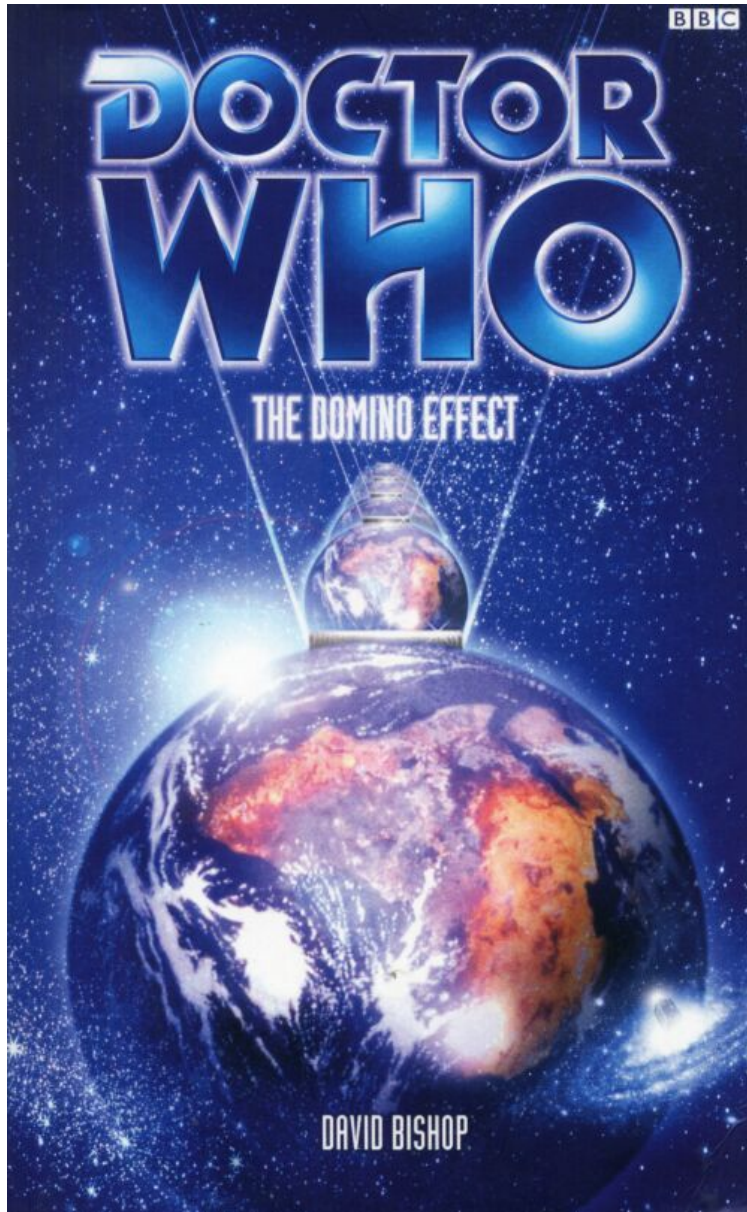


BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE DOMINO EFFECT



DAVID BISHOP

The TARDIS lands in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, during Easter 2003. The city is almost at a standstill, its public services close to collapse and its people terrorised by a bombing campaign.

Within hours one of the Doctor's friends is caught in a deadly explosion, while another appears on television confessing to the murder of twelve people. The TARDIS is stolen by forces intent on learning its secrets. When the Doctor tries to investigate, his efforts are hampered by crippling chest pains.

Someone is manipulating events to suppress humanity's development – but how and why? The trail leads to London where a cabal pushes the world ever closer to catastrophe. Who is the prisoner being held in the Tower of London? Could he or she hold the key to saving mankind?

The Doctor must choose between saving his friends or saving Earth in the past, present and future. But the closer he gets to the truth, the worse his condition becomes. . .

This is another in the series of original adventures for the Eighth Doctor.

The Domino Effect

David Bishop

DOCTOR WHO: THE DOMINO EFFECT

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Published by BBC Worldwide Ltd

Woodlands, 80 Wood Lane

London W12 0TT

First published 2003

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Original series broadcast on the BBC

Format © BBC 1963

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ISBN 0 563 53869 4

Cover imaging by Black Sheep, copyright © BBC 2002

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Mackays of Chatham

Cover printed by Belmont Press Ltd, Northampton

For my father,
Clement John Bishop,
for teaching me right and wrong.

The only thing new in the world
is the history you don't know.

– *Harry S. Truman, 1884–1972*

Domino Effect: *n.* a single event that leads to many
similar events elsewhere as a chain reaction.

Contents

Thursday, April 17, 2003	2
France, 1819	66
Friday, April 18, 2003	72
America, 1884	101
Saturday, April 19, 2003	104
Germany, 1941	122
Sunday, April 20, 2003	126
England, 1732	171
Sunday, April 20, 2003	173
About the Author	195
Acknowledgements	196

Thursday, April 17, 2003

Anji could feel herself floating. Reality swam around her, swirling in the darkness. Her entire body seemed to be weightless, suspended from the effects of gravity. Where am I? She couldn't seem to remember anything. She knew her own name, the telephone number at her flat, the face of the man who sold the Evening Standard outside her office building every weekday afternoon. But she couldn't seem to remember how she'd got here – or even where here was.

Perhaps it was a sensory deprivation tank. Anji remembered Dave persuading her to skive off work for a day because he had something special planned. He wanted to re-enact some 1980s brat-pack film, but with events relocated from Chicago to London. They visited the Tate Gallery, walked along the Embankment eating ice creams, had lunch at the Oxo Tower Brasserie on the South Bank and went to a New Age spa near Waterloo for a sensory deprivation session.

Anji had been particularly dubious about the last activity. She thrived on the stress and excitement of her job in the City. Half an hour lying in a box filled with salt water was not her idea of a good time. But Dave had looked so hurt when she refused to take part. Anji realised she was being selfish. He had gone to a lot of trouble arranging everything. She eventually agreed to try the experience, still protesting it wasn't her thing.

She had stepped carefully into the tank and tried hard to relax, letting the saline solution support her. Once the lid was closed, darkness was absolute. Mellow New Age music was piped into the tank, all gently clinking chimes and breathy voices sighing. If I hear one note of Enya, I am out of here, Anji had thought to herself. She closed her eyes and tried to clear her mind of stress.

She had drifted off, forgetting herself or her own existence. It was startling when she realised the music had stopped. How long had she been unaware? Was this what it was like being dead – eternally afloat in darkness, entombed inside a black box, never to see the light again?

The thought of being buried alive had sent a shiver down Anji's spine. She felt panic welling up within. Got to get out. Got to get out! She had tried to sit up suddenly, but the heavy solution around her compensated, sucking her torso downwards. Anji recalled thrashing around, banging her arms against the sides of the tanks, crying out for help.

After what seemed like forever, the lid had been lifted back to reveal Dave's concerned face. He helped her clamber out and did his best to soothe her. She took a shower to remove excess salt and changed back into her clothes, still shivering at the memory of being trapped in the darkness. The incident had cast a pall over the rest of the day. Anji's mood was not helped when Dave admitted he had chosen the sensory deprivation tanks as a way of replicating what it would be like to float in outer space, one of his many obsessions. He had got a punch in the arm for that.

Dave was dead now, of course. Anji knew that as soon as she thought of him, but she refused to stop remembering her lover. That would be denying their time together. Anji was determined not to let it happen.

All these thoughts and feelings and memories wandered through her mind before Anji realised she must be asleep. She was in that strange interregnum between dreaming and waking, on the edge of both states but still capable of embracing either one. She chose to wake up. Her body jerked in response as it forgot how to be weightless.

Anji opened her eyes but could see only darkness. A great weight was holding her immobile. She could shift one hand and her left leg slightly, but that triggered movement above her. Rocks crashed down against rock, showering her face with dust. She was entombed in the darkness, helpless, trapped. And this time she knew Dave would not be coming to lift open the lid and rescue her. She was buried alive.

Calm down, Anji told herself. It was all she could do to stop from screaming. Anji didn't think of herself as prone to petty phobias. She was a strong, independent woman who could fend for herself in almost any situation. But this wasn't just any situation.

Deep breaths, try taking deep breaths. She was aware of a heavy stone pressing against her ribs, constricting her breathing. That could become a problem if she was trapped here for long. A vague memory from some first aid course stirred, something about shallow breathing having dangerous side effects. Not as dangerous as being buried alive beneath tonnes of rubble, Anji thought. That probably edged out shallow breathing in the not-good-for-you

stakes.

Anji tried to remember how she had come to be in this position. She could recall arguing with someone and Fitz leaving and then –

Fitz! That jolted her. Suddenly she remembered a scrambled catalogue of experiences: first meeting him in 2001, the ice cold of Siberia forming frost on his stubble, the pair of them talking in a café, waiting for the Doctor –

The Doctor. The TARDIS. Edinburgh. It all came thudding back now, a sprawl of memory and realisation. Anji gave herself a moment to let everything settle into place before reviewing the data. She almost smiled – reviewing the data. That's what she used to do for a living. Analyse data, predict trends, trade in what the future might bring. That was the life she had been trying to get back to when the day began. . .

Anji was first to emerge from the Police Public Call Box, its usually conspicuous markings for once blending into the surroundings. They had materialised in front of the Assembly Rooms, a sturdy stone building in Edinburgh's New Town area. Anji thought the name wonderfully incongruous for a place more than two hundred years old. In the Scottish capital, that sort of age was commonplace for buildings. The centre of Edinburgh was crowded with similar structures, stately constructions of weathered stone.

Fitz was next out of the TARDIS, clad in his usual shabby garb. He was a man who could crumple any clothing just by looking at it. Let him wear a garment and all the technology on the planet could not put a crease back into it. Anji thought of suggesting Fitz wear linen suits, so his natural louche-ness found a fabric that crumpling might enhance for once. But April in Edinburgh was not the place to adopt a lighter wardrobe. It might be Spring, but the cool air still bit at the back of the throat.

Last to emerge was the Doctor. He locked the tall blue box and surveyed their surroundings. His eye was caught by the George Street Tearooms, which stood across the road from the TARDIS. 'That looks like the perfect meeting place. Shall I see you in there at midday, Fitz?'

The younger man shrugged and nodded, hands jammed into his trouser pockets. Anji remembered him staring unhappily at her. 'Are you sure you want to leave? I mean, here? Now?'

'For the last time, yes,' Anji had replied. 'We've landed in Edinburgh instead of London, but it's close enough. I want to go home, Fitz. I've had enough. I've seen enough. I just want to get back to reality, back to my own

life.'

'But how do you know this is your reality?' Fitz protested. 'I mean, just because the TARDIS says this is your time and your world, that doesn't guarantee it's safe, does it? Doctor – can't you talk to her? Doctor?'

But the Doctor hadn't replied. He was leaning back against the TARDIS, panting for breath as if he had just run up several flights of stairs. His face was ashen, all colour draining from the features. One hand was pressed against his chest, fingers splayed over the rich fabric of his waistcoat. 'I'm sorry, I – I just felt a little dizzy. Just need to – to catch my – my breath.'

No! Something's wrong!

The Doctor's dizzy spell had worried Anji. His health had been an issue for some time but he recently declared himself restored to full fitness. What had triggered this sudden faintness? 'Look, Doctor, if you need me to stay...'

'No,' he replied, sadness in his voice. 'I'll be all right. Just a flutter of the hearts, I expect. These things take time to settle in.' He stood up straight, his face alive with its usual curiosity again. 'What do you plan to do?'

'An old colleague of mine, Mitch, got head-hunted for a job up here. I thought I might look him up, surprise him. After that I guess I'll get a flight down to London, see if my job's still open.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Look after yourself, Anji. It may take a while to adjust to life in one place and one time, but if anyone can do that, you can.' He bounded forward and gave her a sudden hug. 'Don't forget us!'

'As if I could!' she replied, touched by his words. The Doctor stepped back, allowing Fitz to say his goodbyes.

'Sure there's nothing you need from the TARDIS?' he asked.

'I'm sure.'

'Right,' Fitz replied. He was started to sniff a lot and his eyes seemed to be filling with tears. 'Well, err, look after yourself.' He lurched awkwardly towards her then stopped, unsure of himself.

Finally Anji stepped forward and gave him a hug. 'Look after the Doctor,' she whispered in his ear. 'He needs somebody watching out for him.'

'I will,' Fitz replied huskily.

She stepped back again. 'Well, goodbye. If you're ever back in the early twenty-first century...'

'We'll pop in for tea,' the Doctor replied.

Anji nodded, swivelled on her heels and began walking away. I'll never see them again, she had thought to herself sadly.

Extract from the statement of Fitzgerald Kreiner, made on Thursday, April 17, 2003 AD, in the presence of Major W. M. Hastings:

I arrived in Edinburgh about nine o'clock this morning with two travelling companions – a man called the Doctor and a woman, Anji Kapoor. How we arrived isn't really that important, is it? The three of us had been travelling together for some time and only recently returned to Britain. Anji had been wanting to come home for some time.

I thought the Doctor would try to convince Anji to continue travelling with us, but he was feeling faint and she was determined to go. The Doctor and I decided to split up. We agreed to meet in the tearooms at noon. I guess Anji must have still been there when we made the arrangement, because of what happened later – it's all getting jumbled in my head.

The child smiled. 'Attend me!' Its authoritative voice belied such a young body.

The adjutant stepped forward reverently, not daring to look into the child's face. To gaze upon its features was not forbidden, but few were able to see that aspect without losing control, such was the awe inspired by the Oracle.

The adjutant was called Rameau, though few ever used his given name. He had served the Oracle for years beyond memory, but the adjutant's hair was still black and his fleshy features betrayed few signs of age. The adjutant's powerful physique was clad in a simple uniform of black and gold.

Rameau bowed before the Oracle, his eyes fixed on the black metal floor of the chamber. 'How may I serve you, O Harbinger?'

'I sense an anomaly arriving,' the child announced. 'It is an artefact, a paradoxical anachronism.'

'Where is this, Seer of Seers?'

'In the city of the Scots, near the shadow of the castle. By the place of assemblies shall it be found. A tall, blue box.'

'What should be done about this – anomaly?'

The child gurgled happily. 'Bring it to me. I want to play with it.'

'As you command,' the adjutant whispered fervently. He stood and slowly retreated from the presence of the Oracle. Behind him he sensed the doors

opening without aid or assistance. He let his feet guide him out of the chamber. Only when the doors had closed did he dare raise his eyes. 'As you command.'

Hannah Baxter opened the doors of the Edinburgh Central Library's reference department to find an impatient man waiting outside. He wore a dark green frock coat over a white shirt, cream waistcoat and trousers. His curling brown hair touched his shoulders, an unusual length. But most striking of all were his eyes, gleaming with intelligence and a twinkle of mischief.

'Is this the reference department?' he asked, bustling past Hannah.

'Yes. What do you want, Mr. . . ?'

'Doctor. Everyone just calls me the Doctor.'

'All right, Doctor – what do you want?' Hannah asked. She was used to eccentric types, the reference library seemed to attract them. She had worked here for eighteen months and was now entrusted with opening up. The older librarians preferred arriving at a more dignified hour, as befitted ladies of a certain age.

Hannah was still seen as the young upstart, transferred to the reference department after six months in fiction. She was only twenty-six, at least twenty years younger than anyone else in the department. Her strawberry-blonde hair and oval face were in stark contrast to the greying locks and wrinkled features of the senior librarians.

The Doctor stood by the information desk, tapping a finger against his pursed lips. 'What do I want? That's a very good question. . .'

Hannah sighed and finished fixing open the department's doors. A cold breeze blew up the marble staircase from the library's main entrance. Hannah rubbed her arms through the fabric of her dark brown dress and retreated into the warmth of the department.

The Doctor was wandering between the wooden desks and chairs for visitors, looking around the room's high domed ceiling, book-lined walls and golden cherubs set into ornate plasterwork. 'I'm doing some research into recent history. I've only just arrived in Edinburgh this morning and there's something wrong with my ship.'

'Your ship?'

'Yes, the TARDIS.'

'Foreign vessel, is it?'

The Doctor smiled. 'You could say that. Anyway, I need to cross-check data on recent Earth history.' He swayed slightly on his feet. 'Perhaps some medical reference texts too. I've been getting dizzy spells since I arrived. Best if I looked up the symptoms and see what they may be trying to tell me.'

Hannah pointed at the nearest chair. 'Why don't you sit down there?'

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

I wandered off down the hill towards Leith, in search of a traditional fish supper. I was surprised by how slow moving the traffic seemed to be in Edinburgh. There were a lot of antique cars on the roads. I guess retro must be the in-thing this year? Even the clothes people wore looked old fashioned.

I finally found a chip van down by the docks, cooking with real dripping too. The smell of it! I could feel my arteries hardening just from a sniff. The strange thing was the chippie taking the old money – pounds, shillings and pence. I know banks in Scotland issue their own notes but I never thought I'd see half a crown again. It took some persuading to get him to take my English money.

The chip van gave me my supper wrapped in newspaper – just like when I was growing up. I started the long trek back up towards George Street, eating my cod and chips as I walked.

Mitch had been positively gleeful when he told Anji about the posh corner office he would be occupying at his new company, on the corner of George Street and St Andrew's Square. He bragged about its state-of-the-art technology and cutting-edge design. But when Anji reached the address he had given her, the site was just an old junkyard.

'This can't be right,' Anji muttered to herself. 'Maybe he means another corner?' She walked slowly around the square, perusing the gleaming brass plaques on the front of each building, searching for Mitch's company. It was conspicuous by its absence. Stranger still were the passing vehicles – all chunky gas guzzlers, not a Smart Car in site.

Having done a full circuit, Anji did what any woman would do – she decided to ask a passerby for help. It had always annoyed her when men refused to ask for help with directions, as if asking for assistance was a sign of weakness or stupidity. To Anji, the reverse was true.

Anji approached an elderly gentleman carrying a rolled umbrella. 'Excuse me, I was wondering if you could help? I'm looking for Tartan Futures Trad-

ing, they're supposed to be in a building on this corner.'

The man seemed startled by her words and even more startled by her appearance. He peered at her worriedly. 'What do you want? I don't give money to beggars!' he said brusquely.

'I'm not a beggar,' Anji said, somewhat baffled. 'I just want directions.'

'I can't help you!' the man replied and brushed past her rudely.

'Thanks very much!' she shouted after him sarcastically. Anji looked around. A young woman in a prim cream dress was approaching. Maybe she would be more helpful. 'Excuse me, I'm trying to find...'

But the woman just gave Anji a look of perplexed amazement and walked round her. The next woman did the same. Finally, Anji stepped in front of two middle-aged businessmen in old-fashioned double-breasted suits.

'Excuse me, I'm sorry to disturb you,' she began forcefully. 'I don't want any money and I won't delay you for more than a minute. I am simply trying to find the offices of Tartan Futures Trading and I was told the company was based on this corner. Can you help me at all?'

The two men looked her up and down, their faces amazed. 'Did you know they could speak English, Jim?' one said.

'News to me, kin,' the other replied. 'I didn't know they let her kind in the country. Look – she's dressed up as a man!'

Anji blushed red with anger. She had overcome a lot working in the City, but rarely experienced such blatant racism. If anything, jibes about her gender had been more of a problem. She overcame that by out-working and out-achieving the Neanderthals responsible for keeping such attitudes alive. That was fine in the office, but here...

She looked down at her clothes. What did they mean, saying she was dressed like a man? Beneath a thick coat she wore a casual top and trousers, the sort of clothes favoured by female traders on dress-down days at the office.

Jim leered at her. 'I bet she goes like a steam train. What do you say?'

Iain dragged his friend aside. 'Leave her – you'd probably catch something foreign off her.' He spat on the footpath and then walked away, followed by his friend.

Anji had stood there fuming, her fists clenching and unclenching. She became conscious of other people on the street, staring at her. Parts of Scotland still had problems with racism among a tiny minority, but that was true of

most places. Surely it shouldn't be a problem in a cultured city like Edinburgh?

(Anji wiggled her toes, trying to keep her circulation moving. She realised now the encounter with the two men had shaken her more than she could admit at the time, blinding her to the surrounding evidence – the clothes, the old-fashioned cars, the attitudes. She should have realised sooner that things were badly amiss. Maybe then she wouldn't be trapped in this rubble. . .)

Anji decided to stop searching for Mitch. She'd email him when she got home and give him hell about sending her the wrong address. He had a knack for getting the basics of life wrong, despite being a financial genius.

Anji decided the sooner she got back to her old life in London, the better. What was the best way to get home? She recalled Mitch boasting about how he could fly to London in under an hour, quicker than most commuters could get to work. Head for the airport, that was the solution.

She saw a pair of policemen approaching. 'Excuse me,' she said politely, 'could you tell me how to get to the airport?'

The policemen looked at each other, then back at Anji, still silent.

'What is with everyone in this town?' she asked rhetorically. 'Hello? Do – you – speak – English?'

'Yes,' the taller of the two policemen finally replied. 'Of course we speak English. Where did you think you were?'

'I was beginning to wonder,' Anji said. 'I'm trying to get to the airport.'

'Airport?'

'I want to fly to London.'

'Fly?'

'Yes.'

'To London?'

'Yes!'

The two policemen began laughing, gently at first, and then with increasing vigour. Anji lost patience with them. 'What is so bloody amusing?' she demanded.

'I'm sorry, but I never heard of anybody flying to London,' said the taller policeman. 'Not unless they're in the Royal Flying Corps!' That set the two men laughing again. Anji just rolled her eyes and walked away down the hill towards Princes Street. It seemed everyone was determined to frustrate her. Fine. If she couldn't fly to London, she could get the train. Trains had been

running between London and Scotland for more than a century. Presumably they still were!

Anji did her best to ignore the stunned reactions and muttered remarks of other pedestrians. She could not wait to get out of this city.

Beneath the Houses of Parliament in London were a multitude of secret rooms, all linked by a web of tunnels stretching out under city streets. Some of these rooms were locked away, remnants of forgotten wars. But at the centre of this maze was a quinquelateral room, known as the Star Chamber.

The five-sided space was punctuated by five tall platforms, each with an ornately carved wooded chair atop it. Set into the rear of each platform was a flight of stairs from the floor to the top of the dais. Gas lamps hung from the ceiling near each platform. A beam of light shone down on the centre of the room, illuminating a five-pointed star on the floor. The pentacle was the symbol of the Star Chamber, a reflection of its ritualistic origins. Behind the platforms stood doors leading to five less imposing rooms, individual living quarters.

For hundreds of years, the Service had operated behind the scenes, ensuring the safety of the Empire. Once it had been called the Secret Service – now it was known as the Security Service, although its true agenda remained secret as ever. The Service's activities were never reported, its status remained a matter of mystery and conjecture. But even within the ranks of the Service, a greater secret was hidden.

The Service was directed and controlled by the Star Chamber – a cabal of five men drawn from the top echelons of English life. They were products of the establishment and yet thought of themselves as superior to even the monarch. This quintet controlled every aspect of life in the Empire. It had the power of life and death over millions of citizens, yet was answerable to none.

The adjutant hurried into the centre of the room and nodded to five middle-aged men gathered there. Each wore a uniform similar to that of the adjutant, but with less gold trim, as befitted their lesser status. These were the footmen, each individually selected to serve the needs of his master. The five men scurried away to the private quarters. The Star Chamber was being called to order.

Elswit was first to emerge from his private quarters, a hunched and bitter man of seventy. Harris was next. He was the newest member of the five, hav-

ing only joined a year ago, following the death of his predecessor. Harris was just fifty-two and the youngest by some years. Only twice before had a man under sixty taken a seat here. A place on the Star Chamber was a job for life, death offering the only retirement. Arnold and Bridges emerged from their private quarters at the same time. Arnold had silver hair and cunning, his gaze sliding around the room for some clue about this summoning. Bridges was obese and expended much effort getting himself up the steps to his seat.

Last to emerge was the Pentarch, as was customary. He strode from his private quarters, his back straight and strong. His face was inquisitive, with a black moustache and greying hair. Unlike the others, his background was military intelligence, not the Service. But he had proved an able member during his many years as one of the five, shrewd and cunning. He had been a ruthless leader since taking charge three years ago.

He took the steps to his podium two at a time. Once atop it, he nodded to the others and they sat as one. When settled, he looked down at the adjutant. 'Why have we been summoned? We five are not due to meet for several hours yet.' His words were clipped and precise, like everything he did.

The adjutant stood in the centre of the room. 'Yes, Lord Pentarch. But the Oracle has spoken.'

That brought a murmur from four of the five members. The Pentarch silenced them with a gesture. 'Really? What does the Oracle have to say?'

'The prophecy is not clear, but...'

'When is the prophecy ever clear? It speaks in riddles,' Harris muttered. A glare from the Pentarch commanded him to be quiet.

'Continue, please.'

'Yes, my lord.' The adjutant related the words spoken by the Oracle, then waited. Just as he was the servant of the Oracle, so he was the agency by which the cabal's commands were communicated to the outside world. In practice, the adjutant had men he sent forth to carry out those commands. It was better he stayed close by, lest the Oracle require him.

The job of interpreting the Oracle's prophecies fell to the Pentarch. He mused for several minutes before speaking, aware of his associates waiting impatiently. 'Our prophet tells us a dangerous new threat to the Empire has arisen in Edinburgh. Perhaps some terrorist organisation has landed its agents within our Scottish territories, perhaps a foreign power intent on supplying arms to underground dissidents. This tall blue box obviously contains

weapons that could be used against the people of Britain. It must be confiscated and brought here for examination.'

The Pentarch looked around the room at the other four. All were nodding sagely, even the normally antagonistic Harris. 'Adjutant, convey this order to our forces in Edinburgh immediately. I want this blue box brought to us before midnight. Britannia rules eternal!'

'Britannia rules eternal!' The adjutant saluted before marching from the Star Chamber. He would be hard pressed to achieve the order, but that was often the case. Ultimately, satisfying the Oracle was all he cared about. The whims and wishes of the Star Chamber were another matter. . .

By 10.30 the reference department was starting to fill up with visitors. Hannah nodded to several of the regulars, mostly retired lecturers from the university researching in impenetrable tomes about obscure topics.

The Doctor had collected a pile of leather-bound volumes on his desk, each drawn from a different subsection of the department. Military history, science, nature, politics, maritime, weather, sport. . . Hannah could discern no pattern to the knowledge he was seeking. The Doctor appeared to be getting increasingly frustrated at not finding what he wanted.

He stood up and approached her, carrying three encyclopaedia volumes. 'There's something missing, something significant, but I can't put my finger on it,' he muttered, as much to himself as to Hannah. 'An absence. . .'

Hannah took the three books from him and waited for the next outlandish request. The other librarians had refused to have anything to do with this visitor, happily leaving him in Hannah's care. The Doctor looked about the room.

'It's not what's here, it's what isn't,' he said cryptically.

Hannah nodded without understanding.

The Doctor peered at her. 'Have you noticed the absences? Anomalies, something awry?'

'Not really.' She began walking towards the rear of the department, taking the volumes back to their shelves. The Doctor followed her. Hannah slotted the books back into place. 'Look, I'm not sure that we have what. . .'. She noticed the Doctor was rocking slowly from side to side, his eyelids fluttering, his breathing shallow. 'Doctor? Doctor!'

He fell forward into her arms. 'Something. . . at the back of my mind. . .'. Then he was gone, as if a light had been switched off inside him.

What's happening?

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

I remember being amused by the headlines in the newspaper, thinking it must have been a joke to keep the punters amused. It said Edinburgh had been chosen to host the Empire Games in 2006 – I thought they changed the name to the Commonwealth Games ages ago? And there was a story about the King sailing off for a tour of the colonies. Did Queen Elizabeth abdicate after her golden jubilee in 2002? There were articles about power shortages and plans for a general strike on Easter Sunday and changes in the gold standard. It made me quite nostalgic.

My attention was caught by this woman on the other side of the road. I've always had an eye for the ladies and I saw this striking woman coming out of an auction house. She had the most amazing red hair I've ever seen, it shone like copper in the sunshine. She was wearing a close-buttoned jacket and skirt made from a rich emerald fabric – very striking with her hair colour. She came out on to the street and looked right at me. It was almost as if she knew me. She seemed quite startled. I waved to her but she disappeared into a crowd of people. A man came running out of the auction house, calling for the police. I realised time was pressing, so I carried on up the hill towards New Town.

[Notation on statement by an unknown hand: Kreiner's first slip – admitting he avoided contact with the police before the bombing.]

Edinburgh's main railway station was in chaos when Anji arrived. Her temper had cooled and she was better able to take in her surroundings. People in old-fashioned clothes stood in long queues or huddled together in groups. Most of the men were wearing hats and double-breasted suits. All the women wore dresses, usually with floral prints, and clutched leather handbags. Children looked like miniature adults, boys clad in suits and girls in pretty dresses.

The station itself was a throwback to days gone by. Steam billowed from trains as they arrived and departed. Grime and fumes hung in the air. A man with an impenetrable accent was hawking black and white newspapers, while a cigarette kiosk was doing a roaring trade. Instead of digital screens announcing the movements of trains, a cluster of men ran back and forth in front of a large display like an old cricket scoreboard, moving wooden signs hung on little hooks.

The most striking thing was the queues. The station had just a handful of windows selling tickets to throngs of people, all waiting patiently in line. Anji grabbed a passing porter by the sleeve of his uniform. 'Excuse me, where are the automatic ticket machines? I don't want to have to queue.'

'Automatic ticket machines? What are you on about?' The porter peered at her curiously. 'I know you're a long way from home, but you'll have to get in line like the rest.'

Anji pulled a slim wallet from her pocket and extracted her credit card. The expiry date read 06/03 – it was still valid, just. 'I've got a credit card, if that's any help?'

The porter snorted derisively and scurried away.

The Doctor must have got it wrong, Anji decided. This couldn't be 2003. It was more like the 1940s or 1950s. She decided to buy a newspaper. Anji walked to a paper seller, digging in her pockets for change. She was not sure her coins were still legal tender. 'Paper please.'

'Thruppence,' the seller replied, handing her a newspaper.

'Really? That's cheap – must be a special promotion.' Anji handed him a fifty pence piece and began walking away.

'Hey, none of your foreign money here!'

Anji stopped and turned around slowly. She had had just about enough. 'What did you say?'

'I said I don't want your funny money – either give me proper coins or give me back the paper!' He held out his hand, the fifty pence piece lying heads up. Queen Elizabeth II's profile was obvious on the coin.

'That is proper money!' Anji replied.

'You want a paper, then you give me something with the King's head on it or else stop wasting my time!' He slapped the fifty pence into Anji's hands and grabbed his newspaper back. She just had time to read the date on the front page: April 17, 2003.

If this was some sort of elaborate hoax, it was incredibly well constructed. Everything fitted together, everything appeared absolutely authentic. But that couldn't be right, could it? Edinburgh in the year 2003 should be a bustling, dynamic city. Instead it seemed to be trapped in the past, as if the past fifty years hadn't happened.

Anji decided to make one last effort to escape this perverse, backwards place. She went to the front of one of the long, snaking queues. 'Excuse me, I just want to ask –' she began.

But the family waiting at the front of the queue began hurling abuse at her, demanding she go to the back of the line.

‘But I just want –’

It didn’t matter what Anji wanted. By now the rest of those in line had become, aware of her apparent queue-jumping. The shouts and taunts got louder and louder. Anji admitted defeat and walked to the back of the queue, enduring their suspicious looks and mutterings about the colour of her skin.

At last she reached the end of the queue and joined it. By her count there were thirty-seven people ahead of her and no sign of any movement. Anji watched the slow progress of each transaction. She’d be lucky to get a ticket before midday.

Hannah gently slapped the Doctor’s face. He was stretched out on the reference department floor, a volume of *Who’s Who* under his head. His collapse had attracted the attention of the other librarians and several visitors, but none had been able to revive him. Hannah did her best to make him comfortable and sat beside him, waiting. She had thought of calling an ambulance, but it would take more than an hour to get there through the city’s tortuous congestion. Best to wait and see if he revived of his own accord.

‘Doctor? Wake up. . .’ she whispered. ‘Doctor?’

His eyes snapped open and stared at her. ‘Perhaps history itself has become corrupted?’ He sat upright and gasped for air, filling his lungs with the musty smell of old books and bindings. ‘What do you think?’

Hannah smiled and shrugged. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘No, no – you wouldn’t.’ He looked around him. ‘What time is it?’

‘About eleven thirty in the morning.’

‘No, what year?’

‘2003.’

‘The twenty-first century.’ He nodded slowly.

Hannah was fast coming to the conclusion the Doctor was probably an escapee from some asylum. Perhaps she should be calling the police, rather than an ambulance. But despite the Doctor’s wild ramblings, she was not frightened of him. If he were mad, it was a benign lunacy.

