreed. 'We should get out there straight away, before they can do any more harm with it.'

The Master rapidly manipulated some switches, removed a small segment of the console with a single button and slipped it into his pocket. He checked the gun he had brought from the armoury, a large SiG automatic pistol that was only a few years ahead of its time.

‘Shall we?’ he said, opening the doors.

‘Try not to fire that thing if you can avoid it.’

‘Getting squeamish, Brigadier? This is enemy territory.’

‘With a mostly unarmed crew. And if a shot goes wild, you could probably set off a missile.’

‘Don’t,’ the Master said patiently, ‘be ridiculous. The equipment is quite sturdy.’

He led the way out of the TARDIS. The missile compartment was empty for the moment, perhaps because they hadn’t expected to need to crew the submarine fully for a trip out to sea. The Brigadier followed, then Ian. Barbara came out too.

‘What should I do?’ Barbara asked.

The Master indicated a ladder nearby, which led up to a hatch set into the ceiling.

‘Climb out onto the outer hull and signal for help. The open hatch should also delay Ms Kyle from attempting to submerge.’

The Brigadier nodded. ‘If this is Faslane, Yates should be keeping a pretty close watch.’

As the Brigadier was speaking, Ian was locating a locker with some escape gear. He helped Barbara put on a bulky life jacket and handed her a flare pistol.

‘Since it’s in an emergency locker, I expect the flare is some sort of distress signal. Someone ought to take notice of it.’

He spoke quickly, not wanting to give himself time to wonder if it would be the last time he spoke to her. It wasn’t that he expected her to fall victim again, but he knew that he might. The thought of her experiencing the same pain that he had felt at her death was more than he thought he could bear.

He’d just have to make sure that he spared her that by getting out of this alive.

‘Barbara,’ he said, halting her at the foot of the ladder. As she turned, he caught her eye, wishing that just for this one moment the two of them could be telepathic, hoping that she could read what he felt. ‘We’ll both be fine.’

She looked into his eyes and he could see the confidence she had, both in herself and in him. He could see his feelings mirrored. He could see that the strain would get to her soon, knew that she would not hold back the tears when it did. At that moment, he wanted to kiss her more than anything.

‘I know,’ she said.

* * *

The Master made his way forward, ignoring the crew. None of them paid him any attention, since they obviously didn't realise that he could be an intruder who hadn't arrived from the power station. Foolish complacency, but quite handy nevertheless. Marianne, however, would recognise him, as might whoever had accompanied her from the Moon.

He had no doubt at all that she was the one who had transferred across, but he also had no way of knowing who – if anyone – had come with her. He hoped it was Yu. That would be... amusing.

He found the demat box left on a small chart table and smashed it with the butt of his gun. It was really most satisfying to end someone's plans and he wondered if this was the vicarious thrill the Doctor got out of interfering with his.

But the noise had been a mistake. A burly figure came out of a door on the far side – the gorilla-like frame of Yu was instantly recognisable. Yu pulled a gun and risked a shot, but the Time Lord sidestepped with catlike reflexes.

The Master then hesitated. The missile compartment was filled with unnatural red-lit shadows, which made discerning the presence of his enemy more difficult. It was like picking his way through the deep woods, watching for threats in the looming shadows.

The mechanisms that took care of the missiles in their launch tubes hummed to themselves, occasionally creaking or ticking. The Master paused, studying the precise pattern of the sounds. An astute man would load or cock his gun under cover of the mechanical noises, and he wanted to be sure he could tell the difference.

He moved along the metal path with the ingrained stealth of a hunting cat, covering every pool of shadow as it appeared before him. There were plenty of sounds of movement from elsewhere in the submarine, echoing along the cramped passageways, but nothing from nearby. He began to wonder if perhaps there was no one left in this section.

As if to answer his thought, shots boomed deafeningly up through the floor grates, striking sparks from the interior bulkheads. A pressure dial by the Master's head cracked open, forcing him to dodge aside.

Yu saw the Master evade the steam jet by coming into his line of fire. He squeezed the trigger of his pistol and a shot spanged off something metal. He tried again, but the gun was empty.

Hot sparks were blasting from the bulkhead wall beside his head as the Master returned fire and Yu was driven back into the companionway. He hurried along, reloading as he went. The Master's appearance here couldn't be coincidence. Somehow Kyle must have conspired with him.

So be it, then. Maybe if he threatened her, the Master would drop his guard. It was about time her ambitions got the better of her, Yu reflected. He skidded to a halt in the unexpected brightness of the caged lamps in the SMCS. Marianne looked up as he approached.

Yu hesitated; just long enough to let Marianne turn and see who it was who had killed her. . . She deserved that, at least. The look on her face should be amusing, he thought. And yet, when she turned, she wore an expression of smug surprise, rather than fear. It was as if she had just received a gift. She smiled sweetly and glanced pointedly behind him.