‘Do you believe there’s something wrong? That something is amiss that you can’t explain or express?’ he asked, his intense eyes fixed on her face.

‘Maybe. . .’ she ventured.

‘Almost a repression of reality,’ the Doctor said.

Hannah leaned close to the Doctor and whispered in his ear. 'Do you believe in science?'

'Yes.'

'There are others, people like you,' Hannah whispered. 'They're having a meeting tonight, if you are interested...'

The Doctor nodded, his eyes watching the rest of the room. Nobody else was within hearing distance of them. 'Tell me more.'

'If you want to come, meet me outside the library at six. But be careful no one follows you.' Hannah stood up, replacing the *Who's Who* on its proper shelf. She raised her voice back to normal speaking volume. 'Well, if you're feeling better...'

The Doctor stood up too. 'Yes, I am. You've been most helpful, Miss...?'

'Baxter. Hannah Baxter.'

He shook her hand and smiled. 'Now I must dash, or I will miss a luncheon appointment with my travelling companion.'

It was 11.30 when Anji finally got to the front of the queue. The man on the other side of the counter looked weary and worn down, his crimson uniform a mass of creases. 'You really ought to get some automatic ticket machines fitted,' she said, slapping her credit card down. 'First class to London please.'

'Automatic what?'

'Never mind. A first-class ticket to London, please.'

'That's thirty-two pounds and seven shillings.'

'Fine. Put it on my card.'

'Sorry?'

Anji pushed her credit card across the counter. 'Just put it on my card, please. I haven't got much cash with me.'

The ticket seller picked up the rectangle of plastic and looked at it. 'What am I supposed to do with this?'

'It's a credit card! You charge things to it!'

The ticket seller turned to his corpulent, ruddy-faced supervisor. 'Jimmy, come and have a look at this!' Jimmy reluctantly got out of his chair and approached the counter.

'What is it?'

'This woman's given me a – what did you call it?'

'Credit card,' Anji replied, trying hard not to lose her temper.

'A credit card. Wants to use it to pay for her ticket.'

Jimmy turned the platinum card over in his podgy fingers, reading the text on it out loud. 'American Express? What's that?'

'The name of the company that issues the card,' Anji said. Behind her the queue was becoming impatient. 'Look, can we get on with this? I'd like to get back to London today if possible.'

"Anji Kapoor – member since 98." What's that mean?'

'Anji Kapoor is my name. That's how long I've had the card.'

Jimmy shrugged and handed it back to the ticket seller. 'Well, I haven't had notification from head office about any credit cards, so we can't accept that. Sorry.' He went back to his desk, chuckling. 'Credit cards? What will they think of next?'

The ticket seller pushed the card across the counter to Anji. 'Sorry, but you'll just have to pay cash.'

'Fine!' Anji exclaimed, reclaiming her card and shoving it into her pocket. She dug out a handful of coins and notes. 'How much is a second class fare?'

'Fifteen pounds and eight shillings.'

Anji began counting out the cash, but was interrupted by the ticket seller.

'But we don't let your kind travel in second class.'

'What?'

'You'll have to go in the luggage compartment. Decent people don't like to travel with darkies. They complain about the smell.' The ticket seller's tone was almost conversational, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. When Anji encountered institutional racism, it was either delivered with the bluster of a bully or the embarrassment of somebody who knows they are in the wrong. The ticket seller was simply stating a fact.

Anji couldn't believe what she was hearing. 'They complain about what?'

'The smell. Everyone knows your kind smells funny. Must be all that curry you eat.' The ticket seller smiled at her blithely.

'I'll have you know I smell a lot better than most of the people in this queue and I very rarely eat curry!' Anji stormed.

'That's as may be, but those are the rules. It's the luggage compartment or nothing if you want to travel on the London train.'

'Why didn't you tell me that when I tried to buy a first-class ticket?'

'I thought maybe you were with one of them maharajahs that come over from the colonies on tour.'

'The colonies? Maharajahs? What century are you living in?'

The queue behind Anji was getting ever more restive. A few voices started muttering and demanding she move on. The ticket seller noticed this.

‘Look, do you want this ticket or not?’

‘Fine! How much?’

‘Five and six for luggage.’

Anji slapped a handful of notes on the counter. ‘Take it out of that!’

The ticket seller picked up one of the notes between his right thumb and forefinger, as if it were soiled. ‘What’s this?’

‘A five pound note.’

‘Maybe where you come from –’

Anji finally snapped. ‘I’m from London, all right? Not from the colonies! Not from the sub-continent! Not from the land where the elephants roam or little boys are called Sabu, all right? I’m from bloody London!’

‘Keep your voice down, or I’ll have to call –’

‘I don’t care! I don’t want to keep my voice down. All morning I’ve been insulted, sneered at and made to feel like an alien! Well, I’ve had enough. I just want to get out of this squalid, parochial, racist hole and get back to my home in London. Is that too much to ask? Is it?’

The ticket seller pushed Anji’s cash back across the counter to her. ‘I’m sorry, but I can only accept legal tender.’

‘You’re refusing to take my money?’

‘Yes. Now, if you’d move along, I’ve got paying customers to serve.’ The ticket seller looked past Anji to the family waiting behind her. A man shoved Anji out of the way so he could get to the counter.

‘Do you mind?’ Anji demanded. ‘I was being served!’

‘Not any more, you’re not,’ the man replied. ‘Now get out of our way before I call the police!’ He turned back to the ticket seller. ‘Bloody savages.’

The order had been received from London by telegraph after ten o’clock, but such was the bureaucracy within the Security Service that it took another hour before five men with a truck and lifting equipment were despatched. Harry Kennedy was in charge of the team. He sat in the front of the truck beside the driver, Stuart Grimes, while the other men were relegated to the back of the vehicle. Kennedy read the telegram out loud.

‘“Collect tall blue box this inst. Stop. Standing outside Assembly Rooms. Stop. Transport with all haste to HQ. Stop.” Tall blue box – what do they mean by that?’ he asked, despairingly.

'I don't know,' Grimes agreed. 'That could be anything.'

'Yes, and you know who'll get it in the neck if we get this wrong? Me!' Kennedy sighed and slipped the order back beneath the bulldog clip on his clipboard. 'It'd be easier if they gave us the top copy of orders, instead of having to make do with the bottom carbon!'

Grimes was leaning forward over the steering wheel of the truck, his chin resting on one hand. Not even midday and already the centre of Edinburgh was jammed with traffic. Finally the route ahead cleared and they were able to roll forward. Kennedy was still moaning.

'Why does everything have to be in triplicate anyway? Entire department is run on paperwork. We've got more clerks than we've got people doing the job, it's ludicrous!'

Grimes nodded. He had once made a delivery to the files depot at Dalkeith. Three massive warehouses and each one filled with documents nobody ever referred to. He recalled asking for a copy of his medical records from the doctor once. The physician had just laughed and pointed at a filing cabinet that could no longer be closed, so full had it become. Grimes sometimes thought the whole world would one day drown under a sea of pinks and blues and whites. Of course, you'd have to fill out the appropriate forms first in triplicate before you'd be permitted to drown. . .

Anji sat on a public bench beneath the Scott Monument while trying to decide what to do next.

Something was very wrong. She could attribute the clothes everyone wore to some retro fashion craze. She could understand if Mitch's company had moved to a different office elsewhere in Edinburgh. She could even put some anomalies down to the fact this was Scotland, not England.

But something else was wrong here, something more fundamental. The ignorance of twenty-first century fixtures like credit cards, the use of Imperial notes and coins, the attitude of people – it was like they had never seen an Asian woman before.

Anji realised she had no choice. She would have to go back to the Doctor and Fitz. By now they had no doubt discovered the same anomalies. If anyone could deduce what had gone wrong, it was the Doctor. Right now Anji needed to see a friendly face and Fitz was the perfect candidate. Fitz and the Doctor were meeting around midday at the George Street Tearooms, she remembered.

Anji looked up at a clock on a nearby building. It would soon be twelve. She started walking back towards the TARDIS. So much for going home. Anji hoped she could still find her two friends. She didn't like to contemplate life in this place if they had already gone.

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

I got to the tearooms just after twelve, but the Doctor hadn't arrived yet so I got a table near the door. The place was full of matronly women, all having genteel cups of tea and picking at three-tiered silver stands laden with cakes and sandwiches. I ordered a pot of tea and waited. Looking round the tearooms, I saw the red-haired woman again – she was sitting at a table near the back, trying to blend in. I was intrigued by the strange look she gave me earlier, so I went over to introduce myself.

I couldn't help asking her if we'd ever met before. I mentioned our earlier, brief encounter. I won't tell you her reply but it was neither ladylike nor polite. Let's just say she invited me to go forth and multiply in no uncertain terms. It was quite disconcerting. Normally I can charm most women but this one seemed quite impervious. So I went back to my table. I don't need to be told twice.

I had almost finished my pot of tea when I realised the woman had slipped out. Thinking back, I'm not even sure she paid for her drink.

[Notation: This is the first of two weak attempts by Kreiner to create other possible suspects for the bombing. None of the other survivors recall this woman's presence in the tearooms, despite the very specific and distinctive description given by Kreiner. This is obviously a false lead being planted by the suspect to muddy the waters.]

Anji was walking along George Street towards the TARDIS when she was knocked over by a red-haired woman running across the road.

'Watch where you're going!' the woman said angrily. Her eyes widened when she looked at down Anji, sprawled on the ground. The redhead spun away and rushed off.

Anji just sat on the footpath gasping for breath, winded by the fall. By the time she got back to her feet and readied a stinging rebuke, the woman had disappeared. That was the last straw for Anji. She stomped across the road, narrowly avoiding a heavy truck as it lurched to a halt. Anji could see Fitz was sitting at a table just inside the front door of the tearooms.

‘Are you listening to me?’ Kennedy demanded.

‘What now?’ Grimes grunted in response.

‘Pull over – we’re there!’

Grimes parked the truck outside the Assembly Rooms. Standing among the massive columns in front of the building was a tall blue box. Across the top were painted familiar words. Kennedy had already climbed down from the truck’s cab and approached the object.

‘It’s just a police phone box!’ he said.

Grimes and the others joined him. ‘What do they want with that at HQ?’ the driver asked. He gestured along George Street where two similar police boxes were visible.

‘Ours not to reason why,’ Kennedy replied. ‘Ours is to do what we’re told.’

It needed all five of the men to get the police box on to the back of the truck, even with the aid of lifting equipment. But the task was still swiftly accomplished. Kennedy looked at his fob watch with satisfaction. ‘If we look sharpish, we might get this on the next train down to HQ. What do you say?’

The other men nodded in agreement. The trio of helpers clambered into the back of the truck and Grimes returned to the driver’s seat. Kennedy was just joining him in the cab when a breathless man with long, curling hair ran up to the truck, waving his arms.

‘Hold up, Grimes – I think he wants to ask us something,’ Kennedy said. He leaned out of the truck window. ‘Yes, sir – what can I do for you?’

‘Where – are you – going – with my – TARDIS?’ the man gasped.

‘Tardis? What are you talking about?’

The man pointed at the back of the truck. ‘That blue box – it belongs to me. Where are you taking it?’

Kennedy smiled. ‘Ahh, so you’re saying that it’s your property, are you?’

‘Yes!’

Kennedy picked up his clipboard and began filling out a form. ‘Good, then I’ll be able to give you a receipt.’

‘A receipt? For what?’

‘For your box. Got to complete all the necessary paperwork, otherwise there’ll be hell to pay when we get back to the office.’ Kennedy paused, his fountain pen poised above the paper. ‘Name?’

‘Sorry?’

‘Your name.’

‘Smith. Dr John Smith.’

‘Address?’

‘Look, I’m sorry, but I can’t see the need for this. You’ve got my –’

‘Address,’ Kennedy said insistently.

‘I’ve only just arrived in Edinburgh this morning.’

‘No fixed abode,’ Kennedy muttered as he wrote this down.

‘Please, if you just unload my property. . .’

‘Can’t do that I’m afraid.’ Kennedy signed and dated the bottom section of the form, then ripped off the third copy and thrust it out of the truck window. ‘Here’s your receipt.’

‘I don’t want a receipt, I want my property back.’

‘Told you, can’t do that – orders is orders.’ Kennedy waved the receipt in front of the Doctor. ‘I’d advise you to take this receipt, sir. Without it you’ll have a very hard time proving the property is yours.’

‘Fine!’ The man snatched the receipt. ‘Now, will you please unload my property. You have no right to take it and I demand that you –’

‘Oh, you demand, do you?’ Kennedy turned to the driver. ‘Get this one, Grimes, he demands!’

The driver shook his head and tutted. ‘You don’t want to be demanding, sir. People who go around demanding get themselves into all sorts of trouble.’

The Doctor nodded at this advice. ‘Yes, I have a habit of doing that.’ He dug into his many pockets. ‘Now, what would it take to persuade you and your friends to forget all about these orders and unload my property? I promise to remove it immediately if it is causing an obstruction. I just need to collect my friends from the tearooms across the road and we can go. . .’

Kennedy just shook his head. ‘I’d like to help you, Dr Smith, I really would. But these orders can’t be countermanded, rescinded or ignored. When the Service gives an order, you jump to it – or face the consequences.’ He nodded to the driver, who got the truck started.

‘No, please, you don’t understand,’ the Doctor said.

Kennedy gave him a mock salute. ‘Good afternoon to you, sir!’ With that the truck rumbled off.

‘No, wait!’ the Doctor protested. ‘You’ve got to listen to me!’

But Grimes continued driving away. The three men in the back of the truck waved cheerfully to the Doctor. He stood outside the Assembly Rooms and glanced across the road, but the tearooms were obscured by a bus. The Doctor hesitated, then ran after the truck.

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

I was surprised when Anji arrived at the tearooms. She came to my table and promptly burst into tears. It took a few minutes for her to calm down while we waited for the Doctor. He was late, I guess he got held up somewhere. I glanced over at the table where the redhead had been sitting. There was a heavysset man there, fiddling with the clasp of a Gladstone bag. He seemed nervous and kept looking at his watch.

[Notation: This is the second attempt by Kreiner to create other possible suspects for the bombing.]

Anji tried to tell Fitz about her recent experiences, but he seemed distracted by a man at another table. ‘Sorry, what were you saying?’ Fitz eventually said. Before Anji could reply, a middle-aged man dressed in gaudy tartan trousers and waistcoat approached their table.

‘I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to ask you to leave,’ he announced, his effeminate voice loud enough for the entire tearooms to hear. The gentle murmur of conversation around them died away.

‘Sorry?’ Fitz said.

‘I’m the manager. I’m going to have to ask you to leave.’

‘Why?’

‘Your presence is upsetting my customers.’

Anji looked up at the manager. His puffy face was perspiring, two of three chins wobbling. Thin red lines veined his bulbous nose. An incongruous thatch of carrot red hair sat atop his head. He looked ridiculous, flustered and angry.

Fitz slouched back in his seat. ‘I’m glad you came over, I was going to order us another pot of tea. Could you get it?’

‘Don’t you take that tone with me, young man! I am the owner of this establishment and I am not used to be spoken to like a common lackey.’

‘You should get out more,’ Fitz replied.

‘Fitz, don’t antagonise him!’ Anji hissed under her breath.

‘No, Anji – I want to know what it is about our presence here that is so upsetting to the good matrons of Edinburgh.’

‘If you must know, it’s your servant. We do not permit servants to sit with their masters. You can stay if you moderate your behaviour, sir, but your servant must wait outside.’

Anji jumped to her feet. ‘What did you just say?’

The manager blanched at being confronted so directly but stood his ground. 'We don't want your kind here. I've asked you politely to leave. If you do not do so, I will be forced to call the police.'

'Is that so? Fine. Call the police,' Anji snarled. 'I'd like to see you justify your outright racism before the law. I've had just about enough of people like you, and I've certainly had enough of this bloody city!'

Now it was Fitz's turn to play peacemaker. 'Anji, don't antagonise him!'

'Shut up, Fitz!' She turned back to the manager. 'I am not his servant – I am his friend!'

'I don't care to know the details of your sordid relationship, all I –'

'Sordid? Sordid!'

Anji was fast approaching apoplexy. Fitz stepped between her and the manager. 'Look, let's all just calm down –'

'I don't want to calm down!' Anji protested.

'– and see if we can't sort out this misunderstanding. Now, what exactly seems to be the problem here, Mr – err?'

'Clooney, Francis Clooney,' the manager replied. 'I'm sorry but I've had complaints from the other patrons. Also, she is improperly dressed. Ladies wear gowns in public. They do not dress in such an indecent manner.'

'Indecent? Indecent!' Anji saw red at this point. She began shouting and ranting at the manager, hardly noticing when Fitz stepped out of the tearooms, calling after somebody.

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

Anji was still arguing with the manager when the heavy-set man brushed past me on his way out. I noticed he had left his bag behind. I stepped out into the street, calling to him. He started running away. I was about to follow when the bomb exploded.

Anji had just been preparing to punch the manager when light and sound exploded around her. After that, all was darkness. . .

Extract from a statement by Bobby Lucas, security guard at Waverley Railway Station, Edinburgh:

It must have been about the time that bomb went off up on George Street. I'd been at work since eight, keeping an eye on the trains leaving and arriving at the station – watching out for passengers acting suspiciously or suspect packages. You can't be too careful these days, can you?

Anyway, like I said, it can't have been long after twelve when the truck arrived. Harry Kennedy was in charge and a right jobsworth he is too. Usually stinks of whisky, especially after midday. I think he gets his dinner from a bottle, if you get my drift. But for once he was sober – at least, as sober as he gets. Anyway, he was in charge of this special cargo for the next train going south. His office had called ahead and said to expect it, so I was waiting outside the gates to let the truck in.

It arrived and Kennedy shouted the orders while three men and the driver unloaded a tall blue box from the back of the truck. I asked Kennedy what it was for but he just tapped the side of his nose. Told me it was top secret. He talks a lot of tosh, that man, too full of his own importance. Anyway, they loaded the box into the train and drove off.

It wasn't long after that the man appeared. He must have been running after the truck, he was out of breath. I don't think he was well, either. He was swaying on his feet and kept hold of the gate to stop from falling over.

What did he look like? About my age, maybe older? He had a thin face, and long hair. You noticed that right away, it touched his collar like my wife's. He wore a long green jacket that reached his knees. Very odd all round, I remember thinking, and probably trouble.

He started demanding to know where the truck had gone, what they had done with his property – that's what he called the blue box, his property. I remember now, he also called it 'the ship', like it was a boat! I asked him what he wanted with the box but he wouldn't say.

By that point the train was pulling out of the station so I couldn't see any harm in telling him. I said the box was inside the train just leaving. That hit him hard, like he'd been punched in the stomach.

He started whispering something, I couldn't really make out what he was saying. Something about being too late, the time being wrong. I couldn't figure out what he meant. He asked me where the train was going, so I told him – London. Then, and this was the funniest part, he got this pink slip of paper out of his hand and tried to show it to me. He said he had a receipt! I started laughing then, couldn't help myself! The look on his face was so funny, like a little boy who's had his train set taken away on Christmas morning. The best part was when the wind blew his receipt away.

What did he do after that? I'm not sure. He was mumbling about fits, but he wasn't making much sense by then – not that he ever had really. It was about then we heard the explosion. All the pigeons round the station flew

into the air at once. I just about jumped out of my skin, it was so loud. The noise shocked him too, let me tell you. He ran off up the hill towards George Street. That was the last I saw of him.

I think I could probably give you a good description of him. But you'll need a good artist to get those eyes right. Mad eyes, he had, seemed to stare right into you. Put the chills down my spine. You catch him and I'll be happy to identify him.

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

Once the smoke began to clear, I stood up and walked towards the tearooms. My first concern was for Anji. I started pulling at the rubble, hoping to find her, but it looked hopeless. I yelled for Anji but got no reply. I thought she must be dead or buried in the explosion. Then I remembered the man who had been fiddling with the Gladstone bag – that must have been the bomb. He was probably setting the timer. If I couldn't help Anji, maybe I could still catch the man responsible. I could just see him in the distance, so I ran after him. Everybody else was running towards the bombsite, I was running away from it.

[Notation: Kreiner admits fleeing the scene but claims he was pursuing the 'real' bomber – an interesting interpretation of reality.]

The bomber didn't know I was following him and had slowed to a walk. I caught up with him a few streets away. I accused him of planting the bomb. I grabbed him by the arm and said I was taking him back to face the police but he pulled away from me. I grabbed him again and we began fighting. He winded me with a kick in the stomach and escaped while I was trying to get my breath.

[Notation: The woman called Anji was probably Kreiner's accomplice. Speculation – he fled the aftermath of the explosion but realised she might still identify him, if she remained alive. So the cold-blooded killer returns to the scene of his crime to finish her off.]

I decided to go back to the tearooms and help search for survivors. I knew Anji had been near the front doors with the manager when the bomb went off. Maybe that had saved them, since the device was planted towards the rear of the tearooms. I thought I could help dig her out and save some others.

The explosion had been minutes ago or it could have been hours, Anji had no way of knowing. Entombed in the darkness, she licked her lips. There

was still moisture in her mouth, so dehydration had not yet set in. She tried calling out, and was surprised at how weak her voice sounded.

For a few minutes she got no reply to her calls, but then a distant voice seemed to call back. 'Anji! Is that you?' It was Fitz.

'Fitz! I'm over here!' Soon Anji could hear masonry shifting, little showers of dust falling into her face. Suddenly her hand was free. Someone squeezed it.

'Hold on, Anji! We'll get you out of here in no time!'

She recognised Fitz's voice and gave his fingers a squeeze back. But his hand pulled away. She could hear shouting, but it was just a jumble of words.

Anji felt as if she was floating atop a vast ocean, the black water sucking at her. Concussion, she thought idly. I've probably got concussion. She slid down, the darkness closing in. So hard to concentrate. . .

Extract from statement by F. Kreiner:

I had just found Anji when two policemen attacked me. Someone must have thought I was one of the bombers and it all went wrong from there.

[Notation: Conclusions – Kreiner is an adept and convincing liar. All efforts should be made to locate and execute his co-conspirators, beginning with the woman known as 'Anji' and the male called 'the Doctor'.]

Two burly constables stood over Fitz, their faces soured by disgust. 'No! What are you doing?' Fitz protested. 'My friend's under there – she squeezed my hand! We can still save her!'

'You're coming with us, terrorist!' one of the policemen replied, pulling a heavy black truncheon from a loop of leather on his belt.

'Haven't you murdered enough people for one day?' the second constable added, his truncheon already pulled back ready to strike.

'You think I did this?' Fitz stammered in amazement.

The first policeman turned to his colleague. 'You hear that, Gordon? He confessed to it! He admitted he did it!'

'Scum!' Gordon replied. 'My brother was killed by a terrorist bomb. You're going to pay for this!'

He smashed his truncheon into Fitz's face. Fitz cried out in pain, raising his hands to protect his features. As he slumped to the ground, Fitz could

hear the crowd urging the policemen on. Blow after blow smashed at his cowering body.

It was only the sound of approaching sirens that saved Fitz, bringing the policemen back to their senses. Black vans stopped nearby and more than a dozen gun-wielding guards were disgorged on to the footpath.

'Am I glad to see you,' Fitz spluttered through swollen lips, blood bubbling through his teeth. 'Somebody's made a terrible mistake. . .'

But the new arrivals ignored him, turning to the policemen for guidance. Gordon stepped forward to report.

'We caught this one. He was seen acting suspiciously just before the explosion. Afterwards he came back, apparently trying to finish off anyone who survived the blast!'

Fitz shook his head weakly. 'That's not how it happened.'

But no one was listening. The new arrivals grabbed Fitz and dragged him towards the vans, watched by the crowd.

'Now I know what an angry mob looks like,' Fitz said to his new captors. 'Those two thugs were going to beat me to death!'

News of the explosion reached the Star Chamber within minutes. The adjutant took a report about the bombing to the Pentarch in his private chambers. The room was crowded with souvenirs from around the world, evidence of a life spent fighting on behalf of the Empire. The Pentarch sat reading at his heavy oak desk, the dark wood illuminated by a simple gas lamp.

The Pentarch read the telegram quickly before taking a silver lighter from his desk drawer and setting the communication alight. He dropped the burning paper into an ashtray, his eyes intent on the flickering flames.

'This is an outrage,' the Pentarch said, his voice flat and without emotion. 'The Prime Minister must answer for this atrocity. Have him brought before us.' He looked up at the adjutant. 'Is that clear?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Any word on the other matter?'

'I believe our men have secured the item. It should be here before midnight, as you commanded.'

'Good. Britannia rules eternal.'

'Britannia rules eternal.' The adjutant retreated, leaving the Star Chamber's leader to watch the last flame flicker and die.

Looking back on the day, Edward Knox couldn't decide if he had been a very lucky or unlucky man. He was due to meet his mother at the George Street Tearooms for lunch at one o'clock. He planned to get there early but his plan had gone awry. That was good luck, he supposed, because it meant he was not inside when the bomb exploded. The bad luck was the reason he was late – he had resigned from his job in disgrace.

Knox had been a junior assistant at the Edinburgh Auction House on Leith Walk. It was not the city's most prestigious auction house, but it kept many valuable items on the premises. Knox had been on the front counter that morning, politely helping customers interested in examining jewellery due to be auctioned. An extremely valuable emerald and diamond ring was stolen while he was attending an elderly customer. Knox suspected a bewitching young woman with flaming red hair but she was gone before he could call the police. There had been no alternative but immediate resignation. It was the only honourable thing to do.

He stumbled around the streets of central Edinburgh afterwards, trying to think how he could ever explain what had happened to his mother. She was an overbearing woman of a certain age from the matronly district of Morningside.

Knox kept replaying the morning's events in his head but they didn't get any better with repetition. He was so absorbed he didn't notice the noise of the nearby explosion. Soon after he also failed to notice the man running towards him until it was too late. They were both knocked off their feet, Knox sent tumbling head over heels. The other man fell heavily and did not move.

A few pedestrians gathered around them but Knox waved away those trying to help him to his feet. 'I'm fine, thank you.' He turned to the other man, who remained motionless on the footpath. 'This poor soul, however...'

Doctor! Help me! Help me!

Anji woke, her lungs gasping for air. The constriction on her upper body was gone, but her legs were still pinned in place. She opened her eyes and was dazzled by daylight.

'Hey, doctor! This one's still alive!'

'Doctor?' Anji whispered, her throat dry and raw.

'He'll be with you in a minute.' A fireman was pulling rubble away.

‘Doctor...’

‘That’s right.’ He turned to an approaching figure. ‘She’s in a bad way. Concussion, could be a skull fracture, maybe internal bleeding.’

A man loomed over Anji and smiled. ‘Hello. My name’s Dr MacLeod. How are you feeling?’

Anji did her best to focus on his face. It had dark rings beneath the eyes and careworn features. Thinning black hair was swept back from his forehead. ‘You’re not... my Doctor...’

‘I’m a doctor and that’s all you need right now. I’m sure we can get your own doctor to visit you in hospital.’ As he spoke, MacLeod was examining Anji’s body, gently pressing his hands against her limbs and torso, watching her face for any signs of pain. ‘There don’t seem to be any broken bones, but I can’t be sure.’

The fireman cleared away the last of the rubble, freeing Anji’s legs. She stretched out her toes, delighted to move them again.

MacLeod called over two ambulance men with a stretcher. ‘Get her to the hospital as quickly as possible. We can still save this one.’

‘But she’s not one of us,’ one man replied. ‘Shouldn’t we save our own kind first?’

‘I don’t care what colour her skin is, she’s a human being,’ MacLeod said firmly. ‘Now do your jobs!’

‘Good for you...’ Anji whispered, but no one heard her. She cried out as the two ambulance men grabbed her roughly and shifted her on to a stretcher. Pain and darkness overwhelmed her...

Knox rolled the fallen man over. There was no sign of a wound or contusion, yet the man’s breathing was almost imperceptible. It was as if he had fainted clean away, the collision and fall to the ground being just incidental. Knox stayed beside him for several minutes until the man revived. I’ve got nowhere better to go, Knox thought glumly. I certainly can’t face Mother.

‘Fitz?’ the man asked when he eventually regained his senses.

‘Yes, you had some sort of fit,’ Knox confirmed. ‘You ran into me and then passed out – very peculiar.’

‘No, my friend Fitz. I was supposed to be meeting him.’

‘Ahh. Well, can’t help you there. Where were you meeting him?’

‘The tearooms on George Street.’

‘Really? I was going there too, to have lunch with Mother,’ Knox said wearily. ‘I suppose I better go and face her. . .’

A passerby overheard this exchange. ‘Where have you two been?’

‘Sorry?’ Knox asked.

‘The George Street Tearooms were just bombed by terrorists. The place is a pile of rubble now.’

‘Fitz!’

Knox watched in amazement as the stricken man jumped up and ran towards George Street. Knox pulled out his fob watch and was relieved to see it hadn’t been damaged in the collision. The time was quarter to one. His mother would not yet have arrived at the tearooms.

On balance, Edward Knox decided he was unlucky. A more fortunate man would have died in the explosion, blissfully unaware of the icy ignominy he now faced. Knox got up, brushed himself down and prepared to face the wrath of his mother.

The adjutant hurried into the dark chamber of the Oracle. ‘You summoned me, O Harbinger?’ he said, dropping to his knees. The metal floor was cold and hard beneath him.

‘The artefact, it is ours. But I see something else now – an Elemental. He arrived with the blue box.’ The child gurgled happily. ‘He will come to us, though he does not know it – yet. Time is catching up with him. . .’

Gordon MacDonald was still furious about the intervention of the security forces. What right did they have to take the prisoner away? MacDonald and his fellow constable had caught the terrorist returning to the scene of the bombing – shouldn’t they get the credit? MacDonald smiled with satisfaction. Oh well, at least he had managed to give the bomber a good beating.

Around him the fire brigade was searching the ruins of the tearooms for any survivors. So far only two people had been pulled out of the rubble alive – an unknown brown-skinned woman and the manager of the tearooms, Francis Clooney. All the other injured had been on the footpath when the explosion happened. The brown-skinned woman was a curiosity for MacDonald, he’d never seen one of her kind before. What was she doing in Edinburgh? It was a long way from the colonies.

The two survivors had been found near the front of the rubble. Since then only corpses and body parts had been recovered. MacDonald didn’t envy

whoever had the job of matching the severed limbs to the shattered torsos. Nasty work, liable to give you nightmares. He preferred crowd control, keeping the ghoulish gathering of onlookers back so the emergency services could do their jobs.

One individual proved particularly problematic. He arrived well after the explosion, but ran to the scene as if he'd only just heard about it. In MacDonald's experience news of a tragedy spread quickly. Gossip was a most efficient means of communication. The policeman sometimes thought the postal service should scrap its cumbersome system and employ housewives to spread any news that needed distribution. It would be just as quick as having six deliveries a day.

The new arrival ducked beneath the rope barrier holding the public in check and approached what remained of the tearooms. 'Fitz! No!' he shouted. MacDonald hustled over and led the man to one side.

'Excuse me sir, if you'll just step away. The men need room to work.'

'But my friend was in there!' the man protested.

MacDonald sighed. He feared that would be the case. He hated dealing with the bereaved. Some were good sports, kept their tears in check until he was gone. But all too many collapsed into hysterics, expecting him to comfort them. The policeman shunned physical contact, a stoic attitude thrashed into him by a father fond of the leather strap and the whisky bottle. A man kept his feelings to himself, that was the lesson George had learned.

'Could you give me your friend's name? We have pulled two survivors from the building.'

The man was shaking his head, mumbling to himself. 'I should have been here, I should have been here...'

MacDonald was bemused by the man's attire and collar-length hair.

'We're travellers, you see. We only arrived in the city this morning.'

'Ahh! Theatricals, are you? Putting on a show over Easter?'

'Easter?' the man asked, bewildered.

Must be foreign, MacDonald thought, if he doesn't know this is Easter week. Canadian, perhaps – it was certainly a well-travelled voice. 'Yes, sir – it's Good Friday tomorrow. The day our Lord died to save us all.'

'Yes, of course,' the man muttered. 'Who did this? Who planted the bomb?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, I caught the bomber myself.' The policeman smiled proudly. 'Grubby man he was, just the sort you'd expect to be a terrorist.'

‘What did he look like?’

‘Untidy hair, crumpled clothes – and he can’t have shaved for days. Thoroughly despicable.’

‘How do you know he was the bomber?’

MacDonald smiled. ‘He was seen running away from the scene of the crime just after the bomb exploded.’ The policemen leaned forwards, whispering conspiratorially. ‘Apparently, he had been arguing with the manager of the tearooms just before the blast, in a most animated manner. Then he ran outside, just before the explosion happened.’

‘Really?’

‘Oh yes. I have to be honest, we only caught the terrorist because he came back to the scene of the crime.’

‘Why would he do that?’

‘That’s what I wondered. A member of the public saw the bomber sifting through the rubble, looking for survivors. When he found one, the terrorist tried to strangle the poor woman before she could be rescued. I’ve never seen anything like it.’ The policeman smiled as he extracted a notebook and pencil from the breast pocket of his uniform. ‘Now then, sir, if you could give me the name of this friend you were meeting. Was it a man or a woman?’

But the man turned away, walking towards the rope barrier. ‘That’s all right. I think I’ve got the wrong place – or maybe the wrong time.’

‘At least give me your name, sir. Then we can contact you if your friend should turn up,’ MacDonald called after him.

‘Smith. Dr John Smith.’

The policeman licked the end of his pencil and wrote this down in his notebook. ‘And where can we find you, Dr Smith?’ He glanced up but man was gone, vanished into the throng. MacDonald shook his head despairingly. ‘I don’t know You try to help these people and they just walk away. Bloody tourists...’

The interrogation started just after two o’clock. Fitz had been taken to Edinburgh Castle, stripped, searched and thrown in a cell. He lost count of the beatings. Every few minutes a fresh batch of men would be admitted into the cell, taking turns to hurt him. Fitz could hear money changing hands outside the cell before each visit. He wondered if he could request a slice of the takings, since he was providing the entertainment, but thought better of asking.

Eventually he was given fresh clothes and taken to a simple stone chamber, with just a wooden table and two chairs facing each other. Fitz collapsed gratefully into a chair and waited. Anything that gave him a break from the beatings was welcome. After a few minutes, keys rattled in the lock and the wooden door swung open.

A blond-haired man of no more than twenty-five entered. He wore a black trench coat and carried a peaked cap. The door was locked behind him. The man unbuttoned his coat, revealing a dark blue suit. He hung his coat over the back of the chair opposite Fitz, placed a slim file on the table between them and sat down. He opened the file, reading through the few sheets of paper inside it. Fitz leaned forward and began reading the pages upside down – an old skill born of too many schoolboy visits to the headmaster’s office.

‘Anything interesting?’ Fitz asked, but was ignored. Fitz tried some whistling to pass the time, but his swollen lips made attempting a tune impossible. Better just to wait and see what happened next. Things could hardly get any worse, could they?

At last, the smartly dressed man closed the file and regarded the captive. When he finally spoke, the new arrival had a soft, almost lyrical voice.

‘My name is William Hastings. I am here to ask some questions. Name?’

‘William Hastings. See, I was paying attention,’ Fitz quipped.

Hastings grimaced. ‘Your name?’

‘Ah! Kreiner, Fitz Kreiner.’

‘You’re German? You don’t sound German.’

‘I’m from London, actually.’

‘Interesting.’ Hastings drew a fountain pen from the breast pocket of his suit jacket and began making notations on the file. ‘Your age?’

‘Mid thirties? I lose track, to be honest, moving around so much. Time doesn’t have much meaning unless you stay in one place.’

‘You move around a lot. . .’

‘Yes, with the Doc-’ Fitz stopped himself. Until he knew what was going on, it was best he keep certain facts to himself. ‘I’m a traveller, you might say.’

‘How long have you been in Edinburgh?’

‘We – I only arrived this morning.’

Hastings made another notation, but Fitz could not decipher the spidery scrawl. ‘You should be a doctor with writing like that,’ he offered cheerfully.

‘Do you need a doctor?’ Hastings asked. ‘You seemed to have sustained some bruising and other injuries.’

‘Just the heavy-handed bully-boy tactics of your guards. You get used to it,’ Fitz replied.

‘Really? Why?’

‘Well, once you seen the inside of one cell, you’ve seen them all really, haven’t you?’ Fitz decided to ask some questions of his own. ‘So – what’s going on here? What’s the story?’

‘The story?’

‘Am I being charged or what? I think you should probably have a lawyer here if you want everything above board...’

‘I am a lawyer, Mr Kreiner.’

‘Right! OK... So, what’s happening?’

Hastings put down his pen and regarded Fitz coolly. ‘I think you should tell me what happened earlier today. Tell me the truth and I may be able to save you from the gallows.’

‘The gallows?’ Fitz was having some difficulty getting his head round all this. ‘But I thought capital punishment had been outlawed in Britain since – what, the 1960s? Only crimes of treason are punishable by...’

His voice trailed off as he realised the gravity of his situation.

‘Exactly, Mr Kreiner. Punishable by death.’ Hastings picked up his pen again. ‘Let’s start at the beginning. When did you arrive in Edinburgh?’

‘This morning. We arrived this morning.’

‘We? You were not travelling alone?’

‘How do I know I can I trust you?’

Hastings smiled, his thin lips drawn back to reveal regular white teeth. ‘I am your only hope of staying alive, Mr Kreiner. I will never lie to you. Whether you trust me is your decision. But those in charge want the truth. Either you tell it to me, here and now, in the relative comfort of this cell...’

‘Or else it gets beaten out of me by someone else. Good cop, bad cop.’

‘I have already said, I am a lawyer – not a policeman...’

Fitz held up a hand to stem the explanation. ‘I know, I know – you’re just here to help me. All right.’ He assembled the story in his own head and began, leaving out those details that would have him accused of insanity.

Anji drifted in and out of consciousness for the next few hours, opening her eyes to see a succession of ceilings above her – first the roof of the ambulance,

then the ceiling of a corridor sliding overhead, then the blazing lights of an examination room. During the last of these, a face looked down at her. It had the same caring eyes as before – it was Dr MacLeod.

‘You’re awake again – good. You have a concussion, we don’t know how serious yet. It’s possible that you have a blood clot on the brain but I’d prefer not to operate. The survival rates aren’t good for such procedures and I don’t want to risk it. What do you think?’

Anji smiled weakly. ‘I trust you.’

The doctor nodded before turning to a nurse. ‘Have this patient taken down to the ward. I want her monitored carefully.’

‘Yes, Dr MacLeod.’

Anji listened to all of this with a curious detachment. It was strange hearing other people discuss whether you were going to live or die. She tried to think about what must have happened but a dull throbbing slid forward in her mind, blocking out everything else. . .

Hastings had listened to Fitz’s recollections intently, taking occasional notes and nodding as the prisoner related how events unfolded. When Fitz finally ran out of things to say, the lawyer leaned forward, pen in hand.

‘You mentioned two people – the Doctor and Anji. We need to find them so we can verify your story. You say Anji was caught in the blast. If she survived, she will have been admitted to one of the hospitals dealing with the victims of the explosion. If she didn’t, her body is either still in the rubble or. . .’

‘Laying on a slab in a morgue,’ Fitz said. He didn’t want to think about that. If he had paid more attention to the man acting suspiciously, maybe the explosion could have been prevented. But Fitz knew there was no value in playing the ‘what if’ game – travelling with the Doctor for so long had proven that. Better to deal with the present and plan for the future. The past would just have to look after itself. . .

‘We need a description of her so we can begin checking the hospitals to see if she’s all right. We also need to know what the Doctor looks like. He’s probably gone to the tearooms looking for you.’ Hastings’ voice trailed off, leaving Fitz to ponder the implications.

‘He won’t know if I’m alive or dead! He won’t even know that Anji turned up,’ Fitz realised. ‘OK, well, Anji’s got brown skin – the colour of a strong white coffee. She’s about twenty-nine, I guess. Very dark hair, cut in an angular bob. She should be quite easy to find, considering how few people

of Pakistani descent you have here. The Doctor. . .’ Fitz racked his brain, trying to find the best words to describe his friend. ‘He looks about forty years old, with curling hair down to his collar and intense eyes.’

Hastings smiled too. ‘Thank you for that. You have made our job much easier, Mr Kreiner.’ The lawyer went to the door and knocked. Keys unlocked it from the outside and a guard stepped in. Hastings handed him a piece of paper.

‘I want these descriptions circulated – two terrorists calling themselves the Doctor and Anji Kapoor,’ Hastings said briskly. ‘Have an artist draw a sketch of the male, he’ll be the harder one to find. Concentrate the search for the woman in hospitals and check the morgues – she may have been killed in the explosion. Both are dangerous individuals and should be shot on sight if they offer any resistance. Got it?’

The guard nodded and withdrew, leaving Hastings in the doorway. Fitz was horrified by this betrayal. ‘But you said you were my lawyer! I trusted you!’

‘No, Mr Kreiner, I said I was *a* lawyer. I never said I was *your* lawyer. You know, for a terrorist, you really are far too trusting.’ Hastings smiled coldly, his eyes uninvolved with the emotion. ‘The likes of you don’t get the luxury of having a lawyer – I’m surprised your paymasters never told you that.’

Fitz stood up, ready to hurl himself at the interrogator. But Hastings had already stepped out of the chamber and was locking the door.

The lawyer pulled open a slot and looked in at Fitz. ‘Don’t worry, Mr Kreiner – I won’t tell your friends you betrayed them. My men will be along shortly to beat a confession out of you. I suggest you give them the same cooperation you have shown me. It will make your final hours less painful.’

‘I’ve told you everything I know!’

‘Have it your own way. Goodbye, Mr Kreiner.’ Hastings pulled the slot shut. Fitz sank back down into his chair, shaking his head from side to side.

‘But I didn’t do anything. . .’

Hannah emerged from the library at six to find the Doctor outside in the dusk. He was looking up at the legend carved in the stone over the front doors. ‘Let there be light,’ he read aloud.

‘So, you’ve decided to come to this meeting?’ Hannah asked.

The Doctor nodded. ‘I need your help. A friend of mine – I think he may have been caught up in the explosion at the tearooms earlier today.’

‘Oh, that’s terrible! Was he badly hurt?’

‘I don’t know. I talked to a policeman and it sounded like Fitz had been arrested and charged with planting the bomb – but that’s impossible. Fitz is not a terrorist. We only arrived in Edinburgh this morning.’ The Doctor looked around himself. ‘I need to find Anji too.’

‘Angie?’

‘Anji. Another friend. We parted company this morning before I realised what was amiss. Before all of this...’

Hannah pulled her thick coat closer to shield herself from the biting wind blowing in from the Firth of Forth. She looked at the Doctor more closely. Could he be a terrorist? She knew so little about him, beyond his erratic behaviour in the reference department that morning. But his face was honest and pleading. ‘The explosion was just after midday – what have you been doing since then?’

‘Wandering the streets, looking for Anji, trying to figure out what’s really happening,’ the Doctor replied, his body shivering in the icy breeze. ‘But every time I think about it, I start feeling dizzy.’ He grabbed her gloved hands, cupping them in his own. ‘Will you help me, Hannah?’

She nodded. ‘Come on, we need to get you warm. Your hands are frozen! The meeting doesn’t start for a while yet. Let’s go to a pub and get you out of this wind.’ Hannah led the Doctor away from the library, checking over her shoulder to make sure they weren’t being followed.

Fitz was losing all sense of time passing, after spending hours in a succession of cells and interrogation rooms. The watch commander took great pleasure in helping with the sessions. Fitz had been beaten, chained, starved and deprived of water. But he held out for what felt like forever, until Hastings reappeared.

The young lawyer smiled as he entered the room. Fitz was chained to a chair and flanked by two thugs in black uniforms. They had rejoiced in hurting him, but now snapped to attention as Hastings walked in. The lawyer sent them out with the smallest motion of his head, then sat opposite Fitz.

‘Oh, Mr Kreiner, I did warn you. I said this would be so much less painful if you just confessed. But you had to be noble. You had to insist on maintaining your innocence, even though it can do you no good.’

Fitz responding by spitting on the floor, a mixture of phlegm and blood.

‘Still defiant?’ Hastings raised one eyebrow, his face a smile of mocking

admiration. 'Not for much longer, I think. You'll be happy to know we've found your friend, Miss Kapoor.'

Fitz looked at him warily. 'She's alive?'

'For now. Seems she survived the explosion after all – one of the few to get out alive. My men found her at a hospital, receiving treatment for her many injuries. Of course, terrorists aren't allowed to be given any such aid or comfort, that's collaboration. So we had her brought here. She's in the next cell.'

'How is Anji?'

'Not well, I'm afraid,' Hastings replied blandly. 'Like you, she refuses to confess to her crimes –'

'She's innocent! We both are!'

'Yes, yes, so you both keep telling us. But unlike you, I don't think Miss Kapoor can take much more of our... hospitality.' Hastings got out of his chair and walked in a slow circle around the chamber. 'If you would confess, then we could stop working on her. She really is most determined, but her injuries will be fatal unless she gets medical attention before dawn.'

'Damn you!'

'Now, now, no need to get melodramatic. This is just a simple transaction – you give me what I want in exchange for prolonging Miss Kapoor's life. The damage to her spine could still be repaired. Otherwise, I fear she'll never be able to move anything below the neck again. Quadriplegic – I think that's the correct term.'

Fitz started crying then, he didn't know why. He had been in many hopeless situations before, had cheated death and laughed about it afterwards. Somehow, when it came to his own life and death, he worried less. If you were dead, you were dead, Fitz often told himself. But the idea of surviving while trapped in your own body, dependent on others to care for you. He found that too terrifying to contemplate. He couldn't let that happen to Anji...

Hastings stood up and approached a metal panel set into one wall of the room. 'Perhaps this will help persuade you,' he said, flicking a switch downwards. A small speaker on the panel crackled into life, the sound of a woman crying in pain flooding into the room. Hastings let the anguish echo round the stone walls before switching it off again.

'All right,' Fitz whispered, once his sobbing had subsided. He looked at his captor. 'What do you want me to do?'

‘Confess. Admit your guilt and Miss Kapoor will get the medical attention she needs.’

‘You promise?’

‘I’ve already told you, Mr Kreiner, I never lie. Just make a televised confession to the nation and –’

‘What?’ Fitz spluttered. ‘But – I can’t!’

Hastings feigned puzzlement. ‘Why not? What difference does it make? A confession in front of me is no different from saying the same words in front of a camera. It’s just a change of location, a larger audience.’

Fitz wasn’t listening any more. He just nodded. He wanted it over and done with. The sooner he gave these sadists what they wanted, the sooner it would all be finished. What was one lie in exchange for a life? Not even his own life at that. Fitz could almost consider it a noble sacrifice, if he tried hard enough. But somehow he still felt like a traitor, as if he were letting the Doctor and Anji down. There was nothing noble about giving in to blackmail, Fitz knew. But he had no choice.

‘I’ll do it. Whatever you want. I’ll do it.’

Hastings smiled in triumph. ‘Wonderful!’ He rapped on the door and it was quickly unlocked. A guard stepped inside. ‘Get Mr Kreiner cleaned up. Fresh clothes, a shower. Then send him to me. Our star prisoner is going to be on television tonight – we want him to look his best!’

Daniel Merrell had been Prime Minister of Great Britain for nine years. To all intents and purposes, he was second in command only to the king. But Merrell had become acquainted with the harsh reality of his role only hours after sweeping to victory in the 1994 General Election. His predecessor had taken a quiet delight in introducing the new premier to the Star Chamber, before scuttling away to a quiet life in the countryside.

Merrell had heard rumours about a cabal that ran the country from behind the scenes, but he had never believed them to be true. Just Westminster gossip, he always told himself. But twenty minutes in the presence of the five figures soon scotched any such notions. They sat imperious on their podiums, dark shadows shrouding their faces. The Pentarch pointed out a few facts to Merrell.

The Star Chamber had a file on him – his lies, his infidelities, his secret vices. All carefully catalogued and chronicled, ready to be splashed across the front page of every newspaper in the Empire. Merrell would be disgraced,

dismissed and probably imprisoned.

‘What do you want of me?’ he had begged.

‘Obedience. Loyalty. Silence. For now, those will do. But the day will arise when we require more of you,’ came the reply. ‘When that happens, you shall not question, you shall not debate, you shall not hesitate. You shall do as we say, when we say it. Until that day, you can run the country as you see fit. We will only intervene if we believe you need our... guidance.’

Merrell had agreed, of course, just as they knew he would. The Star Chamber kept its word, only twice requiring him to act on its behalf. The first occasion was the assassination of a visiting American scientist, made to look like suicide. The second was the quelling of a student revolt at a northern university. That had brought him no end of trouble, but the murder of a few dangerous radicals seemed a small price to pay for power.

In exchange he had set about trying to reform Britain. Merrell fought the unions, he fought the backbenchers, he fought anyone who didn’t share his vision of a brighter future. Sometimes he felt the whole Empire was stumbling ever closer to the precipice. But he contented himself by thinking things would have been even worse without him. Perhaps that was self delusion, but he clung to the notion anyway.

Now he was being brought before the Star Chamber for what was probably the final time. The unpopularity of Merrell’s administration had grown to unprecedented levels and defeat in the coming election was certain. The trade unions had called for mass protests on Easter Sunday across the country.

For once, Merrell didn’t fear the ordeal of appearing before the Star Chamber. He had always known this day would come, the day when the Star Chamber called in its marker against him. If that day was finally upon him, at least his sorrows would be over. Merrell almost welcomed the endgame.

The adjutant escorted the Prime Minister into the centre of the Star Chamber’s meeting place, before melting back into the shadows. Merrell was aware of the cabal members’ eyes bearing down on him. In private he called them bitter, twisted old men – impotently wielding power from an underground bunker. But that was bravado. Merrell knew he was just their latest puppet.

‘You summoned me?’

‘This increase in terrorist activity, it must be stopped,’ the Pentarch commanded.

‘Of course. The security forces in Edinburgh have already captured one of

those responsible. He will be making a televised confession tonight.'

'And the others? You said he was one of those responsible.'

Merrell blanched before the Pentarch's remorseless gaze. 'A man called the Doctor and a brown-skinned woman known as Anji Kapoor. They will not get far. Descriptions are already being circulated.'

'But how will the Government respond to this incident?' Another member of the Star Chamber had asked this question. Merrell recognised the voice as Harris, a dangerous and ambitious man who would almost certainly lead the Star Chamber one day. The Prime Minister turned to face his new interrogator.

'My advisors are preparing a bill to grant extra, sweeping powers to the intelligence services. All phone calls and mail will be subject to random interception and monitoring. All points of entry to Britain will have heightened security and increased powers to stop and search. We believe this –'

'When?' Harris demanded.

'Sorry?'

'When will these new measures be ready?'

'Within six months.' Merrell swallowed. Perspiration was beginning to form on his forehead and he was aware how damp his armpits had become. The overhead light beat down on him relentlessly. 'Maybe three.'

'Not good enough!' Another member of the Star Chamber, Elswit, spat the words out. The Prime Minister swivelled round to face him. 'Not soon enough and not good enough!'

'But we are having enough trouble with the unions –'

'Trouble? You don't know the meaning of the word!' Elswit shook his head angrily. 'The unions are not the problem, they are merely a symptom.'

'You are losing control,' the obese Bridges announced, his many chins wobbling. 'You are losing the confidence of the British people and you are losing control. Soon the streets will be in anarchy. Already the resistance against your government is gaining in strength, emboldened by the terrorists!'

'You must show the nation who is in charge. You must show the nation who commands the Empire,' Arnold added, his face a sly smile.

Merrell struggled to keep up with the comments of the five men surrounding him. 'But what can I do?'

'Drastic situations call for drastic measures. If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out,' the Pentarch pronounced ominously.

'But how?'

'A time of crisis deserves a suitable response,' Harris said.

'A proportional response,' Elswit agreed.

'Show them the steel at the heart of the Government,' Arnold suggested.

'Show them the strength of your resolve,' Bridges urged.

'But how?' The Prime Minister clasped his head in his hands.

The Pentarch had the answers. 'In a time of national emergency, it is within your power to institute martial law. A twelve hour curfew. Shoot to kill orders, with every policeman to go armed. All demonstrations and unauthorised gatherings to be banned to preserve public safety. The terrorists could strike again at any time. Take everyone off the streets and you remove the targets. Make Britain safe again for decent people. Crush the trade unions – by any means necessary.'

Merrell quailed before such draconian measures. 'But that's...'

'You were told this day would come,' the Pentarch said. 'Now it has, you dare to question our authority?'

'No,' the Prime Minister whimpered. 'But the people...'

'Will live by our rules or die at our behest. And you will be the person held responsible,' the Pentarch replied.

'That is the price of the power you have enjoyed,' Harris added.

Merrell nodded helplessly.

'We have created a trap for the so-called resistance. When the time is right, the trap shall be baited and set,' Harris explained. 'Until that time –'

'Until that time,' the Pentarch interrupted, 'you shall do as you are told. The statute books already contain the necessary powers to institute martial law. You need merely to reconvene Parliament tomorrow and push through the required legislation, activating those powers. You may say it is only a temporary measure, until the terrorist threat is quelled.'

'Is it? Is it only temporary?' the Prime Minister asked.

The Pentarch smiled. 'Britannia rules eternal.'

'Britannia rules eternal,' Merrell replied automatically. The adjutant appeared from the shadows and guided the premier out of the room.

The pub was called the Living Room. It was on The Cowgate, a low road running underneath Edinburgh's South Bridge. The tavern was beneath the bridge, part of an old dwelling that had been converted into a succession of quiet, smoke-filled rooms. One corner of the tavern's main room was occupied by a wooden cabinet with a small television screen set into the

timber. A grainy black and white image was just visible across the pub. Hannah got the Doctor a single malt whisky and a pint of heavy for herself. They sat at a table in one of the side rooms.

'I like it in here because the barman doesn't raise a fuss if a woman wants to drink a pint,' Hannah explained.

The Doctor looked around the small room. Drinkers were sat at the other tables, muttering to themselves in low voices and watching the new arrivals suspiciously. An elderly man smoked a pipe and stared at the Doctor intently. 'Nobody asks too many questions.'

'Something like that.' Hannah took a long, slow drink from her pint and sighed happily. 'So tell me about your friend.'

'Fitz? He's loyal, friendly, trustworthy. Quite courageous, but not in the way he thinks. Fancies himself as a ladies' man.'

'Is he?'

The Doctor stared into his whisky. 'I'm more interested in you, Hannah. Why did you invite me to this meeting?'

'The way you acted in the library this morning, the things you said, the books you asked for – well, I just knew,' she replied.

'Knew what?'

'Why do you think I work in a library?'

'I don't know.'

'It's the best job I can hope for. I went to university here, before the Government banned women from receiving further education. I wanted to be a scientist, to try to make people's lives better – to make a difference.' Hannah took another swallow of her pint. 'But the Empire doesn't allow that. No change or innovation or development. It's like we're stuck in the past.'

'You're saying society has been deliberately suppressed.'

Hannah nodded. 'Of course, it's worse if you're a woman. We should be able to do whatever we want – become doctors, lawyers, even scientists. Instead we're restricted to the same jobs we've always had. Menial labour and mind-numbing boredom. As if the world would come to an end!'

'That's how you ended up in the library.'

'At least there I could make a difference. I could seek out like-minded people who visited the reference department, guide them towards meetings like tonight, introduce them to others who share their views.'

The Doctor looked up at the pipe-smoker across the room. 'So, has the meeting started yet?'

‘It started when you walked in,’ the elderly man replied. He went to the door and closed it, sealing off the room from the rest of the pub. ‘We’ve been waiting for you. My name is Professor Hamilton. Retired, of course.’

‘Why all the secrecy?’

The professor smiled. ‘Come now, Doctor – you hardly expect us to draw attention to ourselves, do you? The powers that be have made it quite obvious what they think of people with our views. Given the chance, the security forces would come in here and execute us all.’

‘So why meet at all? Why risk being murdered?’

Hamilton sat down and relit his pipe. ‘Because it’s worth it. As Hannah was saying, we believe the development of mankind is being deliberately stifled, suppressed. For most of us, the first evidence of that began when we reached adulthood. If you grow up in a world of restrictions and rules, no matter how draconian they may be, you accept that as the status quo. You don’t know any better because you have never experienced anything else.’

‘Deny children an education and they won’t know they’re ignorant,’ the Doctor said sadly.

‘Exactly!’ Another man in his forties speaking now. He had a bristling moustache and thin-rimmed glasses, his eyes magnified through thick lenses. ‘The Government allows education but only up to a point. Independent thought – now, that is another matter. Teachers are actively discouraged from developing the critical faculties of their pupils. A good teacher should prompt a pupil to think for themselves, to find their own interpretation of reality, of life.’

Hamilton nodded. ‘Malcolm is right. We’ve all had good teachers, givers of wisdom who bent the rules and gave us a glimpse of what lay beyond blind obedience and subservience.’

‘You didn’t retire, did you?’ the Doctor asked.

The professor’s face saddened. ‘No, I was driven out like Malcolm, like many of the others here. Word of my so-called radical teaching methods reached the ears of the university council and I was forced to leave my post. Hannah was among the last pupils I tutored.’

‘So you decided to fight back.’

‘No!’ another man interjected. He was no older than Hannah, with greasy hair and acne. He sat beside Malcolm, nursing a pint. ‘We’re not fighters, we’re thinkers. We meet to talk, to exchange ideas, to spread the word. There is a climate of fear in places of learning across the Empire, nobody

dares speak out or raise a voice in protest. We work behind the scenes to change that, to keep alive the hope of a better world where science and philosophy are not forbidden topics.'

Hannah had been growing ever more uncomfortable during this conversation. Finally, she could hold back no longer. 'Philip, forgive me, but I have to say something.'

The young man nodded to her. 'Go ahead.'

'Everyone here believes in what you and Malcolm and the professor have been saying.' Her words brought a murmur of approval from the others. 'But I believe we have to do more than just talk. I believe we have to act.'

The approval died away to silence. Hannah finished her pint and stood. 'We've all lost friends, people who spoke out in public and were labelled dissidents and traitors, people who disappeared in the night and were never heard from again. But maybe there's another way. Maybe, instead of just talking about change and progress, maybe we can do something about it!

'We have to act. The professor has told me about the resistance in London and other cities, people who are campaigning for change. We can sit here and talk about what's wrong with the world until we're blue in the face, but that won't solve anything. We can fix the world from our barstools but reality will never get any better unless we actually do something about it!'

Hannah examined the faces of the other people gathered in the room. 'Malcolm, surely you can all see that? Surely you understand the need to do something? What about you, Philip? Or maybe I'm the one who's wrong. Maybe I'm the one who should leave.'

The professor stood and rested a hand gently on Hannah's shoulder. 'My dear, you're young. You think you know everything but you don't understand – everyone here has so much to lose...'

Hannah shook his hand off. 'So that's it? Everything we've spoken about, everything we've debated – it's all just been talk? Are you all so scared of losing the few freedoms you have left?'

The others shifted uncomfortably in their seats but nobody spoke. Finally, Malcolm broke the silence. 'We're people of science and education – not violence. We believe there has to be a better way to change things than with a gun and a threat.' The rest of the group murmured their agreement.

The professor spoke up. 'It's the power of the mind that will alter this world, not terrorism and murder. We will not go down that path, not while I have breath left in my body, Hannah. You must accept that.'

‘Fine,’ she said curtly. ‘Prove it to me. Show me one example where your method has the potential to improve our world!’

The elderly professor smiled. ‘You, Hannah. Our words have worked on you, persuaded you of the need for change.’

Malcolm did his best to calm Hannah. ‘You might not agree with our methods, but you agree with our motives. Every mind we change is another step closer to our goal.’

Hannah shook her head. ‘Leave me out of this. I want a better example.’

‘The shroud,’ Hamilton offered. Around him the others nodded sagely. ‘With that, we could change the world.’

Hannah dismissed this with a derisive snort.

‘The shroud?’ the Doctor asked.

‘I’m not surprised you haven’t heard of it,’ Philip said. ‘Few even know of its existence. Over the decades it has become a legend. The shroud is a suppressed document, a paper on which are written the secrets of a machine that could change the world. If you believe all that is spoken about the shroud, the ideas it details have the power to alter all our lives forever.’

‘Where is it?’

‘A good question,’ the professor replied. ‘It disappeared more than sixty years ago. Some say it was destroyed during the war. Others think it is buried away, along with other precious artefacts of the way our lives could be. A less fanciful theory suggests it is in the Tower of London, under constant guard.’

Hannah shook her head. ‘Old wives’ tales, myths and legends. It’s just more talk and no action. You know what you all are? Cowards, too frightened of your own shadows to fight for what you believe in.’

Philip stood up angrily, his fists shaking. But Hamilton motioned him back down again. The professor looked sadly at Hannah. ‘There are all kinds of courage, my dear,’ he said. ‘One day you will understand righteousness is not a cloak that protects you from harm. Might is not always right. I had hoped you had learned that much.’

Anji had been woken twice by the rattling of bedpans and the clatter of doors, but just let herself drift away again. The pressure behind her eyes was like a vice, squeezing everything together, as if her brain was too big for her skull. She dozed, letting her body have time to heal itself.

Finally, she was brought back to reality by an argument over her bed. She listened, careful not to show she was awake or aware.

‘Who’s this patient?’ The voice was male, harsh and guttural.

‘We don’t know her name. She was brought in from the terrorist bomb blast at the tearooms. She’s been unconscious ever since,’ replied a gentler woman’s voice. ‘She didn’t have any identification, but that may have been lost at the scene. We threw her clothes away, the blast left them in tatters.’

‘We’re looking for a dark-skinned woman who may have been caught in the explosion,’ the man hissed. ‘So far, this one’s the only candidate. She has to come with us for questioning.’

‘That’s impossible. A journey would almost certainly kill her.’

‘But she –’ the man persisted.

‘She isn’t going anywhere,’ the woman replied. ‘I’ll be amazed if she’s still alive in the morning. If she is, you can question her then. Now get out of my ward before I throw you out!’

‘Sister, you don’t seem to understand who I am,’ the man said, his voice low and full of threat.

‘I know perfectly well who you are, young man. Don’t expect me to quail before the insignia of the Service. Now get out of my sight!’

After a long silence the man stomped off, doing his best to slam the swinging doors on his way out. Anji slowly exhaled.

‘You can open your eyes now,’ the sister said.

Anji looked up and smiled gratefully. The ward sister was a formidable woman in a blue and white uniform, as wide as she was tall, her greying hair pulled back severely into a bun. But her eyes twinkled at Anji.

‘Don’t worry, he’s gone. I won’t have a scunner like that telling me how to run my ward. I’ll catch hell for it in the morning, no doubt, but there it is.’

‘Thank you,’ Anji said. ‘Am I that ill? You haven’t got any life-support machines or monitors around me, so I can’t be that bad.’

‘Life-support machines?’

‘You know – electro-cardiograms, ventilators – machines that go ping,’ Anji offered, trying to be helpful but soon exhausting what little knowledge she had gained from watching medical dramas on television.

‘I’m sorry, but I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ the ward sister replied, a look of mystification on her face. ‘Perhaps they do things differently in the colonies. Let’s just say you’ll live, but he’s not to know that. Try and rest. They’ll be coming back for you tomorrow morning.’

Anji closed her eyes and thought back over what had been said. A terrorist bomb – that explained what had happened. She was unlucky enough to get

caught in the blast radius. But what had happened to Fitz? And where was the Doctor?

The arguments raged in the side room of the pub for nearly three hours. Hamilton insisted everyone be given a chance to air their views. Finally, a resolution from Malcolm was passed rejecting Hannah's call to action.

The Doctor swirled the whisky round the sides of his glass. 'I think you have your answer, Hannah. Unless people are willing –'

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. 'Yes, what is it?' the professor asked.

The landlord opened the door. 'Something you better see, something on the telly. They've caught one of the terrorists.'

The squeak of a trolley's wheels woke Anji. She looked around the ward, happy to discover she could now focus her eyes properly. There were seven other beds, all occupied by female patients. Some had limbs in traction, others were limping around the room. All the windows were dark, so Anji presumed it was night.

The trolley was being pushed by the ward sister. On top of it was balanced a television encased in wood. Anji admired the burnished walnut finish but couldn't understand why it needed such a huge box to encase such a tiny little screen. Hardly widescreen home cinema, she thought.

The ward sister plugged the television into a wall socket, carefully smoothing out the coils of the cloth-covered electrical flex. 'It was announced on the World Service that one of the terrorists is going to make a televised confession in a few minutes. I thought you all might like to see the face of the man responsible for your injuries.' This brought a murmur of approval from the patients. She turned on the switch and began adjusting the aerial on top of the television. 'It'll just take a few minutes for the set to warm up,' she announced, before bustling back out of the ward. 'I'll bring the men in from the next room to watch it too.'

Anji pulled herself up into a sitting position. It was a slow and painful process, but at least it helped her discover the extent of her injuries. Nothing broken or dislocated – just a lot of pain. I guess my head got the worst of it, she reasoned. The pressure behind her eyes had eased a little. Anji studied the other patients in her ward. They were all in their fifties and older, judging by the blue rinse hairstyles and imperious tone of their voices.

Everyone here must have been caught in the bomb blast like me, Anji thought. She felt self-conscious about the glances the other patients were giving her. Good, she thought. I won't apologise for the colour of my skin.