‘I think you’re aiming the wrong way.’

As if such a trick was going to fool him. He merely sneered in reply and sighted his gun, supporting his gun hand with his left in a formal stance. Then came the distraction; a blurry movement in his peripheral vision, of a catlike and powerful figure stepping out behind him. There was a slight click from no more than six or seven feet behind. He turned with what he felt was agonising slowness, to see the Master holding an unfamiliar gun on him.

‘At least one of us is,’ the Master agreed. ‘Might I suggest we decide among ourselves who it is?’

Marianne tried to maintain her amused detachment, but at this angle it was hard to tell whether the Master was aiming at her or Yu. From a dark and forgotten corner of her mind, uncertainty stirred, as it did when least wanted, needed or expected.

The worst of it was that she didn’t dare take her VP70 off Yu, who certainly was aiming at her. If only she had attached the plastic stock, she could switch the pistol to fire a three-round burst that might be able to hit both men. . .

Yu felt the sweat chill on his temple and it was both uncomfortable and distracting. Now he had two guns trained on him, and his own Desert Eagle felt very heavy.

The Master watched the two humans size up each other and himself, while he kept the SiG levelled at a point between them. He could easily move to shoot either of them. He could have used his tissue-compression eliminator or laser pistol, but the former took effect slowly enough for his victim to possibly get off a return shot before death, while at this range the latter would slice into the surroundings, possibly detonating a warhead or causing the reactor to explode. The Master wouldn’t hesitate to do just that if it was the only way to eliminate his enemies, but it would not be a sufficiently exciting gamble.

All or nothing, life or death; the only true gamble.

* * *

Marianne Kyle tried to read what she could in the Master's eyes. He did not seem to be aiming at her. Should she trust in love or hate, in any empathy there might be between her and the Master, against the hatred and hostile intent she knew Yu had always borne her? Or were Yu and herself now just two members of the Conclave against a common enemy who sought vengeance on both of them? It wasn't supposed to come to something as earthy as this. Her words to the Conclave should have been enough to eliminate Yu when she chose her moment.

Yu watched the glance that Kyle threw the Master. Perhaps his deception was faked and they both intended to kill him? Or was she afraid that the Master would aim at her?

She had always been a schemer who manipulated others to her own ends. But she had also always been ruthless in her advancement in the Conclave. She was more driven than anyone he had met. All the same, she was one of his own: a human of the Conclave. Surely there was a bond of trust between them, and rules of engagement for infighting?

She had never played by those rules, though, had she? Never even followed the most basic tenets. Why should he expect her to do so now, especially when the other opponent was her new favourite?

The Master could almost feel the change in the two humans' moods. The moment they made the choice had come.

Yu moved, raising his Desert Eagle.

Marianne shifted position, the VP70 coming up.

The Master slipped off the safety on his SiG.

A deafening bang echoed throughout the chamber.

Yu's gun drooped, an instant before he fell heavily to the deck, a small hole placed neatly in the centre of his forehead. A larger and messier one was at the back. Marianne let out her breath and looked at the Master, who hadn't fired. His SIG was aimed at her head.

'If my hands were free, I would applaud, Ms Kyle,' he said admiringly. 'As it is, I'd put down the gun, if I were you.'

She froze. 'I thought you trusted me.'

The Master laughed uproariously. 'Like Barron or Grant? I trusted in your rivalry with Yu, Ms Kyle, not the goodness of your heart.'

Human weaknesses were so predictable, and yet she seemed stunned that he had seen through her.

'By any means necessary, Marianne – a watchword to live by. But you did not have the will to set aside your differences with Yu against your common enemy.'

Marianne lowered her VP70. 'Then I have nothing further to say,' she said icily. 'Except goodbye.'

Blurred motion from behind him signalled some kind of attack and the Master reacted instantly. He grabbed the crewman's wrist, hurling him over his shoulder, and then shot him as he landed. There was a clang from above and the Master leapt out into the companionway to see Marianne framed against the sky as she climbed out of one of the emergency hatches.

For a moment, Kyle was dead. She was a clear target and the Master certainly had no qualms about killing anyone who got in his way. But there were fates worse than death. Exile to a foreign world, left with nothing, hunted by everyone. . . He chuckled. Yes, that would be an amusing fate for her. And who know, perhaps she might even trouble the Doctor. That was the deciding factor.

Marianne vanished and the Master heard a faint splash.

'You didn't kill her?' Ian asked.

He and Lethbridge-Stewart had come into the SMCS, and the Brigadier was taking the missile firing keys from the controls before joining the Master and Ian in the companionway.