She noticed the ward was run-down and dilapidated, but that was hardly uncommon in a public hospital. Curiouser was the lack of modern equipment. Several of the women in the ward looked like critical care cases, but you would hardly know it from the lack of life-support systems.

The ward sister returned, leading a trio of men. Two were in wheelchairs, while the last was hobbling along with wooden crutches. He looked familiar to Anji but her eyes started swimming again and she was forced to close them. She rested her head back against a pillow and waited for the spots in her vision to stop dancing.

The television crackled into life. 'This is the Great British Broadcasting Corporation,' announced a plummy voice. 'Now, a special live transmission from our Scottish studios concerning today's tragic events in Edinburgh.'

The landlord of the Living Room bashed a fist against the side of the TV cabinet, trying to improve the picture. The tiny screen was filled with a snowstorm of monochromatic static, occasionally replaced with ghostly faces.

Hamilton's group had gathered round the TV, along with the handful of other drinkers in the pub. The Doctor sat on the floor in front of the group, his arms and legs crossed like a child at the foreground of a class photo. Hannah stood at the back, peering through a gap between Philip and Malcolm. The professor hushed the others.

'Will you all please be quiet? Even if we can't see the picture properly, we can still listen to the broadcast. Your good sense should tell you that!' Everyone fell silent. At last the landlord's thrashing put the screen to rights and a stable image appeared from the snowstorm. On the screen was a bruised man, his eyes wide with terror, his face testament to several beatings.

'Fitz,' the Doctor whispered, unheard by those around him.

Fitz's weary eyes were underlined with black shadows. High on one cheekbone was a smudge of bruise, accentuated by the harsh lighting and monochromatic broadcast. His top lip was fattened and split. Cuts and scratches marked the rest of his features. Matted hair fell forward over his face, partially masking further bruises on the forehead. He looked older than his years, uneven stubble bristling on his jowls. The eyes darted from side to

side, as if searching for escape. The face creased with fear and resignation. After swallowing hard and licking his dry lips, Fitz began to speak.

‘My name is Kreiner, Fitz Kreiner. I am a terrorist.’

That got Anji’s attention. She sat bolt upright and stared at the distant television, trying to focus on the tiny screen. The picture was a grainy, black and white image. That couldn’t be Fitz, could it? Anji thought there must have been some mistake. She squinted, trying to get a sharper focus on the broadcast.

‘I am a terrorist. In recent months and years, my co-conspirators and I have plotted to overthrow the mighty British Empire.’

A single tear ran down Fitz’s left cheek.

‘I was responsible for the bombing of the George Street Tearooms in Edinburgh. I planted an explosive device inside and then fled the premises. When the bomb blew up, twelve people were killed and dozens more were maimed and crippled. Afterwards, I returned to the scene of my crime to gloat over the bodies of the dead and dying.’

He was shaking his head now, his eyes sliding away from the camera to look off-screen. Whatever he saw there forced him back to the grim task.

‘I see now my actions were those of a murderous, callous coward. I deserve to die a dozen times for the lives I have stolen. I can only beg the forgiveness of the victims, their families and of the British people for what I have done – even though I do not deserve any forgiveness.’

Hamilton’s group watched the broadcast in silence, just the dripping of a beer tap behind the bar punctuating the televised confession. When Fitz begged for forgiveness, the landlord laughed out loud. ‘You’ll be lucky, mate. Half the country would happily string you up. The rest would just be content to sit back and watch.’

Fitz’s face fell forward and two bruised hands, manacled at the wrists, cupped the sobbing features. A guttural voice could be heard from off-camera.

‘Finish it! Finish!’

Anji felt goose pimples rising on her skin. She recognised the guttural voice – it was the agent who had tried to take her away for questioning earlier.

Fitz looked up one last time into the camera, his eyes seeming to fix upon some point in the distance.

‘I have given detailed descriptions of my two associates to the police. One of them, a woman, was caught in the bomb blast.’

The Doctor’s brow creased with thought – a woman? Could he mean Anji? No doubt she had soon realised there was something awry. She must have made her way to the tearooms and found Fitz. Then the bomb went off. . .

Fitz licked his cracked lips. ‘The other person was our ringleader. I knew him only as the Doctor. I implore him to surrender immediately and face the consequences of his terrible actions.’

Anji realised the other people in the hospital ward were staring at her. The man on crutches spoke first, pointing at her accusingly. ‘She was sitting with him in my tearooms just before the explosion! She started arguing when I asked her to leave. I remember now, he ran outside just before the bomb went off – the argument must have been some kind of diversion!’

Anji recognised the man as soon as he spoke. He looked different in a hospital gown and minus his toupee, but the ruddy features were plainly those of the tearooms’ manager. ‘She’s one of the terrorists!’ he shouted. The other patients murmured angrily.

‘I know I will die soon,’ Fitz said. ‘I can only pray for forgiveness. Let my example dissuade those who would betray the Empire. May God have mercy on my soul.’

He broke down now, sobbing into his chest. A black-gloved hand reached into view and pulled him away. The screen faded to black. . .

The landlord switched off the TV ‘Terrorist scum!’

The Doctor turned round to see the members of Professor Hamilton’s group staring at him coldly. ‘I’m sorry, I missed part of what was said. Something about a woman being caught in the blast. I heard a name mentioned. . .’

Hamilton walked back to the side room, followed by Malcolm, Philip and the rest. The other drinkers returned to their chairs or went to the bar for a refill. Soon only Hannah and the Doctor were left by the TV. She looked down at him, a mixture of fear and excitement in her eyes.

‘He said the other conspirator was the ringleader. A man called the Doctor.’ Hannah raised an eyebrow at the Doctor.

The Doctor stood up hurriedly. ‘Hannah, please – I can explain.’ She walked back to the side room, the Doctor following. ‘Just give me a chance.’

‘I’m not a terrorist,’ Anji said, keeping her voice calm. ‘I didn’t plant any bomb and I didn’t try to create a diversion.’

‘Are you calling me a liar?’ the manager demanded.

‘No, I’m saying you must be mistaken, that’s all. I am not a terrorist,’ Anji insisted. But that wasn’t enough for the other patients. They began shouting angrily, refusing to be kept in the same room as her. Several began muttering about taking the law into their own hands. Anji would have fled but she doubted her legs would get her out of the room.

Finally, the ward sister stepped between Anji and the others. ‘Everyone just calm down. We will shift this woman into another room, where she can be held securely until the police arrive to question her in the morning.’ The manager tried to protest, waving one of his crutches in the air, but the ward sister was having none of it. ‘Quiet!’ she bellowed, silencing the room with a word. ‘I don’t want to hear another word out of anyone until morning!’

Fitz was curled in a ball on the floor of the black steel van, knees drawn up to his chest, hands covering his face. He didn’t want the security guards to see him crying, it only enraged them further. Fitz had been beaten when he refused to go ahead with the televised confession. A vicious kick in the groin had sent his body into spasm and he lost control of his bowels as he collapsed to the studio floor. At least the guards became less enthusiastic about attacking him, in case they muddied their boots.

It was only the sight of his captors preparing to execute him on the spot that persuaded Fitz to speak. When it was over, Fitz remembered the cameraman casually lighting a cigarette, like someone pushing back his chair from the dinner table after a Sunday roast. How Fitz had longed for a cigarette then, the taste of it in his lungs, the feel of it between his fingers.

The woman holding the confession cards stared at Fitz as if he were the most repellent thing she’d ever seen. When the security guards dragged Fitz away, he shouted to her, protesting his innocence. If one person believed him, maybe there was still hope. . .

Then it was back into the van, more blows and kicks, the harsh curses of

his captors. Fitz felt a wave of nausea rise up through his body and could not stop himself vomiting on the floor. The guards cried out in disgust and a particularly vicious kick caught Fitz in the head. He felt darkness closing in around him and embraced it, wishing to escape this nightmare.

When the Doctor and Hannah entered the side room, Hamilton's group was concluding a vote by show of hands. 'Then we're agreed,' the professor said. He saw them entering. 'We must ask you to leave.'

'Please, you've got to believe me,' the Doctor said. He searched the faces of the group members for sympathy but found only hatred. 'Yes, Fitz is my friend – but he's no terrorist, and neither am I! Can't you see? This is just another lie, another form of propaganda.'

Professor Hamilton shook his head. 'No, we're not talking to you. The sooner you go, Doctor, the safer we shall be. No, I was asking Hannah to leave. She brought you here. She has endangered all our lives.'

'Me?' Hannah's face betrayed her bewilderment. 'But I didn't know he was a terrorist! How could I? He came to the library this morning – before the bomb exploded. Later on he told me his friend had been arrested by mistake and I believed him. How can you blame me?'

'I had my misgivings about welcoming a stranger to our meeting,' the professor replied. 'Sadly, my doubts proved all too accurate. Both of you – please leave. If you do not go, we will.'

The rest of the group began to move towards the Doctor and Hannah. 'But I've done nothing wrong!' Hannah protested. 'You can't do this!'

The Doctor took hold of her arm and began gently guiding her towards the door. 'Come on, Hannah. I think we should be going.'

Now it was her turn to plead. She looked imploringly into his eyes. 'But Doctor, they can't honestly believe I would –'

He smiled sadly. 'A minute ago you refused to listen when I said I was innocent. Now you know how I felt.'

She numbly acknowledged the truth of his words. 'All right, I'll go.' Hannah gave one last glare to the professor. 'But you haven't heard the last of this!'

'Is that a threat?'

'No, it's just the truth. You can hide down here, making plans and talking about how wrong the world is. But until you come out and start fighting back, you're just as complicit as everyone else. In fact you're worse, because

you know the world could be different but you're too scared to do anything about it.'

The ward sister and a nurse pushed Anji's sturdy metal bed out of the ward, into the corridor beyond. 'Where do you want her?' the nurse asked.

'Best put her in a private room, one with a lockable door.'

Anji felt reassured. She didn't want to suffer any visitations from vigilantes on crutches during the night. At least the nurses had the good sense to put her somewhere safe. The two women wheeled her into a small corner room with a window looking out over Edinburgh.

The ward sister locked the brakes on each leg of the bed, fixing it in place. The other nurse left. Anji waited until she was alone with the ward sister before speaking.

'Thanks. I was worried the blue-rinse brigade was going to turn into a lynch mob, with me as their chief suspect.'

All trace of warmth had left the ward sister's face. She glared at Anji, her eyes blazing with hatred. 'Don't you dare thank me for doing my job,' the ward sister hissed. 'I'll keep you alive until my shift ends. But I hope they string you up in front of the hospital gates for what you've done!'

'But I told you, I'm not a -'

'Don't talk to me! I should have let that agent take you. If you'd died during questioning, at least that would have been justice.' The ward sister walked to the door. 'People like you make me sick!' She slammed the door after herself before locking it and stomping off.

Hannah stormed out of the room, followed by the Doctor. He caught up with her outside the pub. 'Haven't you done enough damage?' she demanded. 'I thought I was getting somewhere with them.'

The Doctor stared into her eyes. 'Listen to me, I need your help.'

'Why should I help you?'

'Do you believe I'm a terrorist?'

Hannah shrugged. 'I don't know.'

'I'm no more a terrorist than you are. I need your help to save my friends. We arrived here this morning and got caught up in all of this. Now one of them is in hospital or dead, and the other -'

'Has just confessed to planting the bomb,' Hannah reminded him.

The Doctor grimaced. 'You saw the bruises on his face, the fear in his eyes. That was no confession – it was a lie, a performance for the camera.'

Hannah bit her bottom lip. 'He had been battered about, but that's hardly surprising. The security forces aren't fond of terrorists. . .'

'He's not a terrorist!' the Doctor insisted.

She shook her head. 'I don't know why I believe you. . .'

The Doctor smiled. 'I've got an innocent face.'

'Something like that. Let's just say the GBBC is a notorious Government mouthpiece. You can't trust anything you see on TV.' Hannah began walking away from the pub. 'Let's get out of here. The sooner I get away from those hypocrites, the better.'

The Doctor followed her. 'You mustn't blame them. They're frightened and they have every right to be. In a society where knowledge and progress are suppressed, academics are always the first targets.'

Anji sank back into her pillows, weary and bewildered. What had happened to Fitz? Whoever had tortured him into confessing had also persuaded Fitz to reveal details about her and the Doctor. But how much had he said? The Security Service agent had suspected her earlier. Being Asian in an all-white society made her all too obvious. She was going to face the same fate as Fitz, unless she could get out of here before morning.

She pulled back the covers and swung her legs off the mattress. Anji was horrified by the multitude of bruises visible below the hem of her white cotton hospital gown. Her body felt as though it had been pummelled by a boxer.

Anji pushed her dark hair back behind her ears, a reflex action to keep it out of her eyes. She suddenly felt light-headed, as though bubbles of ginger ale were popping inside her skull. 'Woo,' she whispered, clutching one hand to her forehead. 'I'm not going anywhere tonight.' Anji let herself fall backwards on to the bed, her legs still hanging over the side. Through the window she could see lights twinkling across the city. Then everything slid into darkness. . .

The Doctor and Hannah had been gone for ten minutes, but discussions about the pair were still occupying Hamilton's group. The professor held up his hands for silence, but was ignored. 'Please! Please! Let us move on. Reliving the past will not solve anything!'

There was a squeal of tyres outside the pub. Hamilton strode to the window and looked out. More than a dozen men in security forces uniforms were jumping from the rear of two trucks, machine guns ready. 'It's a raid!'

The professor turned to the rest of the group. They were still talking, oblivious to the imminent danger. 'Silence! All of you, silence!' he shouted. 'The security forces are outside!'

Malcolm glanced out of the window, then made a bolt for the door. But when he opened it, three figures were standing outside in the main room of the pub. Two were security forces men, their status confirmed by the gleaming barrels of their guns and the shining buttons on their uniforms.

The third was a young man in his twenties, clad in a black trench coat and black peaked cap. He removed the cap to reveal blond hair, slicked back close to the scalp. 'Good evening. My name is Hastings.'

All too soon Fitz was shaken awake by the juddering of the van as it wound its way upwards over cobbles. Must be going back to the castle, Fitz thought. He had always thought of Edinburgh Castle as a picturesque tourist spot where visitors could look out over the city's stone tenements and towers. At night the castle was illuminated from below by spotlights, as if the stone had been hewn from the very rock upon which it perched above the city centre.

But now the castle seemed to be home only for the stone-faced men of the security forces – brutal guards carrying shotguns and trench-coated agents walking briskly about the interior. Machine-gun nests were clustered around the exterior walls amid barbed wire and sandbags. The castle had become a fortress again, just as it had been many times before.

The van lurched to a halt and the back doors were pulled open. Fitz tried to sit upright but was clubbed in the skull by a rifle butt. He slumped to the floor, nursing his latest bruise. 'Good thing I've got a thick skull,' he murmured.

'What did you say?' one of the guards demanded, his rifle butt drawn back to strike again.

'Nothing, nothing!' Fitz protested.

'That's "Nothing, sir!", scum!'

Fitz just nodded, not trusting himself to say anything. Better to keep his mouth shut. The fewer excuses he gave them to beat him, the less injuries he should receive. Not that such a policy had done him much good so far. . .

'Out!' a voice commanded.

Fitz dragged himself along the floor of the van and swung his feet down on to the cobbled courtyard. Painfully, he stood up, swaying slightly in the biting cold of the night air.

‘You again!’

Fitz recognised the watch commander, a burly individual with a face like a slab of granite and muscles so pronounced his neck was almost indistinguishable from his shoulders and head. A livid face thrust itself in front of Fitz’s battered, weary features.

‘I wish I could be there when they execute you. I’d pay good money for the privilege!’

‘Really? Perhaps I could sell tickets –’ Fitz quipped. His joke was cut short by a fist flying into his abdomen like a sledgehammer blow. Fitz doubled over, gasping for breath.

‘You think this is funny, do you? You think murdering twelve innocent people is amusing? They’ve all got families, you know. Wives, children, people who loved them!’ The watch commander leaned over Fitz, his spittle-flecked lips just inches from the prisoner’s right ear. ‘I can’t imagine a midden like you has a family. You remind me more of something I would scrape off the heel of my boot! Now – stand up!’

Fitz followed the order, wincing as his stomach muscles protested. The watch commander looked him up and down.

‘Get this animal out of my sight. Put him in the cells. Don’t give him fresh clothes, either. If he can’t use the toilet like a normal, decent human being, then he can suffer the consequences. Take him away!’

Two guards grabbed Fitz by the arms and dragged him away. The shackles around his feet restricted the length of his stride, making it impossible for Fitz to keep up. He lost his footing and was pulled across the cobbles, feet dragging behind the guards. They took him through a stone archway and down a long, spiralling staircase into the bowels of the building. After many minutes’ descent, they reached the bottom of the staircase and opened an old wooden door. The guards threw Fitz into the darkness, locked the cell door and began the long march back up the stairs.

‘What about Anji? You promised I could see Anji!’ Fitz shouted, but got no reply. He listened to the guards’ footsteps receding. Once they had gone, only the sounds of dripping water and vermin squeaking broke the silence. Fitz explored the darkness by touch. The cell was just too small for him to stretch out full length, and he could reach the side walls by stretching out his

arms. He tried to stand and nearly knocked himself unconscious on the low ceiling. Fitz was surrounded by cold stone, almost entombed. If the guards forgot about him, he would die down here – he just wasn't sure whether hypothermia or dehydration would kill him first.

The Doctor and Hannah stood at the bottom of The Grassmarket, looking up at the silhouette of Edinburgh Castle against the night sky. 'That's where your friend Fitz will be held tonight. All the dangerous prisoners are kept there – it's virtually impregnable and very easy to defend,' Hannah said.

The Doctor nodded. 'We'll have to trust Fitz has not yet outlived his usefulness. That just leaves Anji. She heard Fitz and I deciding to meet in the tearooms. She probably noticed the discrepancies in the timeline and –'

'Timeline discrepancies?'

'Yes.' The Doctor rubbed his temples, swaying slightly on his feet. 'I've noticed certain anomalies in your city, anomalies that can only be explained by some form of corruption in the... in the...'

He started falling sideways but was caught by Hannah before he could take a nasty tumble on to the cobbles. 'Doctor!' She eased him down into a sitting position. 'Doctor? Are you all right?'

His dazed eyes struggled to focus on her. 'Hannah? Is that you?'

No! Something's wrong!

What's –

'Yes. You almost fainted again.'

The Doctor gasped, short of breath. 'Whatever is causing this, it gets worse every time I try to concentrate my thoughts on the problem.'

Hannah glanced up and down The Grassmarket nervously. 'Can you stand? We need to get out of here – the sooner, the better. The security forces maintain regular patrols near the castle. They could come past at any minute.'

'We've known about your little gatherings for some time, Professor. In view of today's events, my superiors have decided they can no longer tolerate dissident groups.' Hastings pulled off a black leather glove and examined his fingernails.

'I don't know what you're talking about. We're not dissidents,' Hamilton protested. 'Just a group of friends who gather for a drink and a chat.'

Everyone inside the Living Room had been dragged out into the night and lined up against the pub's exterior wall. A few vehicles passed by, accelerating away quickly when the drivers saw the armed men.

Hastings picked grit out from under a fingernail. 'You know what bores me most about people like you? It's the same, dreary denials. I didn't do it, I wasn't there. You can't blame me. Just once I'd like to meet a man who had the nerve to admit his crimes.'

'But we've done nothing wrong,' Hamilton insisted.

'If your cause is as noble and righteous as you claim, I'd expect you to be proud of your actions. I'd expect you would welcome the chance to confront me and tell me what I'm doing is wrong. Instead you skulk about, blowing up innocent people and holding your furtive little meetings. If ever I doubted the justice of what I do – not that I ever have – I would only need to look at scum like you to be reassured.'

'We just talk.'

'So talk to me now. Tell me something I don't know and it might save your life. Otherwise...'

Hastings pointed at the line of armed men stood on the road, facing the terrified landlord and his drinkers. 'Let's just say the administration of justice will be swift and merciless.'

The landlord could stand it no longer. 'Please, I'm just an honest publican. I didn't know what they were talking about in there. I just serve drinks.'

Hastings nodded to one of his men. They stepped forwards and slammed the butt of a machine gun into the groin of the landlord, who collapsed to the footpath, whimpering and dry-retching. 'An honest publican would have reported any such suspicious meetings. It's people like you, turning a blind eye to terrorism, who are just as guilty as those planting the bombs. I can respect someone willing to back up his beliefs with action. You just want to make a profit from it, a few shillings at best. You're the worst kind of collaborator.'

Hamilton cleared his throat. 'Perhaps I can help you, but you must promise to let the others go if I do.'

Hastings smiled. 'Really? Tell me more.'

The elderly professor peered at him in the gloom, searching for reassurance. 'Do you promise?'

'I am a man of my word.'

'Very well. We watched the broadcast earlier, the confession.'

‘Ah, Mr Kreiner, a fascinating fellow. It was his evidence that led us to your little group,’ Hastings said.

Hamilton was confused. ‘But we’ve never met. We’d never heard of him until tonight.’

‘Yes, yes. You were saying. . .’

‘The man he mentioned during his confession – the Doctor. He came to our meeting tonight.’

‘Did he? How fascinating.’

‘One of our junior members brought him. She said he had approached her earlier today, seeking her aid.’

‘And what is this junior member’s name?’ Hastings asked.

‘Hannah.’

‘Hannah what?’

Hamilton shrugged. ‘I am the only person who reveals my last name to the others in the group. I feel that, as leader, I have a responsibility to share the most with my members. Everybody else only uses first names, in case. . .’

‘In case you ever get captured by the security forces.’ Hastings looked up and down the line of men. ‘Of course, that strategy is only effective if you don’t get captured all together.’

‘Once we discovered who the Doctor was, we ejected him from the meeting immediately. Him and Hannah,’ Hamilton said. ‘As I said before, this group gathers to talk – we do not condone terrorist action.’

‘But you didn’t report the presence of this Doctor to the proper authorities, did you?’

‘Well, I. . .’

‘Did you?’

The professor stared down at his feet. ‘No.’

‘Dear oh dear,’ Hastings said. ‘That’s just not good enough, I’m afraid.’

‘You mean you’re still going to imprison us?’

‘Oh no.’

‘Thank goodness for that,’ Hamilton sighed.

‘No, that would mean paying for all of you to be fed and clothed and housed. No, this way is far more efficient.’ Hastings nodded to his men, who took aim at the terrified men standing opposite them.

‘But you said if I told you something you didn’t know, you would spare our lives.’ The old man was shaking, his body quivering with rage and frustration. ‘You promised – you gave your word!’

'I lied. Promises given to terrorists and those who assist them have no validity. You lie and kill and cheat,' Hastings said. 'We fight fire with fire.'

He nodded to his men, who began shooting.

'What was that noise?' Hannah asked. She and the Doctor were a mile away from The Cowgate when the night air was punctured by a harsh, rattling echo.

'Almost sounded like machine guns,' the Doctor replied. But it quickly died away, replaced by traffic and the city's other noises.

'Before you felt dizzy, you were telling me about Anji,' Hannah said. 'I wonder why was she trapped inside and not Fitz? It doesn't make any sense.'

'Something must have happened to draw him outside,' the Doctor speculated. 'But what? He wouldn't have left Anji if he knew about the bomb.'

'In his confession Fitz said she was caught in the blast.'

'I suspect he said that for my benefit. He knew I might see the broadcast and wanted me to know about Anji.' The Doctor stopped walking. 'If she was injured, where would she be taken?'

'To an accident and emergency department, probably at the Royal Infirmary – that's the city's main hospital. But it's normally overflowing with patients. Anyone injured in the bombing may have gone to another hospital. The whole health system is on the point of collapse,' Hannah said.

'Like so much of this society,' the Doctor muttered to himself. 'What if she was dead?'

'Same place, but a different department – the morgue. Until the body is claimed by friends or relatives, she'd be kept in the morgue.'

'And if it wasn't claimed?'

'A pauper's grave.'

The Doctor grimaced. 'That isn't going to happen. We have to find Anji, dead or alive. If she's dead, she deserves a proper burial. If she's alive, we must find her before the authorities do. At least she won't be hard to find.'

'Why not?'

'Anji is a third generation Briton, but her grandparents came from Pakistan. I don't think I've seen one brown-skinned person all day.'

Hannah nodded. She had never met someone who wasn't white before. The Doctor did have some curious travelling companions. 'Let's start with the Royal Infirmary. If she's not there, as a patient or in the morgue...'

'Then we move on to the next hospital.'

‘This could take all night.’

‘Hannah, you don’t have to come,’ the Doctor said quietly. ‘I’ll understand if you don’t trust me. I’ve no way of proving what I say is true until I can find Anji or Fitz. Anyway, won’t your family be worried about you – staying out all night with a strange man?’

‘I don’t have a family,’ she replied. ‘I’m an orphan. My mother died when I was born. My father passed away a few years ago. He only went into hospital for a simple operation. But they lost his medical records and gave him the wrong medicine. He died three days later.’

‘Hannah, I’m sorry. . .’

‘His death was the reason I wanted to go to university. Unless medical science can progress, people will go on dying needlessly.’

‘You’re right,’ the Doctor said. ‘Come on. Let’s find Anji.’

Fitz was woken by footsteps descending the long stone staircase to his cell. He pulled himself into a sitting position, wincing as he did so. Battered muscles had stiffened while he slept and movement sent stabs of pain through his body.

Keys rattled in the lock and the door swung open. A powerful torch beam swung into Fitz’s eyes, dazzling him. ‘What is it now? I gave you what you wanted.’

‘Yes, and I’m very grateful, Mr Kreiner,’ Hastings replied from behind the torch. ‘Your broadcast has earned me a much-deserved promotion. My superiors have seen fit to remove me from this cold, dank building. I have been summoned to the service’s HQ in London for a special assignment. So, I’m afraid this is goodbye.’

‘I’ll be so sorry to see you go,’ Fitz replied sarcastically.

‘No need for such bitterness. You thought what you were doing was for the good of others. I’m sure they’ll understand your betrayal in time.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘I regret to say I wasn’t entirely honest with you earlier, Mr Kreiner. We never had Miss Kapoor in custody here.’

Fitz felt a wave of nausea surge through his body ‘You mean. . .’

‘The sound of that woman’s pain? That was a recording of an actress. Rather a good one, I might add. We’ve made good use of her talents.’

‘But you promised. You said you would never. . .’

‘Lie to you?’ Hastings chuckled. ‘Sadly, that was untrue. But you can’t trust anybody these days, can you? Goodbye, Mr Kreiner.’ The young lawyer began to leave, but a question from Fitz stopped him.

‘What’s going to happen to me?’

‘You’ve already confessed, so your guilt is not at issue any more. But the courts still like to go through the formalities, to show justice being done. And the newspapers will want to get all the gruesome details of your crimes. So you’ll be sentenced tomorrow, I imagine, then taken out somewhere and executed. A bullet in the back of the head, perhaps a quick swing from the gallows. Something of that ilk. I’ve heard the courts are favouring cyanide injection as it’s less cruel, but I doubt they’ll see fit to grant you such mercy.’ He swung the door shut, locking it carefully before climbing back up the stairs.

Fitz hugged his knees to his chest, rocking slowly backwards and forwards. He knew the Doctor was still out there somewhere and Anji might be with him. She must still be alive, Fitz told himself. Hastings would have had no hesitation about using her dead body as part of his coercion, given the opportunity. Anji and the Doctor made a formidable pair. If anyone was going to save Fitz from this nightmare, it was them. He would just have to hope the Doctor and Anji had seen his confession and were already working out how to save him. The alternative was too grim to contemplate.

France, 1819

John Herschel emerged from the carriage and brushed himself down. The journey back from Paris to England was proving long and arduous. The roads were little more than dirt tracks, none of the cobbled streets familiar from London and Cambridge. French people in the countryside remained openly hostile to the English, even though it was four years since Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. Herschel would be glad to get back home, especially as it would afford some respite from his travelling companion.

At twenty-seven, Charles Babbage was a year older than Herschel. They had met at Cambridge University and become the best of friends. Both had been disappointed by the poor standard of teaching at Cambridge. Trinity might have been Isaac Newton's college, but by the time they arrived it was little more than a finishing school for gentlemen. Babbage and Herschel had helped form the Analytical Society, dedicated to reviving interest in the pursuit of science. Since leaving Cambridge they had even attempted to seize control of the Royal Society. The two men had been through much together, but even Herschel found Babbage's obsessive passions and perfectionism trying at times. Once the man got an idea in his head, he rarely let it go.

'But surely you agree, John – England must adopt this idea of *Ecoles polytechniques*, otherwise we will be left behind!' Babbage clambered down the carriage, still talking as he had done most of the way from Paris.

'Yes, yes, Charles, it was very impressive. But perhaps we could talk about something else for a while?' Herschel smiled at his friend, a note of pleading evident in his voice.

Babbage flushed with embarrassment. 'I'm sorry. Have I been dominating the conversation again?'

'Just slightly.' Herschel patted his companion on the back. 'Don't worry, I'm just tired. Let's get inside the *l'auberge*. A hot bath, a good meal and I'll be ready to talk the night away!'

Several hours later, the two men were debating their favourite topics by a

fireplace, trying to set the world to rights as usual.

‘What I found most fascinating was the mechanism De Prony uses to calculate tables,’ Herschel said, between sips of red wine. ‘Dividing the labour so even barely numerate hairdressers can be given the task of working through the calculations. What did he call it?’

‘The “method of differences”,’ Babbage replied. He stared into the fireplace, watching resin boil and spit as it oozed from the flaming logs.

‘It produced results so much more quickly than just having individual mathematicians working on the same numbers,’ Hershey noted. ‘I think that could be the way forward.’

Babbage wasn’t convinced. ‘You’re right, it was fast – but it was still inaccurate. What is the use of tables that are inaccurate? You may be able to produce them more quickly, but the root problem remains. If only we could take the human calculators out of the process – they are the cause of all these inaccuracies, after all.’

The two men were interrupted by a man in his mid-thirties. Like them, he wore formal garb. He had an inquiring, serious face and was smoking a pipe. ‘Excuse me gentlemen, I’m sorry to interrupt but I couldn’t help overhearing – are you English?’

Herschel and Babbage both stood up to allow introductions. ‘My name is John Herschel and this is my friend, Charles Babbage.’

‘I am William Kempton,’ the newcomer replied. The three men bowed their heads to each other. ‘Would you mind if I joined you? I am travelling alone and would value a chance to speak English again.’

‘Of course, sir,’ Babbage replied, ‘pull up a chair. But I must warn you, you may find our conversation a little dry and uninteresting! We are both scientists and thinkers, and can talk for hours on the most obscure topics.’

‘My friend here certainly can, sir,’ Herschel agreed with a smile, gently teasing Babbage. Kempton drew a chair nearer the fire and the three men sat down, forming a semicircle around the hearth.

‘I believe you were talking about calculating tables before I interrupted you,’ Kempton said. ‘I have some small interest in this field myself.’

‘Really? How so?’ Herschel asked politely.

‘I work in insurance. We use printed tables of numbers to make calculations for our annuities and other policies. Without them we would be lost, but the work is constantly plagued with errors – errors that spring from those same printed tables on which we depend!’

Babbage nodded excitedly. 'I once calculated the British Government has lost between two and three million pounds due to errors in the tables. And that's nothing to the cost in lives – until we have accurate tables for navigation, our sailors will continue to fall victim to unnecessary shipwrecks!'

'Indeed, sir. Those shipwrecks and the loss of valuable cargoes costs my firm many thousands of pounds every year,' Kempton agreed. 'But what can be done about it?'

Herschel laughed. 'You have asked the question that my friend and I have been wrestling with almost our entire journey. Now you have posed the questions afresh, Charles shall keep us here until dawn with his ideas!'

Babbage did his best to look shocked and appalled, but could not help laughing. 'My friend John speaks the truth, I fear, sir. But just before you joined us an idea occurred to me that I hardly dared speak aloud – it seemed too fanciful. But your enquiry has emboldened me.'

'Tell on, sir,' Kempton said. He sat back in his chair and pushed the end of his pipe into his mouth. 'I would be most interested to hear more.'

Babbage held an index finger against his mouth, formulating his thoughts before speaking. 'I was just saying that it is the human errors in printed tables on numbers that lead to so many errors. What if there was a way to eliminate such errors from the tables when they are created?'

'How?'

'The key was in the phrase "human errors". If we could eliminate the human element from the creation of tables, we could eliminate those errors.'

'So what do you suggest?' Herschel asked.

Babbage smiled. 'Would it not be more convenient if a steam engine could be contrived to execute calculations for us?'

Kempton gave Babbage a queer look, as if he suspected the man had gone suddenly mad. 'A steam engine?'

'Yes! That way we could automate the process and prevent human error from poisoning the process of pure calculation,' Babbage enthused.

Kempton shook his head. 'I don't think such a thing could be possible – certainly not in our lifetime.'

But Herschel was intrigued by his friend's idea. 'So you would automate the method of differences that De Prony was using in Paris... with a machine?'

'Not just a machine – a steam engine,' Babbage said.

Herschel stared into the fire now, but his mind was focused on some far distant point. 'Building such an engine is beyond modern science, Charles. But it could be done. Certainly, it should be possible.'

Kempton stood up abruptly. 'I'm sorry, gentlemen, but this discussion has entered the realms of a wild and dangerous fiction.' He began tapping his pipe out against the side of the fireplace, so the contents fell on to the grate. 'Any passing stranger would think you mad for even entertaining such a far-fetched notion. I would advise you against pursuing it further.'

Babbage stood, his former exhaustion replaced with exhilaration. 'No, sir – I'm sorry to say I couldn't disagree with you more! This, to me, sounds like one of the greatest projects a scientist could attempt. For too long the academics of Britain have let those on the Continent define the way forward in mathematics, philosophy and other pursuits of the mind. We English must strive to be leaders of men again. I believe this idea could help achieve that!'

Kempton glared at Babbage, a dark threat underlying his words. 'You would do well to forget this notion, sir – no good can come of it.'

At this Herschel stood up. 'Just what are you implying, sir?'

'Nothing.' Kempton pushed the stem of his pipe into the breast pocket of his frock coat. 'But I believe men and machines are not destined to work together, not in the way your friend describes. Some might consider his notions unholy.'

'Come, come, sir!' Babbage protested. 'I only want to do this to save the lives of others, to improve already existing methods of working. How can that be unholy? You exaggerate, sir!'

'I have said all I wish to say on the matter.' Kempton stared at Babbage. 'Will you not abandon this idea?'

'I cannot,' Babbage replied, taken aback by the curious change in the gentleman's behaviour. 'A man of science must follow the will of his mind. I believe in reform and progress. I deplore the bloodshed and horrors perpetrated in the name of the French Revolution, but the other things it achieved are a beacon for us all to follow. Greater freedoms led to greater achievements. That is what I believe. If we disagree over that, then so be it, sir.'

Kempton turned to Herschel. 'And you? Do you feel the same way?'

'I support my friend, I always have,' Herschel said. 'If you have some quarrel with him, then you have the same quarrel with me.'

Kempton shook his head slowly. 'So be it. I gave you the chance to turn back from this course of action. On your own heads be it!' Kempton stormed

from the room and disappeared up the stairs of the small tavern. Babbage and Herschel watched him go, before sinking back down into their chairs again.

‘What a curious fellow!’ Babbage remarked after a time.

‘Indeed. His words – they were almost a threat,’ Herschel remarked.

Babbage snorted at this notion. ‘I think you exaggerate, my friend. He is obviously one of these men who would rather live in the past than embrace the future. His kind are yesterday’s men. You and I, we are the future.’

Herschel glanced over at the staircase, still wondering. ‘Perhaps. But there was something about his tone I didn’t like. . .’

It was past midnight when the two men finally surrendered to their exhaustion and retired to their separate bed chambers. Herschel was just taking off his waistcoat when a floorboard creaked behind him. He spun round to find Kempton advancing on him, a sharp blade glinting in the moonlight.

‘What are you doing in here? I must –’ Herschel protested. But his words were cut short by the dagger stabbing into his chest and piercing his heart. Kempton clamped a gloved hand over the dying man’s mouth to prevent him crying out. Herschel tried to fight back, his fingers clawing at the face of his attacker. But Kempton held him down remorselessly, one hand twisting the knife in the wound. Gradually, Herschel’s struggles became more feeble, and then finally stopped altogether.

Kempton stood over the corpse, counting to six hundred under his breath. Then, satisfied Herschel was dead, the murderer picked up the body and placed it on the bed. Kempton wiped the blade clean on his victim’s night-shirt before pulling the covers up and over the corpse. Then he retreated from the room, slipping down the corridor to the next door.

Babbage woke with a start. He had fallen asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow, but now he was utterly awake again. Little time could have passed. The sickle moon in the window had moved just a few inches since he had lain down. So what had startled him from such a sound slumber?

A face loomed over Babbage in the blue-tinged darkness, two black eyes staring intently down at him. ‘Kempton? What are you doing in my room?’

Kempton held a forefinger up to his lips, requesting quiet.

‘No, I will not be silent, sir! What are you doing here? I demand satisfaction!’ Babbage began to sit up but Kempton pinned him down on the bed, a

heavy forearm pressed against Babbage's throat.

'I'll give you satisfaction,' Kempton hissed. 'I gave you a chance – but you wouldn't listen. Now you will have to pay the price for that stubbornness!'

'What – what are – you going – to – to do?' Babbage choked out, gasping for breath. The arm across his throat was slowly crushing his larynx.

'The same as I did to your friend Herschel,' Kempton replied. 'I'm going to kill you. That way your idea dies here with you.'

'No – p-please! I have – a wife – c-children –'

'Then you should have thought of that before, shouldn't you?' Kempton flourished the blade in front of Babbage's face.

'No – n-no –'

Kempton drew the edge of the blade sideways across Babbage's neck.

Babbage almost sighed with relief as he felt the arm being lifted away from his throat. But still he couldn't speak. What was wrong? He couldn't seem to draw breath either. He gasped and gurgled but no sound came from his lips.

Babbage's eyes slid imploringly to the window but the moon was gone, hidden by clouds.

Friday, April 18, 2003

It was dawn when the Doctor and Hannah reached Leith Hospital. They had spent the night on a grim tour of Edinburgh's medical centres, searching the wards and morgues for Anji. Twice the pair thought they had found her. The Royal Infirmary had some of the survivors from the bomb blast, but none of them were Anji. The Astley Ainslie had a burns case from the explosion in its specialist unit. The Doctor was grateful when he saw the woman wasn't Anji. Her body was covered in bandages and a morphine drip kept her free from pain. More than half her body must have been incinerated in the blast. The physicians thought it was unlikely she would live much longer.

It was approaching six o'clock when they arrived in Leith, having exhausted almost all other possibilities. 'After this, the only places she could be are Lasswade or Costorphine,' Hannah said. 'Both of those are miles from the centre of the city – she must be here.'

The Doctor strolled into the hospital via the ambulance entrance, followed by a more nervous Hannah. 'Just act as though you own the place,' he whispered to her. 'Only people who look like they don't belong get caught.'

'Right,' she replied and tried to match his bravado. For someone who claimed not to be a terrorist, the Doctor was unusually adept at getting into places where he was not permitted.

The Doctor marched up to the hospital admissions' desk. 'I'm Dr John Smith, a head injury specialist from the Royal Infirmary. I'm here to examine one of the patients injured in the explosion yesterday.'

The receptionist directed him to Ward Nine, where the survivors were being treated. The Doctor thanked her and was about to leave when Hannah stepped forward to the admissions' desk.

'Excuse me, I'm Dr Smith's assistant. He's going to need a white coat for his examination, to stop his clothes getting dirty.' Hannah gestured at the Doctor's unusual attire. 'You know how fussy these doctors are...'

The receptionist just rolled her eyes in agreement. 'Down the corridor, first on the left for the locker rooms. He can get a white coat there. Ward Nine is

up on the third floor – get the lift at the end of that corridor.’

‘Thanks!’ Hannah winked at the Doctor and they strode away.

Fitz couldn’t remember falling asleep. It felt like he’d sat up all night, trying to think of a way out of his situation. But when the guards came back, he was asleep in a corner of the tiny cell. Fitz’s leg muscles had stiffened during the night, so they dragged him up the stairs.

Fitz emerged blinking into the castle courtyard, his eyes unused to the weak sunshine. ‘It’s good to be out of that hole,’ he said.

‘No one said you could speak!’ the watch commander bellowed, kicking Fitz in the back of one knee. He collapsed to the cobbles, crying out in pain. The watch commander loomed over him. ‘No, one said you could rest!’ He pulled back a fist, ready to strike.

Fitz got back to his feet as fast as he could. Collecting bruises upon bruises would not help him find an escape. He looked round the courtyard, a chill wind making him squint. Six police riders in dark uniforms sat on motorcycles. In each of their sidecars sat another policeman, armed with a machine gun. A black metal van stood waiting, its back doors gaping to reveal half a dozen security men inside. Two rows of gun-wielding guards formed a path to the vehicle. A guard of dishonour, Fitz thought.

‘Get in the back of the van!’ the watch commander yelled, shoving Fitz forward. He stumbled towards the van, his steps stymied by the shackles round his ankles. Once inside, he was chained to a metal ring on the floor while the back doors were locked from the outside. The van’s engine roared into life.

‘Where are we going?’ Fitz asked.

‘The High Court Justiciary,’ one of the guards replied. ‘See you get what you deserve!’

‘I don’t recall anyone sending for a specialist,’ Dr MacLeod muttered. ‘What was the patient’s name again?’

‘Kapoor, Anji Kapoor,’ the Doctor replied. He and Hannah had found their way to Ward Nine but Anji was not in the room with the other women injured in the explosion. ‘She’s got dark brown skin, quite unusual.’

‘Oh!’ Dr MacLeod replied. ‘Her! She’s a terrorist, you know.’

‘Yes,’ Hannah chipped in. ‘It was the Service that asked for her to be examined. Make sure she’s fit to be moved elsewhere for interrogation.’

‘She doesn’t look much like a terrorist to me,’ Dr MacLeod said. ‘Such kind eyes she has. You’d never know to look at her.’

‘Appearances can be deceiving.’

‘Quite, quite. Well, she’s down there in a private room. After the broadcast last night one of the other patients recognised her. We had to move her to another room for her own safety. I expect the Security Service will be here to collect her soon, so you better hurry along and examine her.’ Dr MacLeod turned away to continue his rounds, but then remembered something else. ‘Of course, you’ll need a key...’

But the Doctor and Hannah had gone.

Anji opened her eyes. Outside the sky was a dramatic flurry of blue and orange as the rising sun coloured the clouds from below the horizon. It was dawn, so that probably put the time at about six in the morning. Anji yawned and began to stretch, groaning with pain. She was still lying half on and half off the bed, the position where she had passed out the previous night.

A jolt of memory got her attention. She had to get out of here before the Security Service returned for her. If Fitz had been beaten into confessing to a bombing he never committed, what chance did she have? But there were several problems to overcome. For a start, she had no clothes – just a cotton hospital gown. Anji could feel a cool draft leaking in from the sash window behind her, indicating the gown had the usual embarrassing gap at the back. Something more substantial would be needed.

Then there was the state of her health. Multiple bruising she could survive, but suspected concussion was more of a worry. The pressure behind her eyes had eased considerably with a night’s rest and she had no trouble focusing her vision now. But do too much too soon and she risked a relapse. Last but not least, she was locked in a room without the key.

Anji stood up and walked to the window. I’m definitely on the mend, she decided. Last night I’d have collapsed before getting this far. She pressed her forehead against the glass and looked down the side of the building. Her room was on the third floor and there was no fire escape nearby if she climbed out of the window. She would get out the way she came in, or not at all.

Next she examined the bed. But the metal frame was sturdy and refused to surrender any of its part as a potential weapon or tool. A knock on the door startled her. Through a window in the door Anji could see a familiar

face.

'Doctor!' He had a rare ability to appear in the right place at the right time, just as the reverse was often true. Anji rushed over to the door, her soreness temporarily replaced by the joy of seeing him.

'It's locked!' Anji called to him.

The Doctor held up a finger to his lips, quietening her. He looked around himself quickly, then dug out his fob watch and held it up for Anji to see. He held up a single finger beside the watch.

'One watch? I don't understand,' Anji whispered.

The Doctor made walking gestures with his fingers, going away from the door and coming back again. Then he pointed at the watch again with one finger raised beside it. Anji understood this time.

'You'll be back in one minute?'

The Doctor nodded vigorously, then strode away. Anji watched him go, then sat back on the bed. Now that the Doctor was here, her strength was starting to return. Her new hope was shattered by the arrival of a fresh face at the door. A gruff-faced man with black hair tapped at the glass panel. He smiled at her, holding up a Security Service insignia.

'I need the key for the private room at the end of the hall,' the Doctor said.

'Why?' the ward sister asked suspiciously. 'Who are you? I've never seen you here before?'

'This is Dr John Smith,' Hannah replied, making her voice sound as imperious as possible. 'He's a specialist from the Royal Infirmary.'

'Nonsense!' the ward sister said. 'I worked there for twenty years, I know all the specialists and I've never seen this man before!'

Dr MacLeod emerged from the patient's lounge. 'What is all this shouting about? People are trying to get well here, you know.'

The ward sister bristled with anger. 'This pair claim to be from the Royal Infirmary, but I've never heard of them!'

MacLeod rubbed his bleary eyes. 'Oh, that's Dr Smith. Sorry, I meant to tell you, you'll need to key to see Miss Kapoor.' The Doctor smiled. 'Yes, I was just trying to obtain it.' MacLeod glared at the ward sister. 'For goodness sake woman, this isn't your personal fiefdom! Give the man the key, he's got a job to do, the same as you or me! If you want, I'll vouch for him!'

'Fine!' The ward sister produced the key from a pocket of her uniform. 'But on your head be it, Dr MacLeod!'

Hannah took the key from her with a smirk and gave it to the Doctor. They marched off down the corridor towards Anji's room.

Anji grimaced at the Security Service agent and folded her arms. He tried the door without success before disappearing from view, no doubt going to get the key from the ward sister. Seconds later the Doctor reappeared outside the door. He was accompanied by a woman Anji did not recognise.

A key rattled in the lock and the Doctor opened the door. 'Anji! How are you?' He hurried into the room and gave her a warm embrace in his usual, disarming manner.

'I've been better, but I'll survive. Look, Doctor, we –'

'Need to get out of here?' he replied with a smile.

'Yes, there's a Security Service agent in the hospital. He's just gone –'

'Gone to get the key for this room?' the Doctor said, holding up the key with a flourish. 'I thought so. He gave me a most suspicious look in the corridor just now. I think the white coat suits me, don't you?'

'Doctor – hurry!' The woman by the door was keeping a look out.

The Doctor nodded his agreement. He looked at Anji. 'I think you should go out of this room as you came in.'

Anji clambered back into the bed and pulled the covers over her face. 'There's a brake on each of the leg wheels,' she said.

The Doctor ran around the bed, undoing the locks. Once the bed was free to move, he rolled it out into the corridor. 'Hannah, give me a hand,' he said to the woman keeping watch. She grabbed the other end of the bed and they pushed it along the corridor. A guttural voice called after them.

'Halt!' The Doctor and Hannah kept pushing. 'I said halt!'

The bed came to a stop. Anji felt herself shivering beneath the sheet and tried to stay still, breathing shallowly to mask any movement.

'Where are you going with that?' the agent asked, his heavy footsteps echoing along the corridor as he approached the trio.

'The morgue,' Hannah replied quickly. 'A dead prostitute – syphilis. Went mad before she died. Clawed her own eyes out. You want to see?'

'No! Get the whore out of here!' The agent turned on his heel and marched away, calling for the ward sister. 'Where is the key for the suspect's room? I want it found! Where is it?'

The Doctor and Hannah resumed pushing the bed. They stopped in front of an elevator and the Doctor pushed a button to summon the lift. Once it

arrived, Hannah pulled back the two metal grilles and the Doctor pushed the bed inside. As the lift began to descend, Anji pulled back the sheet from her face and sat up.

‘We haven’t been introduced. I’m Anji Kapoor – dead syphilitic whore.’

‘Hannah Baxter. Sorry about that – I didn’t want him demanding to see the corpse. Syphilis was the second thing that came to mind.’

‘What was the first – gonorrhoea?’ Anji asked.

‘No, that’s not generally fatal. You learn a lot, working in a reference library,’ Hannah said. ‘The first thing I thought of was leprosy, but I wasn’t sure he’d believe that in this day and age.’

‘I don’t know,’ Anji replied. ‘This might be 2003 but I didn’t realise the National Health Service was in such a state. They don’t even have enough money for basic equipment.’

‘I noticed that,’ the Doctor said, ‘but I doubt money is the issue. I believe something else is the cause.’

‘What?’ Anji asked.

The lift stopped at the ground floor before the Doctor could explain. Hannah pulled back the twin metal grilles and the Doctor pushed the bed out. Anji repositioned the sheet over her face.

‘What’s the best way to sneak out of a hospital?’ the Doctor pondered.

‘In an ambulance?’ Anji whispered.

‘What a splendid idea.’

‘It was Dr MacLeod, he made me surrender the key for the terrorist’s room.’ The ward sister pointed accusingly at the exhausted physician. ‘I thought they were acting suspiciously, but he overruled me.’

The gruff-faced agent loomed over MacLeod. ‘Is this true?’

‘Well, yes, but Dr Smith and his assistant – they said they were acting on your behalf,’ a bewildered MacLeod replied. ‘They had to examine Miss Kapoor, make sure she was fit to travel.’

The agent shook his head slowly. ‘I never fail to be amazed by where I find collaborators. In every walk of life they exist, people determined to help the cause of terrorists, determined to help spread sedition. . .’

‘But I was just –’

MacLeod was cut short by a vicious backhanded blow across his face. He tumbled to the floor. The onyx ring on the agent’s middle finger had cracked against the doctor’s cheekbone, shattering it.

‘Shut up!’ The agent stood over the fallen doctor, hand drawn back to strike again.

The crumpled physician tried to silence his own whimpering.

‘That’s better.’ The agent relaxed again, straightening his tie and smoothing down the folds of his clothes. ‘I could have you executed immediately, Dr MacLeod. But instead I will take you in for further questioning. Think long and hard. Unless you can give me the names of other collaborators, you will face the full weight of the law.’

‘What about the escaped patient? The two who helped her?’ the ward sister asked.

‘Don’t worry, they won’t get far,’ the agent reassured her. ‘It’s only a matter of time before they are captured.’

He reached down and grabbed Dr MacLeod’s lapels. ‘Up you get, doctor. You’ve got some questions to answer – at headquarters!’

The Doctor abandoned the stolen ambulance in Holyrood Park, below the crumbling ruins of St Anthony’s Chapel. Anji found an ambulance driver’s tunic and trousers in the back of the vehicle and changed into those while Hannah and the Doctor decided their next move.

‘We have to find Fitz. He’s already confessed to the bombing. It’s only a matter of time before his usefulness as a propaganda tool runs out,’ the Doctor speculated. ‘When that happens...’

‘He was due to be sentenced this morning,’ Hannah said. ‘The outcome will be on the midday news.’

Anji emerged from the back of the ambulance. The trousers were far too large, so she had rolled up the legs and clutched the excess material at her waist. The tunic masked her body shape, but her dark skin was still obvious.

‘How do I look?’ she asked sheepishly.

‘As if you need a new tailor,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Hannah, how far is it to your home?’

‘Walking distance,’ she said. ‘I’ve got clothes that will probably fit Anji, and we can listen to the wireless for news about Fitz.’

Anji looked at Hannah. She had a friendly, heart-shaped face and strawberry blonde hair curled in a style reminiscent of the 1940s. They were a similar height, but the Scottish woman was carrying more weight than Anji.

Hannah and the Doctor had obviously developed a rapport in the past twenty-four hours, something that caused Anji a twinge of jealousy. She told

herself not to be so suspicious. If the Doctor trusted Hannah, so could she.

‘How did you meet the Doctor?’

Hannah talked as the trio walked through a persistent drizzle – how the Doctor had passed out in the library and come to muttering about anomalies in technology.

‘You’ve noticed that too,’ Anji said. ‘It’s as if everyone has gone retro-crazy. Everything looks so old fashioned. The clothes, the buildings, the cars...’ She gave a brief account of her own experiences. ‘The level of racism – I’ve never encountered anything like it.’

‘Xenophobia,’ the Doctor said, ‘Fear and hatred exaggerated by the nature of this society, instead of being frowned upon as you would expect in twenty-first century Britain.’

‘People like you, Anji,’ Hannah said, ‘we never see them. Not unless they’re servants brought back from the colonies or visiting dignitaries.’

‘That’s another thing, “the colonies”,’ Anji said. ‘The British Empire was history fifty years ago, but you’d hardly know it from the way people act.’

The Doctor was listening with interest. ‘You’re saying the variations here – it’s not just about primitive technology, it encompasses all aspects of life.’

‘Err, I guess so,’ Anji replied. ‘I hadn’t really got that far...’

‘We’re here,’ Hannah announced. They were standing outside a tall, narrow stone building to the east of Holyrood Park. ‘I live in the basement flat. It’s not much to look at, but it’s a place to sleep.’

‘Don’t worry,’ the Doctor said. ‘You should see the size of the place Fitz, Anji and I call home!’

Fitz’s court appearance had not begun well. He was given fresh clothes and a bowl of cold water to bathe in, but then spent two hours waiting in a cell that stank of stale urine. That was followed by a rough reception from the court guards. Fitz felt he was probably the first man ever to be thrown up a set of stairs while in custody. He entered the number one courtroom on his hands and knees, crawling up the last few steps into the dock.

When he stood up, Fitz took in his surroundings. Whoever designed the courtroom had obviously got a large supply of oak. The walls and ceiling were panelled, the furniture was oak, even the floorboards were oak – all stained a dark brown. Fitz thought it must resemble the inside of an unlined coffin, then hastily put the image to one side. He might be seeing the inside of a coffin all too soon, unless circumstances improved.

The courtroom was choked with pompous men in black gowns and faded horsehair wigs. The jury box along one wall was empty, but the press box bulged with reporters furiously scribbling in their notebooks. One man stared at Fitz before holding up a thumb. Then he licked a pencil and began drawing. The court artist, Fitz realised. Hope he gets my good side.

The room was brought to order by a trio of ancient men emerging from a doorway. On the floor all the barristers scuttled to their places, heads bowed respectfully. After an age, the three judges had shuffled to their seats. A clerk began proceedings by reading the charges against Fitz – twelve counts of murder, one count of attempted murder, sundry acts of terrorism and high treason against the Empire.

The middle judge leaned forward to the clerk. ‘I understand a confession has been entered by the accused?’

‘Yes, m’lud.’

‘Very well. We shall hear the circumstances of these cases before passing sentence. It’s bad enough that we have to sit on a holy day like Good Friday. We have no intention of prolonging these proceedings any further than is strictly necessary.’

Fitz put one hand in the air, a task made more difficult by his wrists still being manacled together. The judge looked at him curiously.

‘Yes, what? Do you have something to say?’

‘I’m innocent.’

‘Sorry?’

Fitz wasn’t sure if the judge could hear him. ‘I said I’m innocent!’

This sent a buzz round the courtroom. The judge banged his wooden gavel on its stand, silencing the chatter.

‘You recant your confession?’

‘That’s right,’ Fitz said with a smile. Maybe this wasn’t going to be so bad after all. He hadn’t committed these crimes, he knew that – so there could hardly be any evidence to prove that he had. ‘I never murdered anyone and I certainly didn’t commit any terrorism or high treason. There’s been a terrible mistake.’

‘A terrible mistake?’

‘That’s right!’

The judges conferred in whispers between themselves before their leader addressing the room. ‘Frankly, we place no credence on this last minute change of plea. It is obviously a stratagem to disrupt the proceedings of this

court and gain publicity for your cause. The prisoner's statements shall be stricken from the record. Any further outbursts will be punished. Now, let us –'

'But I'm innocent!' Fitz protested. Didn't you hear? I said I'm innocent!

'This is your final warning,' the judge replied sternly. 'If necessary, we will conduct these proceedings in your absence. Remain silent or you will be removed from this courtroom! Am I understood?'

'But I –'

'Am I understood?' the judge raged, standing in his seat.

Fitz nodded helplessly. In other circumstances, his predicament would have been funny. Instead it was just chilling, like some Kafka-esque parody of justice. Fitz knew he would find no succour in this court.

Anji stared in amazement at the lingerie. 'You actually wear this?' Hannah was holding up the sort of underwear Anji would call foundation garments. 'I'm guessing nobody's invented stretch fabrics yet?'

'Stretch what?' Hannah asked.

'Never mind. I just didn't expect to be wearing my grandmother's girdle in the year 2003. What trousers have you got?'

'Trousers?'

'You know, trousers. Comfortable, practical – just as good for the office as they are for casual wear. . . .' The look of incomprehension on Hannah's face told Anji all she needed to know. 'No trousers. Jeans?' Another resounding silence brought a sigh of resignation from Anji. 'All right, show me your dresses.'

The rest of the morning's proceedings were taken up with evidence from witnesses. Most had been outside the tearooms when the explosion happened, and could offer little useful testimony. Several suggested Fitz had been trying to strangle one of the survivors still trapped in the rubble, but this was contradicted by others. The judges dismissed the single charge of attempted murder, due to the lack of conclusive evidence. That gave Fitz some heart, but the final witnesses soon crushed any hopes he was nurturing.

Two people spoke about events inside the tearooms before the blast. First was Francis Clooney, the manager who had been trying to eject Fitz and Anji just before the bomb exploded. He entered the courtroom on crutches, one leg bound in plaster and his face blackened by cuts and bruises. The judges

allowed Clooney to sit in a chair beside the witness box, to save him from standing as he gave evidence. The manager glared venomously at Fitz.

‘The prisoner, he came into my establishment just after noon yesterday. He ordered a pot of tea and then began harassing my clientele. One poor woman had to be quite rude to make him leave her alone!’

That brought a murmur of disapproval from those present, soon silenced by the chief judge’s gavel. Clooney continued his evidence, obviously pleased with the flutter of excitement he had caused.

‘She left soon afterwards – I don’t think she was caught in the explosion, I didn’t see her at the hospital afterwards. Or at the – the m-morgue!’ Clooney burst into tears, pulling a handkerchief from his waistcoat pocket and blowing into it, trying to compose himself. ‘I’m sorry, your honour. The police asked me to identify my staff from among the corpses. I found it quite upsetting. . .’

‘The court understands your distress, Mr Clooney. Perhaps a rest?’

‘No, I want to finish this,’ the manager replied. He pointed at Fitz. ‘I want to see that murderer get justice for what he’s done!’

‘As do we all, Mr Clooney, as do we all,’ the chief judge said. ‘Please, continue with your evidence.’

The manager nodded. ‘Not long after the first incident, I noticed the prisoner had been joined at his table by a young woman. Her skin was so brown, I thought she must be his servant, but they behaved like friends. I suppose she must have been part of his terrorist group.’

‘Several of my lady patrons complained about having to share the tearooms with a foreigner and a coloured one at that. I didn’t want to cause a scene but after the third complaint I had to act.’

‘Quite right too!’ one of the other judges chipped in, having stirred from a long stupor. ‘Bloody foreigners! Shouldn’t allow them in the country!’

‘Indeed,’ Clooney agreed. ‘I went over and told the prisoner that he could stay if he behaved, but his servant would have to wait outside. She flew into a rage, abusing me with the most foul language. I honestly thought the heathen girl would strike me, your honours!’

Fitz just shook his head, astounded at the all-pervading racism in the courtroom. What was the world coming to? The year might be 2003, but the social attitudes were like something from Fitz’s childhood. He remembered the abuse levelled at Asian and Caribbean families when they first arrived in London. He knew what it was like to be an outsider, to be attacked because

you were different from others. Growing up during World War II with a German name had taught him how to hide his origins. But he was lucky – you could always change your name. Changing your skin colour wasn't so easy.

He was snapped back to the present by the accusing voice of Clooney. 'The prisoner waited until I was distracted by the girl, then he ran out of my tearooms, shouting at people on the street. I was just about to call the police when the explosion happened.' The manager started crying again. 'I was standing by the front doors with the girl, so we escaped the worst of the blast. My staff – my customers – they weren't so lucky. They...'

It was too much for Clooney. He was led away, his evidence at an end. There was a short pause in proceedings while court staff brought a large wooden screen into the room. They positioned it around the witness box, so that only the judges could see the face of the final witness. Once the screen was in place, the clerk called for the witness to be brought in.

'Mr R. Bring Mr R to the stand!'

The chief judge leaned forward. 'Mr R?' he asked.

'Yes, your honour. The final witness is a member of His Majesty's Security Service and cannot be named in open court. His identity must be protected, for reasons of national security,' the clerk replied.

'Oh well, fair enough. Bring him in.'

The witness came in through a side door, a woollen blanket over his head. Once obscured by the screen, he handed the blanket to the court staff. The chief judge regarded him.

'Mr R, could you please tell the court what you witnessed yesterday?'

Fitz leaned forward, trying to get a glimpse of the mysterious arrival, but was swiftly pulled backwards by two guards. He contented himself with listening to the nasal voice of his accuser, first with interest, then bafflement.

'Thank you, your honour. I had received information that a terrorist incident was planned for the George Street Tearooms, to take place sometime around noon yesterday – that is Thursday, April seventeenth, in the year of Our Lord two thousand and three. I made my way to the establishment and entered the premises, taking a table at the rear.'

Fitz couldn't remember seeing anyone in the tearooms who looked like a security agent, but he had been distracted by the red-haired woman.

'I noticed the man in the dock, Kreiner, already present at the location. He was acting suspiciously, looking around at the other patrons. I did my best to avoid his eye, so as not to make my incognito presence obvious.'

This guy had obviously been a policeman before joining the service, Fitz decided. He used the same, over formal way of describing events favoured by British law enforcers for decades.

'Kreiner was joined by a young woman of foreign origin. This caused quite a stir among the tearooms' customers and the manager, a Mr Francis Clooney, was forced to approach the pair. The young woman used this opportunity to cause a fracas, creating a diversion for Kreiner. He produced a Gladstone bag and began –'

'What?' Fitz shouted involuntarily. 'I never had a Gladstone bag! That was another man!'

The chief judge slammed his gavel down on its rest. 'Would the prisoner refrain from interrupting the witness!'

'But your honour,' Fitz protested, 'he's twisting the truth. He –'

'Silence!' the judge bellowed.

Fitz sank back, utterly bewildered. What was happening? Hastings must have taken parts of what Fitz had told him and turned it into this cock and bull story. But what about the real bomber? Surely someone had seen him?

The chief judge commanded the rest of the court to silence, quietening the hubbub caused by Fitz's outburst. 'If you will continue, Mr R. . . ?'

'Yes, your honour. As I was saying, he produced a Gladstone bag and began fiddling with a dial set into its lock. I believe this to have been a timer for the explosive device within the bag. Realising what was going on, I left the premises and began running towards the nearest telephone kiosk, so I could raise the alarm and prevent this tragedy.'

Fitz leaned forward again, determined to see who was spouting these lies. He managed to catch sight of the witness before being dragged back by the guards. The glimpse was enough – he recognised Mr R at once.

'Kreiner saw me leave and ran after me, determined to prevent me from raising the alarm. He left his accomplice behind to maintain the diversion. I believe she was caught in the blast when the bomb exploded, moments later.'

Fitz was stunned. The star witness was indeed the man he had chased after the explosion. But the man could not be an agent for the Security Service – he was the one who planted the bomb. Then a new and more terrifying thought occurred to Fitz.

'Kreiner attacked me in a nearby street. I can only presume he was trying to eliminate me so I could not identify him as a terrorist. I managed to escape. I waved down a police van rushing to the scene and gave them a

detailed description of the bomber.’

That explains why I was arrested when I went back to the tearooms after the explosion, Fitz thought. But if Mr R was both an agent for the Security Service *and* the bomber – then perhaps there were no terrorists! Perhaps the bombing campaign was being carried out by the intelligence services.

‘Your honour, I must speak!’ Fitz shouted. ‘This man giving evidence – he’s the real bomber! He’s accusing me to shift the blame from himself!’

‘That’s a lie, your honour!’ Mr R replied. ‘It’s a last ditch attempt by Kreiner to confuse this court and escape his rightful punishment!’

‘No, I’m innocent! It’s the British Government that is guilty of running a campaign of terror against its own citizens! Don’t you see?’ Fitz cried. ‘There are no terrorists. Security Service agents have been planting the bombs! I tried to stop him and now I’m being accused of his crime!’

‘Silence! Silence!’ the chief judge commanded, but the court was in uproar. Fitz’s claims had enraged those present. Several reporters demanded his immediate execution. For several minutes the three judges tried to restore order without success. Finally, they walked out of the room, leaving the clerks to empty the press box. Only when all but essential staff had been cleared from the room did the judges return.

Mr R was excused from giving further evidence. He refused to put the blanket back on as he left the witness box, saying there was no need now the court had been cleared. As he was led from the room, the agent turned and smiled at the prisoner. Fitz just shook his head. His first instincts about the court had been right – there was no justice here.

The judges conferred briefly amongst themselves, but did not bother to retire before passing sentence on Fitz. Reporters were permitted back into the press gallery to hear the final moments of the brief hearing. Once everyone was in place, the chief judge announced that the court had found Fitz guilty on all the remaining counts. He asked if there was anything the prisoner wished to say before being sentenced.