'That would be a mercy, and I didn't feel merciful.' He stared levelly at Ian.

'Nor do I,' Lethbridge-Stewart added, turning his gun on to the Master. 'You're going back to prison.'

The Master was impressed. The Brigadier was becoming almost ruthless.

'As you say, I –'

He leapt backward through the bulkhead door and slammed it shut, trapping them in the companionway. He bolted through the SMCS and back into the missile compartment. His TARDIS was just on the other side of the monitoring board and he knew he would make it before the Brigadier showed up. He skidded round the next launch tube. . . And stopped.

Sergeant Benton and Captain Yates were covering him with Sterlings, while a naval officer the Master didn't recognise descended from the hatch behind them.

'Going somewhere?' Yates asked.

'Apparently not,' the Master admitted, less than overjoyed. He raised his hands.

Footsteps behind him heralded the Brigadier's arrival. 'Perhaps you'd be good enough to hand over the key to your TARDIS.' It wasn't a question.

'Perhaps.' The Master slowly dipped one hand into his pocket – it wouldn't do to have Yates or Benton put a burst through both his hearts – and pulled

out the little section he had removed from the console earlier. 'But I think not.' He pressed the single button on it.

Immediately, the groaning of displaced molecules filled the air and his TARDIS faded away.

Lethbridge-Stewart reached out angrily to the space where it had been. 'What have you done?'

'Sent my TARDIS to a safe place, Brigadier.' He gave a mocking smile. 'Come now, you can hardly have expected me to hand time-travel over to humanity – the Doctor would never forgive me!'

Only the waxen eyes of a few scruffy old mannequins looked on at the source of the sudden unearthly noise. The lights that should have illuminated the sculpted witches and inquisitors were dark, but some light seeped into the wrecked crypt through holes in what used to be its ceiling.

The stone floor was thick with chunks of rubble, but none larger than a hatbox, until the noise began. Then a rough-hewn altar stone coalesced out of the darkness.

Outside, Olive Hawthorn paused as she passed the ruined church and listened carefully. She was certain she had heard something, but the sound didn't repeat itself and a quick cantrip didn't reveal any dark powers at work. Deciding that it must have been the wind howling through one of the holes in the ruined church, she went on her way.

Benton took Carol Bell a tray of lunch, but she hardly looked at it.

'Don't you want to be fit and healthy to greet your brother?' Benton asked.

Bell looked up from her seat in the office. 'He's all right?'

'Beresford found him this morning. His captors all ran out with the others; like Carswell.'

Bell collapsed into a sobbing mass, but Benton could see that they were more joyful tears. He was glad he had volunteered to tell her; somehow he had felt he owed it to her after being the one who caught her.

'It's all right, love,' he murmured.

EPILOGUE

The UNIT lab was empty at this time of night, but not silent. A strained mechanical groaning filled the air, seeping out into the rest of the building. Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart heard it quite clearly in his office and it was much more interesting to him than filling out yet more reports in triplicate. It was about time the Doctor returned, he thought, as he left his office.

The sound was coming from the lab, of course, and he got there just as the Doctor's police box solidified with a resounding thud. Jo Grant looked out of the door cautiously. Seeing the Brigadier, she grinned and walked over to him.

'Oh no,' the Doctor grumbled, much to Lethbridge-Stewart's chagrin, as he followed her out. He tossed his Ulster on to a nearby chair. 'This won't do at all. . . Here to greet us, Brigadier?'

'UNIT does function in you absence, Doctor. Is something wrong?'

'I had set the co-ordinates for Metebelis Three, in the Acteon group. I mean, since the TARDIS was working, I thought we could just pop over there on our way home.' He looked around disconsolately. 'It seems I was a little overconfident.'

'But the TARDIS did work,' Jo said. 'At least you've made some progress.'

The Doctor absently scratched his chin. 'I don't think so, Jo. No, I'm afraid that our trip was a con-trick from the beginning.'

'The Time Lords?'

'The Time Lords,' he confirmed with a nod. 'They tricked me into doing their dirty work for them again, then sent me right back here without so much as a thank you.'

Lethbridge-Stewart couldn't help but feel sorry for his old friend's hopes being dashed. However, with luck it meant that the Doctor would be able to get back to work here and arrest the remaining infiltrators with the detection equipment the Master had mentioned.

"'You can't fight City Hall,'" isn't that how the line goes?'

'Something like that,' the Doctor admitted. 'Well, Brigadier, did anything untoward happen in our absence?'

Lethbridge-Stewart had been looking forward to telling the Doctor all about the recent events and the offer of a transfer he had given to lieutenant Sullivan

when his tour at Faslane was over. In the end, he restricted himself to a casual grin.

Just routine, Doctor. Just routine.'