‘This travesty of so-called justice should bring shame on you all,’ Fitz began. ‘I was tortured, beaten and coerced into giving a confession to these trumped up charges on television while being held at gunpoint. I have been refused my rights and the only evidence this hearing could offer against me was that of the man responsible for my alleged crimes. This sham, this farce is not worthy of the name justice. May you all rot in hell for what you are about to do!’

This provoked angry murmurs from those in court, but events were nearly at an end. The judges picked up squares of black cloth and balanced them atop their wigs. The chief judge spoke slowly to ensure the reporters got every word of his statement.

‘Mr Kreiner, you are without doubt the most dangerous and evil man ever to stand before this court. In my forty-three years on the bench, I have never encountered a prisoner who showed so little remorse for his crimes. And your crimes are terrible, indeed. You callously murdered twelve people, innocent citizens just going about their lives, little knowing you planned to steal away those lives, to use them as the exclamation mark to some anti-Empire folly.

‘You murdered in a cowardly and cruel way. Not for you the way of the gentleman, facing your victims and giving them a sporting chance to defend themselves. No, you used a timed explosive device, the weapon of the craven and the weak. You took twelve lives, but you injured many more and maimed the spirits of dozens of families. For that alone, you deserve to die a dozen times over. But you were not content with this atrocity.

‘When one of his majesty’s intelligence officers tried to raise the alarm, you ran after him, hell-bent on ensuring your act of wanton terrorism could not be prevented. As proof of your innate cowardice, you left your female conspirator behind to face the explosion. You care so little for human life that you happily left her to die in the blast.

‘You had the decency to confess to these crimes, but now you attempt to repudiate that confession! You dare accuse the very man who tried to stop you of being the bomber himself! You are utterly without shame in the baseness of your accusations, the hollowness of your beliefs and the depths to which you are willing to sink to exculpate yourself from justice!

‘I have nothing but contempt for you and all those like you. You said before you hoped we would all rot in hell for what we are about to do. I can confidently say that it is you who shall face the eternal torments of damnation for what you have done. Let this be an end to it!

‘On each of the twelve charges of murder you are sentenced to life imprisonment, the terms to be served consecutively. On the charge of terrorism, you are sentenced to a further term of life imprisonment. Lastly, on the charge of high treason, you are to be executed without delay. Your dead body will be put on display for twelve days, to show others of your ilk what awaits their crimes of tyranny and terrorism. Then your corpse will be buried in an

unmarked grave on unconsecrated ground, to ensure no hope of salvation for your soul.'

The judge paused, allowing the weight of his words to sink in. He had one last, personal message for Fitz.

'The Empire will never crumble, will never weaken its resolve before would-be anarchists like you, Mr Kreiner. We British are made of sterner stuff! If I had it within my power, I would kill you myself twelve times to make you pay for what you have done. Take the prisoner down! Britannia rules eternal.'

Fitz finally snapped. He had held his tongue through all of this, but could now stop himself no longer. 'You're making a terrible mistake! I'm innocent! I tried to save those people, I tried to save them –'

His words were cut off by the truncheon blows of his guards, clubbing him to the floor. Fitz was despatched back down the stairs – head first. He was still conscious when he reached the bottom, but the stone floor cracked against his forehead and darkness overwhelmed him.

Anji spent a blissful two hours soaking in a hot bath, easing away her aches and pains. She eventually got out and strapped herself into the borrowed clothes, the underwear more like some medieval instruments of torture. Over that she wore a plain blue dress and court shoes. Not a perfect fit but adequate.

Anji emerged into the main room of the cramped flat. A small wooden table with two chairs was wedged against one wall, beneath a window. A leather armchair stood opposite a fireplace. She tugged at her sides, still unused to the vicelike grip of her borrowed lingerie. 'How do I look?'

Hannah smiled with approval. 'Like a proper lady.'

Anji rolled her eyes. She turned to the Doctor who was absorbed with examining the insides of a tall, wooden radio atop the broad mantelpiece over the fireplace. 'Doctor?'

'Very good,' he replied without looking up. 'Blue suits you.'

Hannah peered with concern at the pile of valves on the floor beside the radio. 'Have you fixed my wireless?'

'Yes,' the Doctor said. He began twirling the radio's tuning dial. 'I've adjusted the frequencies you can receive. We should be able to –'

He was interrupted by the speaker crackling into life. 'This is the Great British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service coming to you from Lon-

don. Here are the headlines at midday on Good Friday, April eighteenth.'

'Excellent!' the Doctor said with a grin. 'We're just in time.' He sat down in an armchair opposite the radio and listened intently to the news. Hannah and Anji stood beside him as the headlines were read out.

'The self-confessed terrorist Fitzgerald Kreiner appeared in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh this morning. After a stormy hearing during which the court had to be cleared when Kreiner made wild accusations –'

'I can imagine,' Anji chipped in.

'– the terrorist was sentenced to thirteen consecutive life sentences. for the crimes of murder and terrorism.'

'That's not so bad,' the Doctor said with relief. 'He's escaped the noose.'

But he spoke too soon, as the announcer concluded the court report.

'For the crime of high treason Kreiner was sentenced to death. His execution is expected to take place within days. It is believed the prisoner will be transported south and held in the Tower of London. The intelligence services wish to interrogate Kreiner further, in the hope of gaining vital information that will help them crush the terrorists operating in Britain and the colonies.'

'Poor Fitz!' Anji said. 'He looked bad enough during the confession. I don't know how much more interrogation he can stand.'

'It is believed Kreiner may have been associated with the dissident network of trade unionists threatening to disrupt the Empire with mass demonstrations on Easter Sunday. After the hearing there was speculation that he had also met with the so-called "resistance" – an anti-Empire group thought, to have planted agent provocateurs in universities around Britain.'

The Doctor jumped up from the armchair and turned off the radio. 'We need to get to London, the sooner the better. Hannah – can you arrange some kind of transportation for us? We can't go by rail, the authorities will be checking all travellers on public transport.'

She nodded. 'I'll see what I can do. Wait here.' Hannah pulled on a coat and grabbed an umbrella on her way out. Once she had left, Anji turned back to the Doctor.

'Doctor, are you sure –' She was shocked to see him leaning against a wall, one hand clutched to his chest. 'Doctor! Are you all right? What's –?'

– happening?

Doctor! Help me! Help me!

The Doctor gasped for breath several times before beginning to relax again, the pain and fear fading from his features. 'Just a... dizzy spell. I've... been getting them... since we arrived.'

'That's why you fainted at the library?'

He nodded. 'It's an arrhythmia in my hearts, I think. It passes quickly.' The Doctor smiled at Anji. 'There, it's going already!'

She was worried. The Doctor had experienced enough problems with his cardio-vascular system. Was this a side effect of his body adjusting to having two hearts again? Or was something else causing this?

'Why do we need transportation to London, Doctor? Why not just take the TARDIS? You seem to have much more control over it lately...'

'The TARDIS is gone. It's been taken.'

'What? By whom?'

The Doctor told her about the TARDIS being put on a train to London.

'When was this?'

'Yesterday, just before the explosion. I was on my way to meet Fitz when it happened.'

'Why would the TARDIS be taken to London?' Anji wondered.

'Perhaps someone linked it to our arrival,' the Doctor speculated.

Anji pulled out a wooden chair and sat down. 'Ever get the feeling you're one move behind whoever's running the game?'

'Yes, and I don't like it. Somebody wants us to go to London. They've taken the TARDIS there, now Fitz is being used as bait to lure us too.' The Doctor looked at Anji. 'We can't leave Fitz to be executed, but there are other questions that need answering.'

'Like what's happened to make the year 2003 more like 1953?'

'Exactly!' He began pacing excitedly back and forth across the room. 'What's happened – and why?'

'The primitive state of equipment at the hospital,' Anji remembered.

'Yes, but more than that...'

'The lack of modern buildings, the old fashioned clothing and cars.'

'Keep going,' the Doctor said.

'As if scientific and technological development has been slowed down...'

'Or suppressed. But it's not just that – think of what you told me about the attitudes of people to your skin colour.'

Anji nodded. 'As if the development of society itself had been held back, so people's attitudes and ideas are still –'

‘Stuck in the past?’

‘Yes! Like someone’s trying to keep everything as it was in days gone by. The ultimate nostalgia trip. . .’

The Doctor stopped pacing and stared at Anji. ‘What’s the one thing you haven’t seen since we arrived here?’

She thought about it for a moment. ‘Another Asian person.’

‘What else?’

‘Digital clocks.’

‘What else?’

‘I don’t know – um, colour television.’

‘What else?’

‘Doctor, what is this – twenty questions?’

‘What else? What one thing has been conspicuous by its absence? Think back to all the things you used to take for granted.’

Anji sighed and blew air from her mouth in exasperation. ‘Heart monitors. Automatic cash machines. Laptops. Mobile phon-’ She stopped, suddenly aware of what was missing. ‘Computers. I haven’t seen any computers!’

The Doctor nodded. ‘What would that mean?’

‘No computers? No internet, no world wide web, no chatrooms.’

‘Thus stymieing globalisation of people with like minds and helping to limit easy, fast access to information. What else?’

‘No mobile phones, obviously, because there would be no satellites to bounce the signals off,’ Anji realised.

‘No space programmes at all without computers to help launch, fly or even design spacecraft in the first place,’ the Doctor chipped in. ‘No jet airliners.’

‘Everything has to be stored in print – medical records, any and all financial transactions. The stock market is run on paper.’ Anji smiled to herself. ‘That’s me out of a job, for a start.’

‘What else?’

‘No automatic sorting machines, so no postcodes. The postal system must be a nightmare, especially with everything having to be confirmed on paper.’

‘Keep going.’

‘No credit cards. It’s either hard currency or cheque books.’ Anji had already experienced the problems that could cause. ‘Huge queues to buy anything, chaos on the roads, probably food rationing. . .’

‘Power blackouts too,’ the Doctor added. ‘Without computers, electricity companies can’t predict when there will be a surge. And if it’s that much

harder to predict the future...'

'Everybody ends up embracing the past. Hence the nostalgiafest,' Anji concluded. 'The Festival of Britain, for ever and ever.'

The Doctor's face was grim. 'This isn't nostalgia, Anji. This may be the year 2003 but the future never happened here.'

'Social engineering on a nationwide scale?'

'Global, more likely,' he replied. 'It will have affected all of mankind. To make this work, the effects could not be confined to a single country.'

'All this – just because there are no computers?'

'That's a means to an end,' the Doctor said. 'Something has happened to define this world as reality, replacing the history we know with something unnatural. The consequences are almost incalculable.'

'I've seen the consequences,' Anji replied.

'No, you've seen the symptoms. The consequences could be catastrophic unless we can stop them.'

Merrell stood at the despatch box, looking out across the faces of the Opposition. It was almost unprecedented for Parliament to be called to order on Good Friday, a public holiday and religious occasion of great significance. The symbolism was not lost on the Prime Minister. His political career was being sacrificed today – but was it for some greater good? He just didn't know any more. Long ago he would have been certain. Now he was just going through the motions. The sooner he could resign and disappear, the better.

Still, he was giving everyone their money's worth today – raging at the MPs who tried to block the imposition of martial law. 'Would the honourable gentlemen opposite prefer to see the Empire delivered into the hands of the terrorists? Perhaps they do not believe the Empire is worth saving? Well, shame on them! This island, this Britain, this nation shall not bow down before the shadow of terrorism! This Government shall not shirk its duty as protector of the people! This great Empire shall never – now or in the future – surrender itself just to satisfy those who would see it crumble. That is why these drastic measures are necessary! That is why these powers must be enacted! That is why this must become law – and become law now!'

Thunderous applause rained down on the Prime Minister from his own MPs. The applause was echoed by the cluster of reporters from pro-Government newspapers allowed to watch, and by the people carefully

screened and selected to sit in the public gallery for this debate.

‘Let us decide now on behalf of Britain – do we want to be great again? Or are we content to go gently into that good night, slaves to the socialists and dissidents and terrorists that would destroy our nation, our heritage, our Britain? Never! I will never let that happen! We chose to stand firm! We chose to fight back! We chose to win! Britannia rules eternal! Britannia rules eternal!’

Anji could hear Hannah returning, footsteps descending the stairs to the basement flat. ‘So, what can we do?’

‘I need to think,’ the Doctor said. ‘We need to discover when the divergence in reality happened. Then we can go back and try to prevent it.’

‘When we get the TARDIS back,’ Anji added.

‘Yes.’ The Doctor grimaced. ‘That worries me more than anything else. I can’t believe that was a coincidence. It was enemy action.’

Hannah came into the flat, clutching a newspaper. ‘It’s getting cold out there. It may be Easter, but I wouldn’t be surprised if we got snow later.’

‘Any luck finding us transportation?’ Anji asked politely. A grim thought occurred to her. Hannah belonged to this time and place. If they could recover the TARDIS and put history to rights, what consequences would that have for Hannah and millions like her? Anji decided to put that to one side for now. This wasn’t the best time to start an ethical debate in her own head.

Hannah nodded, but tears were welling up in her eyes. ‘I’ve got a friend, Colin, who works for a haulage company. He says we can hitch a ride in a truck travelling south tonight.’ She burst into tears, collapsing into the empty armchair.

‘What is it? What’s wrong?’ Anji asked. She crouched beside Hannah. ‘What’s happened?’

Hannah explained, once her sobbing subsided. On her way back from contacting her friend, she had seen a poster: EDINBURGH DISSIDENTS EXECUTED. Hannah held out the paper for the Doctor and Anji to see.

The front page showed a line of corpses beneath white sheets stained with dark patches. Anji recognised blood when she saw it, even in a badly printed black and white photograph. The accompanying text was terse and brutal. The previous night Security Service agents had uncovered a group of terrorist sympathisers among the city’s academics. The group resisted arrest and tried to escape. They were summarily executed for their crimes.

The Doctor read the names of those executed. 'Professor Hamilton, Malcolm, Philip... these were the people at the meeting last night. But they weren't terrorist sympathisers! They were students, lecturers and thinkers. They even ejected us when Fitz mentioned me on the television broadcast.'

Hannah pointed to the photo, unable to look at the picture herself. 'See where that was taken? Just outside the pub. It must have happened not long after we left.' She started sobbing again.

The Doctor placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. 'That settles it. The sooner Anji and I leave Edinburgh, the safer you will be.'

Hannah looked up at him, steely determination in her eyes. 'No, I'm coming with you. They've killed my friends, there's nothing left for me here any more. I want to come with you.'

'I don't know, Hannah. We've put you in enough danger...'

'I can make contact with the resistance in London,' she said, pleading with him. 'Professor Hamilton had contacts with people down south.'

Anji turned to the Doctor. 'We can't leave her here, not now. If the Security Service could find that meeting, they can find this flat. The sooner we all get out of here, the better.'

He nodded. 'I'm afraid you're right. I'm sorry to bring this upon you, Hannah. I never wanted anyone to suffer on our behalf.'

'Don't blame yourself, Doctor. We were suffering a long time before you arrived,' she replied, wiping the tears from her cheeks.

The Oracle was leaning against the TARDIS, resting the left side of its face against the door. 'I can hear something inside. Maybe someone.'

The tall blue box had arrived in London from Edinburgh the previous night. It had been transported across the city and delivered to Whitehall. The adjutant had personally supervised the shifting of the artefact into the Oracle's quarters.

'Indeed, O Harbinger. The box seems to hum, as if it were alive.'

'Alive? Perhaps.' The child slapped the palms of its hands against the door. 'But not in the way you mean. This box should not exist, it does not belong. It is from a place that never was – not any more.'

'I don't understand,' Rameau ventured.

'Yes. Not so much a living being, as a living energy.' The Oracle rubbed its hands back and forth across the blue surface. 'It's warm, like home. Like forever.'

The adjutant had learned not to expend too much energy interpreting the Oracle's more cryptic comments. If the prophet wanted to be understood, it chose words he could more easily decipher. Sometimes he felt the Oracle deliberately clouded his mind, to shield him – but from what?

'The Elemental. The toy belongs to him. He, too, is an anachronism.' The child tugged at the adjutant's sleeve. 'Where is the key?'

'Key?'

'Every box can be opened, every lock has a key. It may be lost or stolen, but it exists. I must have it!'

'Where shall we look?'

'The Elemental – he will have it. He will come here, soon enough. But we must open the box first.'

'As you command, O Harbinger.'

Fitz opened his eyes and wished he hadn't. His vision swam for long seconds before snapping into focus. His head throbbed dully, while the rest of his body felt like one unending bruise. His skin would be mottled with an interesting array of yellows and purples in the days to come. If I survive that long, Fitz thought, recalling the death sentence.

He shut his eyes again and used his other senses to assess the situation. Most obvious was the smell, a vile mixture of animal manure and disinfectant. Something else beneath that, reminding Fitz of walks in the countryside during sunny autumn afternoons – freshly cut hay. The floor beneath his fingertips was wooden, made of roughly hewn boards. The room seemed to be gently rocking from side to side, yet Fitz sensed a powerful forward momentum. The kklakity-kklak of metal wheels running along tracks completed the puzzle. He was on a train, travelling at speed. But he seemed to have been relegated to the horse box. Fourth class all the way for me, he thought. Nothing ever changes.

Fitz opened his eye a fraction to have a squint. Three bored guards were staring at him, their faces filled with contempt and loathing. They sat on a wooden bench against the wall of the carriage, beyond the metal bars that surrounded Fitz. Each clutched a heavy black truncheon in case the prisoner should attempt to escape. Not very likely, Fitz thought. I'm so sore I doubt I could fight my way out of a wet paper bag. He sat up and regretted it. Pain lanced across his skull. He gingerly touched fingertips to his forehead and was rewarded with another stab of agony. The wound from smashing his

skull against the stone floor beneath the courtroom was sore enough, but his fingers came away without fresh blood on the tips. Hours must have passed while he was out cold.

A small window set high in the wall above the guards confirmed this. The sky was black and blue, with the first stars just becoming visible in the gloaming. Twilight, Fitz decided. I've been unconscious all afternoon. He became aware of how full his bladder felt and looked around for the nearest toilet. But the carriage had been designed for transporting live animals and they didn't need such luxuries.

'Excuse me, but I need the toilet,' Fitz said to his captors. 'I don't suppose you could tell me where the nearest one is?'

'About fifty miles,' one of the guards replied. The others laughed at this.

'I'm not sure I can hold on that long. Surely there's a toilet on board?'

'Aye, for decent people. Animals like you don't need one.' The guard pointed at a pile of hay in the corner of Fitz's cage. 'You want to go, you go in there – or not at all.'

'Terrific.' Fitz looked at the hay, then looked at the guards. 'I don't suppose you could all nip out of the carriage while I... you know. It's just I find it difficult to urinate in front of an audience.'

'Is that so?'

'Yes, so if you could just...'

This brought another burst of hilarity from the guards. Their leader stood up, pulling the tunic of his dark blue uniform taut. Fitz recognised sergeant's strips on one sleeve. The guard's silver buttons gleamed brightly. He neared the cage, but was careful to stay beyond Fitz's reach.

'Sorry, but we don't nip out for anyone – especially not the likes of you! If you're feeling shy, I suggest you cross your legs,' he said, getting another generous round of laughs from his colleagues.

'Everyone's a comedian,' Fitz muttered.

'What was that?'

'Nothing! Nothing. Perhaps I'll wait until we reach our destination. How long will that be?'

'At least another four hours to London,' one of the other guards chipped in. 'That's if the signalmen haven't gone on strike again! Lazy wee buggers...'

'London? Why are we going there?' Fitz asked.

The sergeant grinned. 'We're taking you to the Tower.'

'The Tower?'

‘Of London!’

‘Ahh!’ Fitz was puzzled. ‘Why? I thought it was a tourist attraction. I don’t mind a spot of sightseeing, but –’

‘Shut your mouth!’ The sergeant smashed his truncheon against the bars of the cage, startling Fitz. ‘The Tower of London is where the most dangerous prisoners are kept. . .’

‘Really?’

‘. . . until they are executed.’

‘Right. So. . .’ Fitz ventured, ‘. . . I guess that makes me a bit of a celebrity? Almost famous, you might say.’ He smiled. Fitz had always wanted to be a celebrity. Admittedly, being sentenced to death for committing a terrorist atrocity hadn’t been high on his list of how to achieve fame, but life was full of surprises.

‘Oh yes,’ the sergeant replied. ‘Only the worst scum and filth in the Empire gets to see the inside of the Tower. But they don’t stay long.’ That brought a knowing laugh from the others. The smile drained from the sergeant’s face. ‘You won’t be alive long enough to worry about such things.’ He cleared his throat and then spat the contents into Fitz’s face. ‘Terrorist scum!’

Fitz wiped the phlegm away with a shirtsleeve and retreated to the far wall of his cage. He leaned back against the metal bars and slid slowly to the floor, keeping his eyes fixed on those of his tormentor. Never turn your face from a bully, Fitz had learned that the hard way. And never show them you’re scared. That’s how they know you’re beaten.

He wondered where the Doctor and Anji were. If they were planning a rescue attempt, they should hurry up. Fitz felt like he’d been abandoned, as if he’d never see his friends again. He didn’t want to think about that.

He lay down and tried to sleep. Whatever lay ahead, he needed rest and his body needed time to recover from two days of beatings, bullying and brutality. The gentle rocking of the train soon soothed his way to sleep. . .

The adjutant watched as the Star Chamber’s members reassembled, wearily returning to their podiums. For the most part the Oracle left them to their own devices, only occasionally making one of its prophecies. But the child had been increasingly active in recent weeks and days. Now the visions seem to be coming within hours of each other.

Once the five men had taken their seats, Rameau began relaying a message from the Seer of Seers. The Pentarch listened to the words.

‘Summon our best scientists. They shall examine their artefact, see if they can breach its interior, learn its secrets.’ He glanced around the chamber. The others nodded their agreement. The Pentarch smoothed down his moustache with a thumb and forefinger before speaking. ‘Was there something else?’

The adjutant completed the Oracle’s latest prophecy.

The Pentarch smiled. ‘Our security forces in Edinburgh have reports about the active terrorists in the city. The confessor – he said one of his associates was called the Doctor. It seems this man liberated the other associate from a hospital at dawn. The Doctor claims to be the owner of the blue box. He must be this Elemental of which the Oracle speaks. The Doctor knows his property has been brought to London. He will come looking for it.’

The adjutant nodded. ‘I will have the blue box moved to a laboratory for testing by the scientists. Britannia rules eternal!’

It was dark when the Doctor, Anji and Hannah climbed into the back of the lorry. Hannah’s friend Colin was transporting a crop of carrots to Manchester. From there the trio hoped to hitch another ride south to London. They rearranged the sacks of vegetables to create a hiding place for themselves among the produce, close to the driver’s cab.

‘Not the most elegant or comfortable way to travel,’ Anji said with a grimace as they went over a pothole in the road. ‘How long will it take us?’

‘We should be in Manchester by midnight,’ Hannah replied. ‘If we get lucky, we could be in London by dawn tomorrow.’

The Doctor had been working on enlarging a hole in one of the sacks. He pulled a carrot out and began munching on one end. ‘Hannah, during the meeting last night, one of your friends mentioned a suppressed document called the shroud. What do you know about it?’

‘Only what the professor told me.’ She paused, remembering her dead mentor. ‘It’s a legend among radical students and lecturers, those who think science should be used to improve everyone’s lives.’

‘First I’ve heard of it,’ Anji said. ‘Tell me more.’

‘If you believe the legend, decades ago there was a genius at one of the universities in England. He developed several theories about numbers and how conundrums involving numbers could be solved.’

‘Code breaking, cryptography, that sort of thing?’ the Doctor asked.

‘I think so, yes. Apparently some of the ideas he created were later very important during the war.’

‘Which war?’ Anji asked. Considering how different human history seemed to be in 2003, she was learning not to take for granted that her memories and knowledge of Earth’s past were all still valid.

‘The Second World War.’ Hannah gave Anji a puzzled look. ‘Apparently the Germans were big on using special codes for their messages.’

‘Interesting!’ the Doctor said. ‘So the war still happened – and some of the basic principals of machine-based code-breaking were used to help the Allies win. Most intriguing.’

‘After the war it was all hushed up and those involved were never allowed to speak about what they had done. Official secrets and all that.’

‘Hides a multitude of sins,’ Anji said. ‘But what about this shroud?’

‘Well, this genius, he thought machines could be use in other ways. He believed automatic machines, thinking machines, could revolutionise many parts of human life. He even had a name for them. . .’

‘Computers?’ Anji offered.

‘No,’ Hannah replied. ‘He called them –’

‘Universal machines!’ the Doctor exclaimed, his eyes wide open.

‘That’s it,’ Hannah said. ‘Universal machines. A special machine that –’

‘Could do the work of any other machine.’

‘Exactly. He drew a blueprint for what the machine could look like, even wrote a paper about it. After that the story gets a bit vague,’ Hannah admitted. ‘It’s been told and retold so many times, nobody knows the truth of it any more.’

‘Tell us what you know,’ the Doctor said.

‘This was before the war. There was a big fuss about his idea. News about it began to spread through the scientific community around the world, from university to university. Everyone was waiting for the paper to be published, expecting it to open up major new areas of research.’

‘So what happened?’

‘This man, he was a lecturer at Cambridge. He was just about to publish his paper when he got arrested. Charged with sexual deviancy and sedition, sentenced to life imprisonment. All his notes were confiscated, his research was destroyed. The papers disappeared but the schematic is still thought to exist.’

‘Alan,’ the Doctor said softly. ‘His name was Alan Turing, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ Hannah replied. ‘How did you know that?’

‘I met him during the war. We went to Germany together.’

‘I don’t think that’s possible. He’s supposedly been in prison since 1936. Nobody knows if he’s even still alive.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘He committed suicide in 1954, unhappy and alone. I remember him during the war. He seemed so alive, so full of hope...’

Hannah was perplexed. ‘If you believe the legends, he’s been held prisoner in the Tower of London since the war.’

‘So what has all this got to do with a shroud?’ Anji asked.

Hannah smiled. ‘The name started out as a joke among undergraduates. They said the schematic’s importance in proving Turing’s work was akin to a holy relic, like the piece of cloth said to show a bloody imprint of the face of Jesus Christ. So they called the schematic the –’

‘The Turing Shroud,’ the Doctor said. He slapped a hand to his forehead. ‘Of course! Turing was crucial to the genesis of the modern computer. He developed key concepts like artificial intelligence. His notion of the universal machine revolutionised scientific thinking for generations to come. The work he did from 1936 onwards would change history...’

Anji quickly grasped the essence of what the Doctor was saying. ‘But if he was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment, that work could never happen. So, no Alan Turing, no computer? Could 1936 be the point where reality diverged?’

‘I’m not sure I understand what you’re talking about,’ Hannah said, but the Doctor and Anji were already racing ahead in their thoughts.

‘Surely taking one man out of history would not be enough to prevent the computer being invented?’ Anji asked the Doctor.

He nodded. ‘No, but it would delay that invention significantly.’

Anji turned to Hannah. ‘You said the Government has been deliberately suppressing people who favour scientific progress and new ideas?’

‘Yes. Anyone who speaks out publicly is threatened, or discredited, or simply just disappears,’ she replied.

‘Or they get called terrorists, pull up against a wall and executed,’ the Doctor added. ‘Incidents like that soon become a powerful disincentive to all but the most determined. Remove a few key thinkers like Turing and the process of scientific development is slowed to a crawl around the world.’

Anji had seen the evidence of what the Doctor was saying. ‘Wouldn’t scientists in other countries also be developing similar ideas?’

The Doctor pressed his index finger against his lips, deep in thought. ‘Yes. So whoever is behind all this must have some foreknowledge of events, en-

abling them to prevent, suppress or destroy such developments. But how?' His eyes rolled back into his head and his hands clutched at his chest.

Anji crawled across the truck to him. 'Doctor! What's wrong? What is it?'

*Something's –
– happening –
Doctor –*

'Another... dizzy spell...' he said between gasps for breath. 'Don't worry... about me, I'll be... fine...' Then he fainted dead away, his head lolling to one side. Anji pressed her left ear against his chest, listening for one heartbeat, then the other.

'Still beating,' she muttered to herself. 'That's something.'

Hannah was just as concerned as Anji, but was also curious. 'Why did you listen to both sides of his chest?'

Anji decided telling Hannah the Doctor was an alien time traveller with two hearts would raise more questions than it answered. 'Err, I'm not very good at first aid,' she said. 'I get confused about what side of the chest the heart should be on.' Anji was grateful when the Doctor began recovering.

'I blacked out again, didn't I?'

'Only for a few seconds,' Hannah said.

The Doctor frowned. 'The incidents seem to be getting closer together, increasing in frequency. The closer I get to the truth of this, the worse I feel.'

Comments like that worried Anji, but she didn't share her fears with the others. The Doctor had enough to cope with and Hannah was still upset by the news about her friends being murdered. I hardly blame her, Anji thought. It takes a long time to get over the shock of a sudden death...

'I want to play a game,' the child said sulkily. 'Can I play a game?'

'What game would you like to play, O Harbinger?' the adjutant asked.

'Close your eyes and give me your hand,' the Oracle ordered. Rameau did as he was bid, reaching outwards an open palm.

'I'm going to show you a secret. Would you like to know a secret?'

'I do whatever you wish,' the adjutant replied hoarsely, trying to keep the fear from his voice. 'I am yours to command, as always.'

'Good. Now, open your mind and see...'

Rameau felt the child's hand touch his own.

And then he understood.

America, 1884

Herman Hollerith was walking home from his job at the Patent Office, almost unaware of his surroundings. Around him the leaves on the trees were already beginning to take on their autumnal hues of yellow and orange and copper, but Hollerith had little time for such aesthetic considerations. He wanted to get home as fast as possible, so he could fill in the application form he had picked up before leaving the office.

For three years Hollerith had been working on what he liked to call his Census Machine. The idea had been spurred by a passing comment from John Shaw Billings, the director of the Vital Statistics Division at the Census Bureau. Hollerith had been working as a junior clerk at the bureau in 1881, one of hundreds tallying by hand the data from the previous year's census.

Billings had been walking through one of the rooms full of clerks. He turned to Hollerith and said something the would-be inventor could still recall, word for word: "There ought to be a machine for doing this, something on the principle of the Jacquard loom."

The sentence had made the hairs on the back of Hollerith's neck stand up. Could a machine tabulate statistics for populations and similar topics? Tallying the results was a mechanical process – could not a machine be made to do the job that proved so daunting and long-winded for humans? For the following three years every spare moment of Hollerith's time was devoted to creating just such a machine. Now, it was nearly ready.

He planned to fill out the patent application form on the kitchen table after dinner and submit it the next day. Hollerith pulled his coat closer around himself against the chill twilight air, one hand patting the form in his breast pocket. He turned the corner into his street and strode briskly towards his home.

Ahead of him he could see a cluster of people gathering outside one of the buildings, talking amongst themselves and pointing up at the first floor windows. What was going on? Hollerith and his wife had often talked about moving to a better part of the city, but his meagre salary made that financially

impossible.

‘Don’t worry, my love,’ he had told her just this morning. ‘The census bureau is talking about running a competition to find some way to speed up tabulation of the 1890 census. My machine is bound to win. The prize is a hundred dollars! Imagine what we could do with that!’

She had argued with him about the mess in the spare room. He had turned it into his study, filled to the brim with his workings. Hollerith hadn’t let his wife clean the room since the day they moved in. ‘It’ll all have to change when the baby arrives,’ she had maintained. They had shouted at each other, but he was determined to make it up to her tonight.

Hollerith smiled. He still couldn’t believe he would soon be a father. This year was fast becoming the best of his young life. He had always imagined the future with a golden glow surrounding it – now that future was coming true.

‘Herman! Thank goodness you’re back!’ Mrs Gottlieb from downstairs wobbled towards him. ‘It’s your wife – something terrible has happened to your wife!’

‘Lottie? What could...?’ Hollerith looked at the familiar faces of his neighbours, all crowded on the street. He realised they had been pointing up at his apartment. Hollerith ran through the crowd, not hearing the cries and protests of those sent tumbling. He raced up the stone steps and through the communal doorway. ‘Lottie! Lottie!’ he shouted, taking the stairs three at a time.

On the first floor a policeman stood outside the door of Hollerith’s apartment. He saw the wild-eyed man and began moving towards him. ‘I’m sorry, sir, I can’t allow you to –’

Hollerith shoved him to one side. ‘Get out of my way! Where’s my wife? Lottie? Lottie!’ He pushed open the door and stepped into the apartment. On the floor a man was squatting beside a bloody pile of rags. He looked up at the new arrival, puffing at the pipe clenched between his teeth.

‘Mr Hollerith? Mr Herman Hollerith?’

Hollerith nodded. He couldn’t take his eyes off the pile of rags. But it wasn’t just rags. Beneath the torn and tattered clothing he could see skin and flesh, remnants of a body that had been flayed to the bone. Worst of all, he could see a face. Sightless eyes stared up at him accusingly. ‘Lottie!’

The policeman from the landing got hold of Hollerith’s arms before the shocked man could fling himself at the dead woman’s remains. ‘I’m sorry, sir,

I can't allow you to touch the corpse.'

The word corpse stung Hollerith's ears. He sank to the wooden floor, his knees smudging a tacky puddle of blood that had spread out from the atrocity in the centre of the room. Hollerith started sobbing, grief overwhelming him.

'We need you to come down to the precinct, sir, to answer some questions. The neighbours reported hearing raised voices between you and your wife this morning. Judging by the state of the corpse, she's been dead since then.'

Hollerith looked at the pipe-smoker. 'What do you mean?'

'We can understand how these things happen – a jealous rage when you discovered she was sleeping with another man –'

'What other man?'

'She says she's pregnant, you fly into a rage – it happens.'

Hollerith could not believe what he was hearing. 'What happens?'

'What we don't know is why you destroyed everything in the study?'

'What?' Hollerith got to his feet, almost slipping in the blood. He stumbled forwards into the spare room. The floor was strewn with shattered pieces of machinery. All his papers had been shoved into a wire basket and set alight, leaving just ashes and a few fragments of his notes. All his work for the past three years – destroyed.

'Perhaps she did this in retaliation for something you did to her, sir? So you killed her? Was it this that made you snap? Or knowing she was carrying another man's child?' The senior policeman nodded to his colleague. 'Either way, I'm sure we'll get to the truth – sooner or later.'

Hollerith just shook his head. 'But I didn't kill anyone. Somebody else must have done this. I loved her! I could never kill her! You've got to believe me – please, you've got to believe me!'

'I'm afraid all the evidence points to another conclusion, sir. I'd advise you to confess as soon as possible. That way you might escape execution.' The senior policeman signalled for Hollerith to be taken away. 'But I'm not making any promises, sir. No promises at all.'

The grieving Hollerith pulled away and threw himself on top of his dead wife. 'Lottie! Lottie! Speak to them! Tell them I would never hurt you!'

'I'm afraid she can't tell us anything any more, sir. As you well know.'

Saturday, April 19, 2003

It was just after midnight when the adjutant knocked on the heavy wooden door of the Pentarch's private quarters. 'Enter!' called a voice from within. The adjutant opened the door and stepped inside.

'You wanted to see me, Pentarch?'

'Yes, Rameau.' The Pentarch was seated behind his desk as usual. He was holding a sepia-tinted photograph of himself in younger days, his military uniform crisp and smart, a swagger stick under one arm. A bottle of whisky was open on the desk, half its contents gone. A glass stood beside it, three fingers of single malt inside. The Pentarch picked up the tumbler and swallowed half the liquid thirstily. He pointed at a black leather chair opposite himself. 'Have a seat.'

'Thank you, my lord.'

Another drink and the glass was empty. 'Want one?'

'Thank you but no, my lord.'

The Pentarch poured another generous whisky into his tumbler. 'Why did I call you in here?'

'I'm not sure.'

'Nor I.' He took another swallow of whisky. 'Were you ever in the army?'

'No, I've always been with the Service,' Rameau replied.

'Damn shame. It's a damn shame.' The Pentarch was starting to slur his words. 'Some bloody fine chaps in the army. Followed your orders to the letter, never questioned you – not like that Harris. He can't wait to sit in my place. Too ambitious for his own good.'

'Perhaps you should stop drinking, my lord...'

'Don't tell me what to do! You may be at the beck and call of that little freak, but that doesn't mean you can tell me what to do!'

The adjutant took the bottle from the Pentarch's grasp. 'You should be careful what you say, my lord. The Oracle is not a freak. The Oracle is –'

'Yes, yes, I know – the saviour of us all. Its predictions have enabled us to maintain the Empire when others would have happily watched it crumble.'

Thank you, I know the speech – I’ve heard it often enough.’ The Pentarch got up with difficulty from the chair, swaying slightly. ‘But why does it never get any older, eh? Answer me that? Why does it never let anyone but you talk to it?’

‘I don’t know,’ Rameau lied. He stood up and helped the Pentarch stagger over to the adjacent bedroom. ‘The Oracle knows I will follow its every command without question, convey its prophecy without fault or failing.’

The Pentarch collapsed on to the bed. ‘Bloody freak, that’s what it is. . .’

The Doctor, Hannah and Anji had spent several bitterly cold hours at a roadside café on the outskirts of Manchester before hitching a lift to London. The Doctor had no difficulties getting a lift for himself and Hannah, but several drivers refused to carry Anji. Their attitude infuriated her but she kept her own counsel. They needed to get to London and drawing attention to themselves by starting a scene would not help, no matter what the provocation.

The truck driver who finally agreed to carry all three of them was Alf, a militant trade unionist on his way south to join a mass protest planned for the capital on Easter Sunday. ‘Bloody government is bringing in martial law after all the terrorist activity in Edinburgh!’ he said gruffly.

‘And you don’t approve?’ the Doctor asked.

‘Bloody right I don’t approve! They’re just trying to stop our protests, using the bombing as an excuse for imposing curfews and new laws. This country will go up in flames soon.

‘You think so?’

‘Just a matter of time. Working men will only take these new laws and restrictions so long. Eventually the British people will start fighting back, you mark my words. All these strikes and protests, it’s just the beginning.’

‘Or the beginning of the end,’ the Doctor suggested.

Alf finished sipping his mug of tea and shook the last drops out on the roadside. ‘So, you and your friends want this lift or what?’

‘Yes, if you’ve got room.’

‘One of you can come up in the cab with me. The rest will have to go in with the load of furniture I’m carrying.’

The Doctor gestured to Anji and Hannah. ‘This kind gentleman has offered us a lift. Two of us will have to go in the back.’

Alf looked at Anji with interest. ‘Where you from then?’

‘Bloody London, all right?’ Anji hissed.

Alf held his hands up in surrender. 'I was only asking. No need for that.' He walked away towards the truck.

'I suppose I have to go in the back,' Anji muttered angrily at the Doctor.

The Doctor took her to one side. 'This isn't about your skin colour, Anji. Nobody's looking for Hannah, but they are looking for both of us. Even bearing in mind the primitive state of communications here, our descriptions have probably been circulated by now.'

Anji realised the truth of this and felt ashamed at her outburst. 'Sorry, Doctor. I'm just not used to being treated like such an outsider by everybody.'

He nodded. 'I know, but curiosity and racism are two different things. In this time and place, you are an oddity. That doesn't mean everybody is going to treat you like a second-class citizen.'

Anji acknowledged the wisdom of his words, then smiled. 'At least we're not sharing our transport with several tons of carrots this time.'

Fitz arrived at the Tower of London in darkness, driven there in the back of a windowless van from King's Cross train station. Even in the early hours of the morning, the journey across the capital took an inordinate amount of time. Finally, the vehicle lurched to a halt after having its papers and prisoner checked by security guards with forbidding faces and black uniforms.

Fitz was dragged from the van and pushed through a door in a high wooden gateway. He emerged into a small courtyard, just a few gas lamps around the walls offering any light. Ahead of him stood a familiar figure – Hastings. The blond man was flanked by half a dozen guards on either side, each armed with a machine gun.

'You!' Fitz shouted. 'You little sh-'

'Tsk, tsk, no need for unpleasantries, Mr Kreiner,' Hastings said briskly. 'I knew we had a new prisoner arriving tonight but I never guessed it would be you. That we should meet again so soon – ahh, the irony of fate.'

'I don't believe in fate,' Fitz replied, but Hastings ignored the comment.

'Welcome to the Tower of London. You shall be a prisoner here for the next few days, until a time and place can be set for your execution. Events elsewhere are rather overtaking us and I suspect the Law Lords will not sit again until after Easter, so you may live for nearly a week.'

'You're too kind.'

'Anything but, Mr Kreiner. I would give you the grand tour but I'm sure you'd prefer to get some sleep. The guards will remove your shackles and

escort you to your cell. Please excuse the primitive conditions, but this is a medieval prison after all – not a luxury hotel. I do hope your stay here will be an unhappy one.’ Hastings nodded to the guards holding Fitz’s arm. ‘Take him.’

They led the new arrival down a bewildering succession of stone corridors and staircases. Fitz tried keeping track of the path, in case he ever got the chance to escape, but was soon utterly lost.

Before joining the Doctor, Fitz had often contemplated taking a tour of the Tower, but never got around to it. He cursed himself now for not visiting the ancient stone building that had held such famous prisoners as Anne Boleyn, Sir Walter Raleigh and Rudolf Hess. Now the name Fitz Kreiner had been added to this list, although he doubted many historians would record his presence there.

By the time he had come to this conclusion, the guards had reached his cell. They pushed open the heavy wooden door, flung Fitz inside and bolted it shut after him. A thin, vertical slit cut high into one wall offered the only light. The first glimmerings of dawn seeped through it, offering little comfort to the prisoner. The walls were thick stone, curving upwards and inwards to form an arched ceiling. A powerful stench of human body waste wafted from a small recess set into one wall about knee-high above the wooden floor. A lone woollen blanket lay on an oak bench that was stood against one wall.

‘Charming,’ Fitz said glumly. ‘Another day, another dungeon.’

It was two hours into the journey before the Doctor spoke again. Anji had curled up in the corner of a sofa, enjoying the gentle rocking motion of the truck. She was woken by the sound of the Doctor muttering to himself.

‘Doctor, you’re not making sense.’

‘Sorry, Anji. Did I wake you?’

‘I was just dozing.’ She sat up and looked over at him. His face was pale blue in the early morning light. It would be dawn soon and they were still several hours from London. ‘What’s wrong? I know that look in your eyes.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Yes, I imagine you do. I will miss you when you leave the TARDIS, Anji.’

‘You’ll have Fitz for company! Anyway, I’m not leaving yet. If this is the year 2003, I don’t want to stay here any longer than I have to.’

The Doctor nodded his agreement.

‘What’s really bothering you?’

‘I can always trust you to cut to the heart of the matter, can’t I?’

‘It’s my job,’ Anji replied. ‘At least, it used to be.’

The Doctor sighed. ‘It’s Alan. He may still be alive in this history, but I know he died half a century ago. If I succeed, if I put the world to rights – then I condemn him to death. And his last years were so unhappy.’

‘You were friends?’

‘More than friends. He was a boon to me at a time when I was confused, when I didn’t know who I was. We went through so much together. But we lost touch and after that. . .’

Anji leaned forwards and laid her hand on his. ‘We can’t save everyone, Doctor. I know that better than anyone. You can’t stop the people you care about hurting themselves or losing their way. You just try to be their friend, and hope they ask you for help. That’s all you can do. That’s all any of us can do.’

‘I didn’t even do that,’ the Doctor whispered hoarsely.

Anji gave him a hug.

Fitz was woken by the sound of seagulls squawking. He eased himself off the bench and looked up through the narrow slit in the wall. The birds were circling in the air outside, gliding on the rise and fall of breezes from the Thames. He listened intently for other sounds – traffic noise, boats on the river, the excited shouts of children. But the familiar sounds of London’s riverbank were missing. Hardly surprising, Fitz reasoned. If the Government had turned the Tower back into a prison for dangerous terrorists, they wouldn’t encourage visitors.

‘I am dying for a slash!’ Fitz said to himself. He hadn’t eaten anything since his fish supper two days earlier, so calls of nature had been few and far between. But his body was telling him urgent action was required. He banged on the wooden door but got no reply. ‘Hey! Hey! I need the toilet! Can anyone hear me? I need the toilet!’

‘Use the latrine,’ a faint voice replied.

‘What?’ Fitz said.

‘The latrine!’

Fitz looked around. There was nothing even resembling a toilet, except for the stench coming from a recess set into the wall. ‘What latrine?’

‘The alcove in the wall. Use that.’

Fitz walked over to it. A small hole was visible in the base of the recess, leading into a drain. 'Where does it go to?'

'I'd guess it discharges through an opening halfway up the building's outer wall. Quite a sophisticated system, considering the date of construction.'

'Really? That's fascinating,' Fitz replied, his voice heavy with sarcasm. Realising there were no better options, he made use of the primitive facilities, sighing with relief. Feeling considerably more comfortable, Fitz decided to investigate the disembodied voice. 'Hello? You still there?'

'I'm always here.' It was a man's voice, but shy and hesitant, as if the speaker were nervous about talking too loudly.

'Where are you?'

'In the adjacent cell to yours, I imagine. They normally put the new arrivals in next to me. There have been quite a few lately. . .'

'My name's Fitz. What's yours?'

'Alan. Why are you here?'

Fitz smiled. 'It's a long story.'

'Well, we've got all day. Please tell me. I hear so little news from outside.' Alan was pleading, almost whining. The tone was that of a lonely child but the voice had a quiver of age in its timbre.

So Fitz began. He started with arriving in Edinburgh, careful to leave out any reference to the Doctor or how he had arrived in the Scottish city. After his experiences with Hastings, Fitz would not be so quick to trust. He had no way of knowing if Alan was a prisoner, or just another trick to prise further information from him. If the authorities believed Fitz was a terrorist, they might also believe he had information about other terrorists worth having. Fitz still felt guilty about giving descriptions of the Doctor and Anji to Hastings. He didn't want to put them in any more danger.

It was nearly nine in the morning when the Doctor, Anji and Hannah bid farewell to Alf. The truck driver left them outside King's Cross railway station. The trio went to a deserted café opposite the terminus for breakfast. Behind the counter a bored woman with a curdled face and slender arms was listening to the radio. She raised an eyebrow when the trio walked in. Anji braced herself for a jibe about her ethnic background, but the woman took their orders without comment. Anji and Hannah were soon eating heaped platefuls of baked beans on toast while the Doctor sipped hot, sweet tea from a chipped enamel mug.

‘What next?’ Anji asked as she mopped up the last dregs of the orange sauce with a crust. ‘What’s the plan?’

‘If your friend is being held in the Tower of London, the only hope of getting him out is the resistance,’ Hannah replied. ‘Professor Hamilton once told me about a group of radicals who met at a flat in Bloomsbury.’

‘That’s walking distance from here,’ Anji said. The Doctor had been quiet since their conversation in the back of the truck. Thoughts of the decisions he faced were obviously weighing heavy on him. ‘Doctor? What do you think – do we try to contact the resistance?’

He finished the last gulp of tea and stood up. ‘Let’s!’

They were paying for the meal with Hannah’s money when the light entertainment programme on the radio was replaced by the nine o’clock news.

‘This is the GBBC’s World News, broadcasting live from our London Studio. Here is the news for Saturday, April nineteenth. The Government has confirmed that it is instituting a state of martial law over Great Britain and the colonies. Beginning at midday today, all public transportation will be halted and all assemblies will be banned. The general public is asked to stay indoors and observe a curfew from seven at night until seven in the morning. Anyone seen outside during the curfew will be shot on sight for anti-Empire behaviour.’

‘Martial law has been declared for public safety reasons, in response to increasing terrorist violence against the Empire. The state of emergency was instigated last night by the Prime Minister, who has the power to activate such measures under the Prevention of Terrorism Act passed by Parliament yesterday. News of martial law brought swift reaction from trade unionists, who pledged to go ahead with planned anti-Government protests.’

The woman behind the counter switched the radio off in disgust. ‘Bloody unions! Do they want tanks on the streets of London?’

The Doctor smiled at her as he held the door open for Hannah and Anji. ‘Thank you for breakfast. It was very nice.’

‘Last one I’ll serve for a bit. If they shut down the railways, they’ll put me out of business,’ the surly woman replied. ‘Bloody Government!’

Hannah stopped outside a five storey brick building on Tavistock Place. ‘Number 32 – this is the one. It’s the top floor flat.’ She walked up the concrete steps to the doorway and pressed a brass button. A window was pulled open on the top floor and a woman leaned out to look at them. Anji

felt herself being stared at. She was starting to find people's reactions to her ironic. She got treated better by many alien species than by people in her own city.

'Yeah? What do you want?' she demanded.

'My name's Hannah. I'm a friend of Professor Hamilton,' Hannah said.

'Never heard of him.'

'He said if I was ever in London and wanted to meet some friends, I should come here.'

'Really? Well, you can go back to Glasgow and –'

'Edinburgh,' Hannah said. 'We've come from Edinburgh.'

'I don't care if you've come from Loch Ness and you've brought a bagpipe army with you. Clear off before I call the police.' The woman withdrew her head and began closing the window. The Doctor stepped forward.

'I'm called the Doctor. You may have heard about me. This is my friend Anji Kapoor.'

The woman leaned back out of the window and glared down at them. 'Well, then – you better come up.' She disappeared back inside. Seconds later a buzzer sounded and the lock on the communal front door clicked open. The Doctor led Hannah and Anji inside. They climbed four flights of stairs to reach the top landing. A door opposite stood open, white walls and timber floorboards beyond it.

'Hello?' the Doctor called, but didn't get a reply. He strolled into the flat, followed by the others. Once they were inside, the door slammed shut behind them to reveal the woman from the window.

She was about thirty years old, with long sandy hair pulled back in a ponytail from her heart-shaped face. She was wearing a dark green dress. Her wide eyes regarded them with suspicion, while her hands pointed a shotgun at the new arrivals, underlining her hostility 'Tell me who you really are and don't give me any crap. I've killed worse than you before.'

Anji sniffed, her nose protesting at an acrid smell. 'What is that stench?'

'Ammonia. I imagine our friend here has been busy making bombs,' the Doctor said, his voice calm despite the shotgun pointing at his chest.

'You'd know all about that, wouldn't you?' the woman sneered. 'I saw the confession. You're one of the terrorists that blew up the tearooms.'

'Nothing could be further from the truth. But one of our friends, Fitz, is going to be executed because of it. We need your help to rescue him.'

The woman laughed out loud. 'Rescue him? He's in the Tower of London! He'll be dead within days, and so will anybody who tries to get him out. Anyway, he confessed – I saw it on the television.'

Anji stepped towards the woman, who swivelled the barrel round to cover her. 'Do you believe everything you see on TV? Everything you read in the newspaper? It's all just propaganda, lies spread by the Government.'

Hannah added her voice to the others. 'Perhaps you read about the resistance cell that was summarily executed in Edinburgh? They were my friends, my colleagues. If the Doctor and I hadn't left the meeting when we did, we'd both be dead now too!'

'Fitz is no more a terrorist than I am,' the Doctor added. In a blur of movement he grabbed the gun out of the woman's hands before she could react. He cracked it open and looked inside. 'Just as I thought – no ammunition.'

'Having a loaded shotgun is a criminal offence these days, or haven't you been listening to the news?' she retorted.

'I have,' the Doctor said. 'Martial law. Draconian restrictions on freedom of movement, assembly and speech. The British Empire is fast becoming a police state – what are you going to do about it?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I said what are you going to do about it?' the Doctor demanded, his voice becoming more insistent as he loomed over the woman.

'Fight back!' A man emerged from a side door, clutching another shotgun. He was in his early fifties, with greying hair and a thoughtful, intelligent face. 'We're going to fight back – while we still can.'

'Good for you,' the Doctor replied. 'Now, can we stop playing games and start making plans?'

'Why should we trust you?'

'I'm a wanted man. According to my friend Hannah here, you're the only people who can help us. I'm asking for your help.' The Doctor handed the shotgun back to the young woman. 'Anyway, I suspect you need our help as much as we need yours.'

By the time he finished relating recent events, Fitz could feel his stomach rumbling. 'When do we get lunch? I mean – they do feed us here, don't they?' He didn't fancy starvation as a method of execution. If they were going to kill him, they could at least make it a quick death.

As if in answer to his question, approaching guards became audible. They marched towards the cells, stopping outside Fitz's first. An eye appeared, staring through a small spyhole in the door. 'Get back to your bed! Now!' a stern voice commanded.

Fitz retreated to the wooden bench against the wall opposite the door and sat down. Bolts were drawn back and the door opened inwards slightly. A small wooden bowl was placed inside, then the door was hastily shut and bolted again. Fitz stayed where he was, listening to the same procedure being replayed nearby. Once the guards had stomped away, he approached the bowl. A murky liquid half filled it. A lump of bread floated miserably on top.

'What is it?' he asked.

'Broth. It's Saturday, so it must be broth,' Alan replied. 'I only keep track of what day it is thanks to the repetitiveness of the food. It is Saturday, isn't it?'

Fitz had to think hard about that. 'Yes... yes, it is.'

'Good. Then this is broth.'

The new arrival picked up his bowl and sniffed at the contents, his nose scrunching unhappily at the odour. Still, food was food – even if the bread was mouldy and stale, and the tepid soup tasted brackish. He guzzled them both down, grateful for the salty liquid.

'Don't eat too fast,' Alan warned. 'If you haven't eaten for several days, your body is likely to reject anything you swallow too fast.'

Now he tells me, Fitz thought, one hand clutching at his stomach. Already he could feel the muscles in his gut convulsing. He dashed for the latrine and spewed both the broth and bread back up again. Once the spasms had passed, he wiped his face clean on a shirtsleeve and staggered back to the bench. Fitz curled up on the hard wooden slats and closed his eyes, trying to stop the cell from spinning around him.

'Are you still there, Fitz? Fitz?'

'Not now, Alan,' he replied weakly. 'I'm not feeling too good.'

'So I could hear. Try to get some sleep. We'll talk again later.'

It was midday when the adjutant brought news to the Star Chamber. 'Martial law has begun. All public transportation has been suspended. The first curfew begins at seven tonight.'

‘Good,’ the Pentarch replied quietly. His eyes were bloodshot and his face was even more pallid than usual. ‘What about the Doctor?’

‘He is in London. One of our agents near King’s Cross saw him with two women. We believe one of them is the dark-skinned woman he helped escape the hospital yesterday. Our agent believes the Doctor will contact the resistance and enlist its aid.’

‘He’ll come after the blue box,’ Harris announced.

But the Pentarch disagreed. ‘No, you’re wrong. He does not know where it is, nor does he have any way of finding it. He has already endangered himself liberating one of his associates. He will do so again.’

The adjutant cleared his throat to get their attention. ‘The prisoner, Kreiner, has been transported to the Tower of London as you commanded.’

Harris was furious. ‘We never agreed to this!’

The Pentarch smiled. ‘I lead the Star Chamber, but I do not need your approval to authorise any actions. When you are the Pentarch, you may do the same, Harris. Until then, you will never question my actions again.’

Harris looked around the rest of the cabal, but Elswit and Bridges avoided his eyes. Arnold tutted under his breath but did no more. Harris had gone too far, he was out on his own. The beaten man lowered his head to the Pentarch in acknowledgement of the command.

‘That’s better. What about my other orders, adjutant?’

Rameau nodded. ‘Confirmation about the shroud’s location will be leaked to the resistance within twenty-four hours.’

The Pentarch smiled triumphantly. ‘So the trap is being baited and set. Now we just wait for the vermin to spring it. Then the last vestiges of resistance to the Empire will be swept away. Britannia rules eternal!’

It took several hours of persuasion and a strip search before the two resistance members began to believe the Doctor, Anji and Hannah were not Government agents. The man introduced himself as Frank and the woman as Dee.

‘How many of you are there?’ Hannah asked.

‘Enough,’ Dee replied.

‘Why the bomb making? I thought you didn’t approve of terrorist scum,’ Anji said. One room of the flat was devoted to mixing ingredients. Dee had been distilling the latest batch into glass bottles when they arrived.

‘We don’t,’ Frank maintained. ‘We don’t believe in blowing up innocent people to make political statements. Anyone who fights for the Government is an enemy of the people, a collaborator. When they take up arms against the citizens of this country, they become just as guilty as those in charge.’

‘Distinctions like that are easy to make in theory. It’s when you put those principals into practice that innocent people get hurt,’ the Doctor said.

‘What do you suggest we do?’ Dee demanded. ‘Sit back like the other sheep and let this country be run by the Star Chamber and its puppets?’

‘The Star Chamber?’ the Doctor asked. Dee looked at him suspiciously.

‘Where do you people come from?’

Anji smiled meekly. ‘We’ve been out of the country for a while. We only returned on Thursday.’

‘What country do you come from?’ Frank asked. ‘India? Pakistan?’

‘London,’ Anji replied curtly. ‘What’s the Star Chamber?’

Frank sat back in his chair and lit a cigarette he had been rolling. ‘Well, if you believe everything you hear, it’s a cabal that controls the entire Empire. Who is a member, where they come from, what they do... Nobody knows except them. The public doesn’t know the Star Chamber even exists. We only hear about it in whispers from our sources inside the Security Service. But one thing we do know for certain – the Chamber controls everything and everyone in Britain. We want to change that.’

‘Why?’ the Doctor asked.

‘You said it yourself, the Empire is fast becoming a police state. I was studying to be a physicist at Imperial College in the 1970s. Every time we got close to making some new breakthrough, some new discovery, the authorities would dissuade us – cut our funding, close the labs, reassign the lecturers. The university was terrified of bringing down the wrath of the Government. Now the whole world is getting like that. But it’s all starting to come apart.’

“‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,’” the Doctor said, quoting from memory. The others looked at him. ‘W. B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*.’

Dee smiled. ‘You forgot the rest of it: “The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity”.’ She shrugged. ‘I always liked Yeats’s work.’

‘What about Fitz?’ Anji asked impatiently. ‘What can we do about him?’

Frank shook his head. 'I'm not sure that we can help you. I'll contact other cells within the resistance, see what help they can offer. But once martial law takes effect...' He stood up, stubbing out his cigarette on the lid of his tobacco tin. 'I have to go out for a meeting. Strategy for tomorrow's protests. I suggest you stay here with Dee, out of sight. Wandering around the streets of London will only get you arrested and that won't help anyone.'

'Can I come with you?' Hannah asked. 'I'm not on the wanted list.'

'No offence, but I don't know you well enough to trust you that much.' Frank pocketed his tin and left, locking the front door after him.

The Oracle was asleep. Its small feet kicked at the air and tiny fingers opened and closed, grasping at the unseen.

The adjutant stared down at the child in awe. Since the Oracle had given him the gift of knowledge, Rameau could look upon the child without fear. The Pentarch was wrong – the Oracle was not a freak. It was beautiful.

A shadow of doubt passed across the child's face, as if it were pondering some subconscious darkness or uncertainty. The adjutant realised he had been standing there for more than an hour, transfixed by the Oracle. Even asleep, it compelled him utterly. He could still remember his first meeting with the Oracle, although it was many years ago...

By dusk, Fitz was feeling better. An entire day without being beaten helped, as did a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. He was finally woken by the guards returning. Fitz sat up on his bench and watched as his lunch bowl was replaced with another, this time with steam rising from the surface. Once the guards had gone, he approached the evening meal.

'Broth again?' he said.

'I told you, it's Saturday,' Alan replied. 'This time it's hot.'

'No bread.'

'If you're lucky, you might find a lump of potato instead.'

Fitz carried the bowl carefully back to his bench and slowly sipped at the soup, gently reminding his body how to cope with food again. He didn't find any potato but the battered end of a carrot did appear in the bottom of the bowl. Fitz chewed it a dozen times before swallowing, just to be on the safe side.

'Feel better?' Alan asked eventually.

'Much.' Fitz put the bowl back by the door. 'Alan?'

‘Yes?’

‘You said before it felt like you’d always been here. Why?’

‘I’ve spent most of my life in solitary confinement. Months pass when I don’t exchange a word with a living soul.’ ‘But why? What did you do?’ Fitz asked. There was a long silence before the other prisoner replied.

‘I fell in love.’

The sound of guards approaching sent Fitz scurrying back to his bench. The bolts on his cell were undone and the door opened to reveal Hastings, flanked by two burly security men. The major smiled broadly on seeing Fitz.

‘My, my, you do look better! Amazing what a little hospitality does, even for the likes of you. You look almost human,’ Hastings said.

‘What do you want now?’

‘Oh, nothing. I just came to give you a bit of news. A time has been set for your execution – dawn on Monday morning.’ Hastings pulled a fob watch from his pocket and flipped open the lid. ‘That’s about thirty-six hours from now.’

‘Well, I’ll have to check with my social secretary. I’m not sure I can fit that into my busy schedule,’ Fitz replied.

Hastings gave a thin smile. ‘How very droll. Getting your spirits back too, I notice. Good. I had been expecting more from a terrorist insurgent, but you’ve been a disappointment to me, Mr Kreiner – until now. Perhaps we can talk tomorrow, there’s so much more I’d like to know about your organisation.’

He nodded to the guards. They pulled the cell door closed and bolted it shut again, before marching away.

After an afternoon of waiting and pacing the floor of the flat, Anji could stand it no longer. ‘I’m going out!’ She looked around for a coat to put on over her dress, which had been crumpled by the long, uncomfortable journey from Edinburgh.

‘You can’t, it’s too dangerous,’ Dee said, moving to block the doorway.

‘I don’t care. If I have to spend another minute in this place with the fumes from your little bomb factory, I’m going to scream,’ Anji replied. She looked at the others. ‘I’m going to the nearest pub, I need a bloody drink. Who’s coming?’

Hannah stood up eagerly. ‘Me.’

‘Doctor?’ Anji asked. He had spent the afternoon staring out of the window across the rooftops of Bloomsbury, saying nothing. She knew not to disturb one of his brooding spells, but enough was enough.

The worry in his eyes receded temporarily and he smiled. ‘All right. We can’t stay here for ever and the curfew begins soon. But somebody else will have to pay. I, err, haven’t had time to change my foreign currency yet.’

All three of them approached the door where Dee was still standing.

‘Well, are you going to let us out or do we have to force our way past?’ Anji said. ‘Come to the pub. One pint won’t be the end of the world, will it? You can always start the revolution afterwards.’

Dee smiled despite herself and unlocked the door. ‘All right, but just one.’

‘Alan? Are you there?’ Fitz called. ‘Alan?’

‘Sorry, I dozed off,’ the man in the next cell replied. ‘Did I miss anything?’

Fitz sighed. ‘Just the time of my execution – dawn on Monday.’

‘Sometimes I pray to be executed,’ Alan said wistfully. ‘I’ve been alone for so long, kept alive against my will. I went on a hunger strike but they beat me and then force fed me when I was too weak to resist.’

Fitz could hear the other prisoner quietly sobbing. ‘Why don’t you rest, Alan. We’ll talk again in the morning.’

‘Good night, Fitz.’

‘Good night.’

Fitz stretched out on the wooden bench, his eyes fixed on the thin slot of moonlight falling through the narrow window. Thirty-six hours, he thought. That might be more than a lifetime for a mayfly, but it was next to nothing in human terms. Not long enough, not nearly long enough. . .

Dee took them to the Lord John Russell, a small tavern round the corner from Tavistock Place. The dark wood panelling and floors were almost matched by the mustard-brown nicotine stains on the ceiling. A fog of cigarette smoke hung in the air, making the faces of the patrons grey and anonymous. For once Anji was grateful to be in a room filled with smoke. It made her skin colour much less obvious. A television screen was just visible through the haze, stood against one wall. The three travellers huddled round a table by the door while Dee bought the drinks.

The Doctor had just begun sipping his pint when his right hand started shaking. He put the glass down on the table and stared at his arm.

Something's wrong!

'What's wrong?' Hannah asked.

'I can't stop it shaking,' he replied, sweat forming on his forehead. 'The ends of my fingers are tingling. I can feel my pulse racing too.'

Anji was concerned. The Doctor's attacks were coming closer and closer together, the symptoms growing more pronounced. If he were like any other man, she would have suspected a heart attack. But the Doctor was different, with an utterly alien cardio-vascular system. 'Maybe this was a bad idea,' she said. 'We should go back.'

The Doctor managed a smile. 'I'll be all right. It'll pass soon.' He frowned. 'It's almost as if my body is responding to some external threat, my fight or flight instincts going into overdrive.'

'What's he on about?' Dee asked. 'Can't be the pint, he's hardly touched it. The beer's usually very good in here.'

The Doctor wiped a hand across his brow. 'There, it's passing.' He sat upright again. 'I just wish I knew what was causing it...'

Hannah turned to Dee. 'On the way down to London, the Doctor and Anji were asking me about the shroud. Professor Hamilton once told me that resistance members in London had been actively hunting for it.'

Dee nodded. 'We think we know where it is. I probably shouldn't say...'

'Please,' Hannah pleaded. 'You don't know how much it would mean to me to find it. The professor spent his whole life hoping to get a glimpse of the shroud.'

'OK, OK. But I don't think you're going to like it. According to legend, the shroud is at the Tower of London, where they used to keep the crown jewels. A resistance member has infiltrated the kitchen staff there. We're expecting a report from him tonight.'

'Where Fitz is!' Anji said.

The Doctor shook his head sadly. 'It's a trap.'

'What do you mean?' Dee asked.

'If the shroud still exists, what better place to keep it than a heavily guarded fortress?' he replied. 'The authorities know how much the resistance wants it. So the shroud is the bait for their trap, trying to lure you into making an attempt to steal it. Whoever is behind all of this has added Fitz as an extra incentive. It's all too convenient, too neat,' the Doctor concluded. 'It's a trap, it must be.'

‘But we can’t just leave Fitz there because you think it’s a trap,’ Anji protested. ‘They’ve sentenced him to death! They’re going to execute him any day now. Are you willing to stand by and let him die?’

The Doctor just glared at her, hurt in his eyes. ‘Don’t tell me what I am and am not willing to do, Anji Kapoor. I’ve done things you couldn’t possibly imagine, things you don’t want to know about.’

Anji was stung by his harsh tone but before she could reply, Hannah got everyone’s attention. She was pointing at the pub’s television screen.

‘Look!’

The landlord was adjusting the volume control, turning up the sound. Once he stepped out of the way, everyone in the pub could see what was on screen: a drawing of the Doctor’s face, rendered in black ink. The features were not a precise match but the face was still recognisable.

‘Just to repeat, the authorities have released this artist’s impression of the terrorist known only as the Doctor,’ a voice announced over the broadcast of the picture. ‘It is based on eyewitness reports about the terrorist’s activities in Edinburgh over recent days. It is believed the Doctor has now travelled south and may be in London.’

‘He is probably involved with the illegal demonstrations planned for tomorrow. He may be one of the instigators of the trade union unrest or he may be planning to explode a terrorist bomb in the midst of the demonstrators. Either way, the police are urging anyone thinking of joining the Easter Sunday demonstrations to think again before breaking the law. Stay at home and stay alive!’

‘If you have any information about the whereabouts of this man, call the following number: Dreadnought 222. That number again...’

Dee looked round the room. Everyone else was still watching the broadcast, but it wouldn’t hold their attention for long. ‘We’ve got to get out of here – now!’ she hissed. Anji nodded to the Doctor. ‘Let’s get out of here, before someone recognises you.’

‘I don’t think that’s very likely,’ he replied. ‘It’s a terrible likeness. I may look younger than my years, but you’d think they could do better than that!’

Anji stood up and motioned for the others to do the same. ‘I don’t care if they’ve given you two horns and a pointy beard, we’re leaving.’

The four quietly made their way out of the pub and hurried back towards the flat. The landlord watched them leave. Once they had gone, he went to the back of the building and made a phone call. ‘Hello, operator? Put me

through to Dreadnought 222.'

Frank was waiting for the Doctor, Dee, Anji and Hannah when they got back to the flat. He nervously smoked a raggedly rolled cigarette. 'Where the hell have you been?'

'Out for a pint,' Dee replied bashfully.

Frank closed his eyes in despair. 'His face is all over London!'

'We know, it was on the television in the pub,' Anji replied. She suddenly realised how tired she was. The wave of adrenalin from fleeing the pub had passed and events from the past three days were catching up with her. 'I need some sleep,' she announced. 'I'll see you in the morning.' Anji retired to one of the flat's bedrooms, closing the door after herself.

Hannah noticed the Doctor was struggling to stay conscious as well. He swayed slightly and she grabbed his anus, helping him stay upright.

You have already seen what is to come. . .

'I'm just not feeling myself,' he murmured. 'As if I'm out of sync. . . ' He collapsed to the floor.

Germany, 1941

Konrad Zuse did not recognise the noise when he first heard it. The high-pitched wailing was like the distant scream of a mechanical child. Zuse put the unnatural screech out of his mind and concentrated on what was in front of him. He was savouring the completion of his beloved equation solver Z-3, a machine that had consumed his imagination for six years.

Zuse had graduated from the Berlin-Charlottenburgh University as an engineer in 1935, just as Germany stepped up efforts to re-arm itself at the order of the Fuehrer, Adolf Hitler. Zuse got a job with the Henschel aircraft company, helping to ensure newly designed planes would not be torn apart by the stresses of flying. But the calculations needed involved dozens of unknowns, requiring teams of mathematicians working for weeks to solve the problems.

Zuse realised a machine could be made to take over these calculations. But he was only a lowly engineer in a large company. So Zuse decided to design and build it himself at home.

He smiled, remembering the years he had lavished on the design and creation of his first prototype. The results were crude and cumbersome but by 1938 it was ready. He christened it the *Versuchsmodell-1*.

A year later Zuse had almost finished his second prototype when he was called up to serve in the army. Germany was at war and every able-bodied man was expected to help. The prototype went to his friend and fellow engineer Helmut Schreyer, who kept working on the second prototype while Zuse was away. It was Schreyer who introduced fast relays to the design, switches that could be turned on and off by passing an electrical current through them.

When Zuse and Schreyer were reunited in 1940, Zuse realised the fast relay concept would massively accelerate the abilities of the equation solver. The two men took their ideas to the national aeronautical research laboratory, the *Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Luftfahrt*. It agreed to fund the transformation of Zuse's crude prototype into a fully engineered and pro-

grammable calculator.

Now, a year later, the Z-3 was completed. It had cost twenty-five thousand Reichsmarks and become a permanent resident in Zuse's living room, but it was ready. Schreyer was due to arrive at any minute so they could toast the success of this long, frustrating, but ultimately rewarding project. He also had some news about the next stage of their journey.

An urgent knock at the front door heralded Schreyer's arrival. Zuse opened it to find the breathless man standing outside in the darkness of early evening. His friend bustled inside, dropping his coat and hat on the floor.

'Helmut? What's wrong? You look terrible.'

'I ran all the way here. Haven't you heard?' Schreyer replied.

'Heard what?'

'The sirens. British bombers are heading for Berlin! It was on the news earlier.'

'Is that what that noise is? I was beginning to wonder.' Zuse could not help laughing. 'British bombers attacking Berlin? That's preposterous! They'll never make it this far – our anti-aircraft gunners will blow them out of the sky!'

'They have, but the bombers keep on coming. It looks like a suicide run.' Schreyer got his breath back. 'You know I've got contacts within the party...'

'I don't want to know about your Nazi friends. I fight for the Fatherland, not for your precious Adolf!'

'I'm going to forget I heard you say that, Konrad. Have your opinions but keep them to yourself – you know such talk isn't safe,' Schreyer warned.

'Yes, yes,' Zuse agreed hurriedly. 'So what do your friends in German High Command have to say?'

'I know someone in the cryptography department who works on breaking the English codes. They intercepted a message earlier today.' Schreyer stepped closer to his friend. 'Konrad, it mentions you by name!'

'What? That is preposterous!'

Schreyer pulled a hastily typed scrap of paper from his waistcoat pocket. 'I knew you wouldn't believe me, so I got them to type it out for me. Read it!'

Zuse told the paper and read it aloud. 'Executive order. Target is Neukölln suburb, believed to be the home of enemy agent Konrad Zuse.'

'Now do you believe me? You've got to get out of here!' Schreyer said.

Zuse was still unsure. 'Why did you come all the way down here? Why not just phone and warn me?'

Schreyer grabbed his friend by the lapels and shook him bodily. 'Because I knew you wouldn't believe me otherwise! Plus you'd taken your phone off the hook again!' He pointed at the receiver on the floor, lying beside the telephone instead of atop it.

Zuse grinned ruefully. 'Sorry, I didn't want to be disturbed.'

'Well, I think the British bombers have got different ideas. Now, come on!' Schreyer grabbed Zuse's coat from a hook on the back of the front door and handed it to his friend.

'But why me? Why would the British target me? It doesn't make sense. How do they even know I exist?' Zuse asked.

'How do I know? I'm not sure they are after you.'

'Then what?'

Schreyer pointed at the Z-3. 'That.'

'The prototype? But it's only just functional. How could the British even know about it?'

Schreyer could not look his friend in the eye. 'That idea you had, to increase the machine's speed by replacing the relay switches with vacuum tubes from a radio?'

'Yes. It could accelerate computations by a factor of thousands. What about it?' Zuse's brain reached the conclusion before his friend could reply. 'Helmut – you didn't! I told you not to...'

'I'm sorry Konrad, but I was so excited I couldn't stop myself.'

'You presented my idea to your friends in the party, didn't you?'

'German High Command, actually.'

'But how could the British know...'

Schreyer shrugged. 'Just as we crack their codes, so they break ours. They must have intercepted a message about the Z-3, mentioning its location.'

'And now they have sent a squadron of bombers to destroy it.' Zuse stared at his creation. Already he could hear the characteristic hum of aircraft engines approaching. 'We were so close to our next breakthrough. Who knows what we could have done with the next prototype...'

'You would have been a hero of the Third Reich,' Schreyer replied.

The floor shook as the first bomb exploded nearby. It was followed by another and another. 'It's begun,' Zuse said sadly. 'Around us the people of Berlin are dying, my friends and neighbours, all because of this machine.'

The sound of the bombing stopped for a few seconds. Zuse shivered in the eerie silence. 'I'm told it's the bomb you don't hear coming that kills you.'

Sunday, April 20, 2003

Hannah was staring out of the front windows of the flat when the Doctor regained consciousness. It was just gone midnight and everybody else was asleep. Dee had laid a blanket over the Doctor and slipped a cushion under his head before retiring to bed with Frank. 'Best just to leave him where he is,' she had said. 'Does he do this often?'

Hannah had shrugged. 'Whatever is causing the attacks, it seems to be getting worse.' Now she watched as the Doctor opened his eyes, slowly taking in his surroundings. He soon noticed her standing by the windows.

'Hannah? What's wrong?'

She held a finger to her lips, indicating he should keep his voice down. Hannah got a chair and sat down next to the Doctor. 'Have you ever felt you were responsible for other people's suffering? Felt guilty about doing something you thought was the right thing at the time?' she whispered.

The Doctor nodded sadly. 'All too often. I've tried to do good, but sometimes that just becomes a choice between the lesser of two evils.' He peered at her in the moonlight. 'Why, what's troubling you?'

'Professor Hamilton, the others. . . I can't help feeling they're dead because of me.'

'You're wrong. The Security Service killed them, not you.'

That did not console Hannah. 'I didn't pull the trigger, but it was my fault they were still there when the security forces arrived. If I hadn't started arguing with Philip and Malcolm and the others.'

'They might still be alive now?' the Doctor said, finishing her thought.

'Yes.'

He sighed heavily. 'Regret is a terrible thing. You'd do anything for the chance to go back and change things, to start over, to have another opportunity, to correct your mistakes. But you have to learn to let go of the past.' The Doctor's gaze became distant, his face stricken by unspoken thoughts. 'I should know that, more than anyone.'

'Why?' Hannah asked.

‘At some point, I suffered a terrible trauma. What happened, what caused it, I don’t know. I’ve considered going back to the past, trying to find out what took place. But it happened for a reason and I have to accept that and move on. ‘You can’t live your life in the past, Hannah. You have to move forward.’

She nodded. ‘I know, but... It’s not easy. I feel so responsible for what happened. They were my friends. They trusted me. And now they’re dead and I have to live with that for the rest of my life.’

Anji was woken by hushed voices outside the bedroom. She listened to the animated discussion as she pulled on her clothes.

‘I’m telling you Bill saw it in the Tower!’ Dee was speaking, her voice excited and insistent.

‘The shroud? Where?’ Frank replied.

‘He had to take a meal up to the new prison governor, Hastings. The governor was arranging for the shroud to be shifted to a new site, away from the Tower. They will be moving it out of the Tower within forty-eight hours.’

That got Anji’s attention. She hastily finished dressing and emerged from the bedroom. Hannah, Frank and Dee were all standing in the main room of the flat. ‘What about Fitz?’ Anji asked, getting their attention.

Dee looked embarrassed. ‘The word came through this morning. You friend Fitz is going to be executed at dawn tomorrow.’

‘And you’re more excited by a sighting of a diagram for some bloody computer.’ Anji was appalled. ‘Fitz is my friend. How would you feel if you knew one of your friends was going to be executed tomorrow?’

‘I know exactly how that feels!’ Dee replied, her cheeks flushed red with anger. ‘I’ve been a member of the resistance since I was fifteen. Everyone I’ve loved, everyone I’ve cared about has been shot, or died after falling down one too many staircases while in custody, or simply disappeared. Frank and I are the only two left from the Bloomsbury cell – there were twenty of us five years ago. One by one we’ve been picked off. Betrayed, sold out and executed. So don’t lecture me about how you feel! I’ve seen enough friends die to last me a dozen lifetimes.’

Hannah nodded in agreement.

Anji was taken aback. She had been so wrapped up in her own feelings, she hadn’t considered why the resistance even existed. ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t realise...’

‘No, you didn’t,’ Frank agreed. ‘The shroud – it’s become like the Holy Grail for the resistance, hard evidence that science can be used to make lives better. If we could get the shroud, use it to make one of these universal machines – we could prove progress should be embraced, not feared. We could prove human development is being suppressed for all the wrong reasons.’

‘But why?’ Anji asked. ‘That’s what I don’t understand.’

Dee grimaced. ‘Power. Those in charge want to keep it and they will stop at nothing to maintain their grip on the Empire – murder, repression, terror.’

‘That’s why they must be stopped.’ The Doctor joined the discussion. He had been in the other bedroom but now emerged, pulling on his frock coat. ‘Whatever the consequences, this tyranny must cease.’

Anji nodded. At least they could agree on that. ‘So, what’s our first step?’

‘Simple,’ Hannah replied. ‘We send a raiding party to steal the shroud from the Tower of London.’

‘That’s crazy!’ Frank protested. ‘Suicidal!’

Dee nodded. ‘You’d have to be insane just to contemplate such an idea.’

‘Think about it for a minute, will you?’ Hannah asked. ‘You said yourself the shroud is being moved out of the Tower within days. Who knows where it will be taken next? This could be our last chance to get it.’

‘Yes, but –’

‘But nothing!’ Hannah insisted. ‘The security forces are going to be busy with the mass protests today. Most of their men will be occupied elsewhere. You arrange for another resistance cell to create a diversion near the Tower, get some of the guards out of the building. Dee, your friend in the kitchens – he could sneak us in. Once inside, we find the shroud, grab it and get out again.’

Frank nodded thoughtfully. ‘It could work. . .’

‘Yes!’ Hannah smiled. ‘Dee – you want to fight back, want to avenge all those people who have been murdered or imprisoned. This is your chance, a chance for the resistance to make a difference, instead of just skulking around from one safe house to another.’

‘What about Fitz?’ Anji asked.

‘We get him out at the same time,’ Hannah said. ‘Free all the political prisoners being held captive in the Tower. Hell, Turing himself may still be alive somewhere in the Tower for all we know.’

‘I’m up for it,’ Anji said. ‘Fitz will be dead by this time tomorrow unless we do something.’

The Doctor had listened to all this quietly. Now he spoke up. 'I won't be coming with you to the Tower,' he said sadly. 'I have something else I must do.'

'But what about Fitz?'

The Doctor looked away. 'Fitz will understand.'

Anji couldn't believe what she was hearing. 'Understand that you're leaving him to die? Understand that you've got better things to do than help save him? I don't think so!'

'I'd explain to you if I could...'

'Don't bother, Doctor! You've made your feelings perfectly clear!' Anji walked away, not trusting herself to say any more. She stood in front of the windows, looking down at the empty street below. The curfew must still be in effect. The distant chimes of a clock striking seven confirmed her theory. Behind her, the others were still discussing Hannah's plan.

'Well, I'll need to talk with other cell leaders,' Frank said, 'see what they think about the idea. It's a risky strategy, but we need to do something. Like you said, how many more people have to die before we act?'

'Whatever you're going to do, I suggest you get on with it,' Anji said, pointing down at the street below. 'Look!'

The others joined her at the window. Tavistock Place was rapidly filling with black vans, security forces spilling out from the back of each vehicle on to the street and into the residential buildings.

'Could just be a random check,' Dee said, sounding unconvinced. 'They seem to be looking in all the blocks of flats.'

'We can't take that chance. Someone probably saw you in the pub last night and decided to call the security forces, hoping to grab the reward,' Frank muttered. 'They know we're somewhere nearby, they just don't know which building. We've got to get out of here – now!'

'What about the bombs?' Dee asked.

'Too heavy to carry. Set a timer on the biggest one – sixty seconds should do. When it explodes, it'll destroy anything left behind.'

Dee hurried from the room. Frank looked at the Doctor, Anji and Hannah. 'You've got less than a minute,' he said. 'There's a fire escape at the back of the building. Use that, then go down the alleyway into Leigh Street.'

'What about people in the other flats?' the Doctor asked.

Frank shook his head. 'All empty. The building is scheduled for demolition, that's why we choose it.' He looked at his fob watch. 'There's a small café

on the Strand called the Alcove, near the Savoy. Meet us there in the back booth at ten o'clock. Go! Get out while you still can!

The trio followed his instructions, emerging on to Leigh Street just as the home-made bombs began exploding. The Doctor, Hannah and Anji strolled away towards Tottenham Court Road, trying to look inconspicuous.

The Prime Minister returned to Downing Street after a dawn meeting with the Star Chamber. He went straight to his office and summoned the leaders of the police and armed forces. They arrived within an hour and were ushered into his office.

Merrell knew he looked terrible. He hadn't slept for two days, his hair was greasy and unkempt and the early morning summons by the Star Chamber hadn't even given him time to shave. He had hurriedly scraped a razor across his stubble after returning, but his hands shook too much. Now his face was a mess of bloody cuts and nicks. It didn't matter, he told himself. After today, nothing would matter. He intended to resign. This meeting would be his final act as premier, a bitter bequest to his successor.

'I understand there is to be a protest in Trafalgar Square at midday,' the Prime Minister said. The police commissioner nodded.

'Yes, sir. The trade unionists have refused to back down. Even though you closed all public transport yesterday, we believe thousands of men had already arrived in the city by then. Even more have arrived since, mostly in trucks and other private vehicles.'

'Why didn't you stop them?' Merrell asked.

'They hadn't done anything wrong yet, sir,' the commissioner replied.

'And similar protests are expected in cities across the country?'

'Yes, sir.'

'That is most regrettable.' Merrell got up and walked to the window looking out over the garden at the rear of Number 10. 'They must be stopped.'

'But sir, it's impossible to stop that many people gathering in different places across the country,' protested an army general.

'You misunderstand me. I don't want the gatherings prevented. I want these dissidents gathered together in groups. They will make an easier target for your men,' the Prime Minister replied.

'I'm not sure I follow you. . .'

'Then let me be quite explicit. I want your men to allow the dissidents to gather. Then, once the protestors are together, I want them surrounded.'

None must be allowed to escape.

‘But we can’t arrest that many men at once! There will be thousands of them. There aren’t enough prison cells in the country!’ the commissioner said.

Merrell watched a bumble bee fly from one flower to the next in the garden. ‘Who said anything about arresting them?’

‘I’m sorry, sir, I don’t mean to be obtuse, but just what are you saying?’

‘Execute them. All of them.’

‘You can’t be serious...’

‘I am utterly serious.’ Merrell returned to his desk and sat down. ‘Shoot them all. Use machine guns if you have to, I don’t care how you do it. These men are dissidents – enemies of the Empire. They have been told not to gather. They have been warned. This country is at war with terrorism, yet these men are determined to break the law. Well, under martial law, such acts of anti-Empire behaviour are punishable by death. So, death it is.’

‘But that’s barbaric!’ the police commissioner whispered.

‘No, it’s the law. If you are not willing to enforce it, I will find someone who is. And I will make sure the first person they pass sentence upon is you, for refusing to obey the direct orders of your superior! Do I make myself clear?’

The police commissioner looked at the others, but they said nothing. A lifetime of following orders without question left them little choice.

‘Do I make myself clear?’ Merrell hissed at the commissioner.

‘Yes – sir.’

The Prime Minister smiled. ‘Good, then that’s settled. The armed services will swell your ranks and assist with cleaning up afterwards. By sundown tonight, the last of the dissidents will be history.’

Fitz woke with a start. He had been dreaming about an afternoon when he was seven and his mother wanted to kiss him goodbye in front of the school gates. He was embarrassed and didn’t want anyone to see him with her, but she insisted. Just as she was bending down to kiss him, worms began curling out of her mouth and her eyeballs were replaced by crawling maggots.

‘No, no!’ he shouted, before realising it was just a nightmare. As the images faded from his mind, so did the memory of his mother’s face. I can only remember her now in nightmares, he thought bleakly.

Outside a smear of cloud was visible in the blue spring sky. It was already daytime. He had less than twenty-four hours to live.

‘Fitz! Are you all right?’ Alan called out.

‘Yeah. Just a bad dream,’ Fitz called back. ‘What time is it?’

‘Morning.’

‘I know that, I can see the sky. I mean, what time is it? Nine o’clock?’

‘Probably. Time doesn’t have much meaning here.’

‘Not for you, maybe! I’m being executed tomorrow!’ Fitz replied angrily. He regretted his outburst instantly. ‘Sorry, Alan. It’s not your fault. I’m just...’

‘Scared?’

Fitz nodded grimly. ‘Yeah. Scared.’

‘You don’t have to be. There’s a life beyond this one.’

‘You believe that?’

‘Don’t you?’

Fitz pondered his answer. He had seen so much in his travels with the Doctor. Places where it seemed every death had a meaning, places where death was callous and random. He had watched his own mother die a slow death of the mind. He had seen so much – too much perhaps. The only thing he knew for certain was the absence of certainty. ‘I don’t know,’ he replied simply. ‘I’d like to believe...’

‘But you don’t know,’ Alan said, completing the thought. ‘I’ve had a lot of time to think about it and life doesn’t make sense to me otherwise. I can’t believe I’ll never see Chris again.’

‘Chris is the person you loved?’

‘My first love.’

Fitz pulled his wooden bench over to the shared stone wall between the two cells. ‘Tell me more, if you don’t mind.’

‘Are you sure?’

Fitz smiled. ‘Please. Maybe it’ll take my mind off what’s coming.’

‘All right. Forgive me if I stumble over the details, it’s been a long time since I thought about some of this...’

Alan was born in 1912 at a nursing home in London, the second of two sons. (Fitz did a quick calculation – that made him nearly ninety one.) His father was a civil servant working in India, so Alan spent most of his childhood in

a succession of temporary homes, often with foster families. He never knew his father well, but that was not uncommon in the early twentieth century.

'My mother told me I used to plant my broken toy soldiers in the ground, hoping they would grow back fully healed!' Alan said wistfully.

He taught himself to read in three weeks, but couldn't tell left from right. So he kept a red spot on his left thumb for ease of identification. At the age of ten Alan had an epiphany when given a children's book about science. It was the start of a lifelong obsession. A year later, a gypsy fortune-teller at a church fête predicted Alan would be a genius.

In 1926 he was sent to a public school in Dorset. But his dislike of group sports and habit of conducting his own science experiments in the dormitory made him an outcast, friendless and alone. He didn't fit into the system and ignored his classes, yet was still able to top the end of year exams in maths and sciences, to the frustration of his teachers.

'It was 1927 when I noticed Chris. I wanted to look at his face, again and again,' Alan said. 'I worshipped the ground he trod on, he made everyone else seem so ordinary.'

'Did he love you?' Fitz asked.

'It wasn't allowed. The headmaster called it filth. So we were friends.'

Chris was a year above Alan in school. When Chris went for a scholarship to Cambridge's Trinity College, Alan decided to try as well. The college was among the best in the world for sciences. More importantly, they would be separated for a year if Alan failed to attain a scholarship.

In early December 1929, the two spent a week in Cambridge taking the scholarship exams, away from the strictures of their school. They sat up past midnight playing cards, they went to the cinema together, they went on walks. The two were inseparable. 'It was the happiest week of my life.'

But Chris won a scholarship and Alan did not. During the next term at school Chris was taken ill and transported to London by ambulance. He had two operations but died on February 13, 1930.

Fitz could hear Alan crying. He waited until the tears subsided before asking a question. 'What killed him?'

'Tuberculosis,' Alan replied. 'I only found out after he died. His life had been in constant danger all the time I knew him and he never said.'

'He sounds very brave.'

'He was,' Alan said quietly. 'He had a way of smiling at me, almost sideways. I still miss him so, even after all this time. I hardly remember how he

looked any more, but I sometimes see his face in my dreams.'

Fitz hoped Alan's dreams were happier than his own.

'After Chris died, I devoted myself to my studies. I believed I would be letting him down unless I did so. It was almost as if I had to carry on for both of us, as if there was some great work I had to accomplish.'

Alan became increasingly interested in mathematics, particularly ciphers and cryptography. He was elected to a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, and arrived there in 1931. Gradually, he found new friends. He joined the Anti-War Council. He did not try to hide his sexuality, but neither did he flaunt it like others.

By 1935 Alan was elected a Fellow of the college, becoming a don while still only 22. He was intrigued by machines. Others had spoken of mechanical rules for mathematics, but no one sat down to design a machine for such a purpose – until Alan. He imagined a machine that could simulate the work done by any machine.

'I designed a table for this device. I called it the universal machine.'

'What, like a computer?'

'Exactly! An electronic brain, if you will. I wrote a paper about it called "On Computable Numbers". That was when the trouble began.'

Fitz could hear the guards returning. 'What trouble?'

'The trouble that ruined my life.'

The bolts were being opened on Fitz's cell. The door swung open.

'Get back against the wall!' The guards marched into the cell, gesturing at Fitz with their machine guns. He held his hands up in meek surrender and retreated to the wall opposite the open door.

'All right, all right, I'm going!'

One of the guards raised the butt of his machine gun in the air. The metal smashed into Fitz's forehead and he knew nothing more.

'Forgive me, O Harbinger, but our greatest minds are unable to penetrate the artefact. The Star Chamber asks –'

The child laughed, clapping its hands together repeatedly. 'Give them this.' The Oracle opened its hands. A silver tube fell out and rolled across the metal floor, coming to rest against the adjutant's black boots.

Rameau picked it up and turned the tube over in his hands. 'What is it?'

'An alien device. It is not powerful enough to open the artefact. But correctly used, that may hurt it.'

The adjutant was uncertain. 'What will happen then?'
'It will scream!'

It was a bleak morning for Anji. She, Hannah and the Doctor walked through the deserted streets of central London. Martial law had emptied the city centre, but Anji was more perturbed by the differences between this London and the city she knew and loved. No skyscrapers stretched up towards the clouds. No tourists clogged the street corners, getting in the way and taking photos of local landmarks. Traffic was almost nonexistent. It was like walking through a haunted, vacant landscape.

The silent city matched the silence between herself and the Doctor. Ever since they arrived in London, Anji had sensed a distance between herself and the Doctor. No, maybe it started earlier than that. She remembered how cold he seemed after rescuing her from the hospital. Even when they first stepped out of the TARDIS and she was saying goodbye, he seemed distracted, preoccupied. There were flashes of his usual self, but he seemed almost paralysed, as if something was gnawing at him and she couldn't get him to admit it. Was he trying to push her away? She couldn't believe he honestly meant to leave Fitz to die. Or did he?

Hannah had occupied herself by trying to turn the journey into a sightseeing tour, until Anji had shut her up with a barbed comment. After that all three of them hardly spoke another word.

Finally, it was the Doctor who broke the silence. He stopped on St Martin's Lane, his head tilted to one side. 'Can you hear that?'

In the distance was a noise like a train, shuffling towards them. As the sound grew nearer, the shuffle became more clearly audible. It was the sound of marching feet, hundreds of them.

The Doctor grabbed Anji by the arm. 'Hey!' she protested but he silenced her. He pulled Anji and Hannah into a dark doorway. Less than a minute later the source of the noise marched past them – row upon row of armed policemen and soldiers.

When the marchers had passed, Anji stepped out to see where they had gone. 'Looks like they're planning to stop the trade union protest before it starts.'

'There must have been at least a hundred of them,' Hannah said.

'A hundred and twenty,' the Doctor noted. 'Well armed, too. The protest could turn into a bloodbath.'

Anji remembered the truck driver who had given them a lift into London. 'I hope Alf is all right. I can just imagine him on the front line.'

The bells of St Martin's-in-the-Field chimed ten o'clock. The Doctor began walking briskly towards the Strand. 'Come on. We've got an appointment.' Anji and Hannah ran to catch up with him.

'Don't you even care about what happens to people like Alf?' Anji demanded. She was fast losing patience with the Doctor's attitude.

'Of course I care. Sometimes I wish I didn't – it would make things easier, make what I have to do easier,' he replied, still striding onwards.

'What things? Make what easier?'

The Doctor looked at her then motioned at Hannah fleetingly with his eyes. He walked on without waiting for an answer, leaving her fuming.

'My apologies, Mr Kreiner.' The voice was Hastings's, but the smirking tone did not match the words spoken. 'I told my guards merely to bring you here. I did not realise they would be so overenthusiastic.'

Fitz opened his eyes. 'Keep hitting me on the head like that and I'll suffer permanent brain damage.'

'Perhaps, but I doubt you'll be alive long enough to worry about that.' Hastings sat behind a large wooden desk in a well-appointed office. Ornate tapestries hung on the walls, woven matting covered the floor and the lead-lined windows were framed by crimson curtains. The wall behind Hastings was a vast bookcase, stretching from floor to the ceiling. 'You're admiring my office. It was once part of Sir Walter Raleigh's lodgings, when he was a prisoner here.'

'Fascinating.' Fitz made his disinterest plain with the tone of his voice.

'In fact, it was added to the Tower in 1605 to provide extra space for his family and attendants. This may have been a prison, but that didn't mean he couldn't have some home comforts.' Hastings arched an eyebrow at Fitz. 'Is there anything I could offer to make your brief sojourn here more comfortable?'

'A set of escape plans?'

'Now, now, there's no need to be churlish. I may be your gaoler but that doesn't mean we can't be friends.'

'That's exactly what it means,' Fitz snapped. 'Since you'll be overseeing my execution tomorrow, I doubt we'll have much time to get acquainted.'

‘Sad but true. Let’s cut the small talk then, shall we? I am authorised to offer you a stay of execution and even a full pardon – if you furnish me with certain information.’

Fitz got up to leave but found his feet were shackled to the chair. He collapsed back down into the seat. ‘You’ll forgive my lack of trust, but your track record in such matters isn’t great.’

Hastings rested his elbows on the desk and formed his fingers into a steeple in front of his face. ‘I wouldn’t trust me either, if I were you. But all you need do is tell me the names of your terrorist leaders and you can go free.’

‘How many times do I have to say it? I am not a terrorist. I am innocent. You tricked me into making a confession. As for that farce of a hearing! Even if I did know the names of these terrorists, I wouldn’t tell you – but I don’t!’

Hastings stared at Fitz. ‘You know what? I’m almost tempted to believe you. You certainly seem to believe yourself. But the actions of your co-conspirators, the Doctor and Anji. . . these point to a different truth.’

That got Fitz’s attention. ‘What about them?’

‘They seem to have been very busy, according to reports from our field agents. The Doctor colluded with a resistance cell in Edinburgh. He formed an alliance with a dangerous individual. Together they liberated Miss Kapoor from a hospital where she was being held prisoner. They were last seen bound for London. Our men would have caught them but the trade unions’ protests have been tying up much of our resources.’ Hastings leaned forward in his seat. ‘I have one simple question – why? Why do all this? What do you hope to achieve? Surely none of you can believe the might of the Empire can be toppled by a handful of terrorists, no matter how resourceful they may be?’

Fitz was grinning. After three days of torment, torture and doubts, he was happy again. He started laughing, despite himself.

‘Mr Kreiner, what do you find so amusing?’ Hastings asked.

But Fitz kept on laughing, all the tension and stress melting away.

‘I ask you again, what is so amusing?’ Hastings stood up abruptly, all the colour draining from his face. He walked around the desk. ‘What is so funny?’

Fitz tried to answer but his laughter had turned to hysterics. Hastings could stand it no longer. He lashed out, slapping Fitz across the face. Fitz grabbed Hastings’s arm and gripped it tightly.

‘You want to know what’s so funny?’ he hissed.

‘Guards! Guards!’ Hastings yelled, fear in his voice.

‘My friends are coming for me. And there’s nothing you or your tinpot little army of thugs and bullies can do to stop them.’

‘Guards!’ Hastings succeeded in pulling away from Fitz and stumbled backwards as three guards ran in. ‘Take him back to his cell – now!’

Dee was already sipping a cup of tea in the back booth of the Alcove café when the Doctor, Hannah and Anji arrived. The rest of the café was empty, except for a waitress behind the counter. ‘You made it, good,’ she said. ‘I wasn’t sure if you’d get here. The police and army are establishing a cordon around Trafalgar Square, but they aren’t stopping people – yet.’

‘We saw. Where’s Frank?’ Hannah asked.

‘Must still be contacting the other cell leaders. He definitely made it out of the flat. I lit the fuse as he went down the fire escape.’ Dee smiled to herself. ‘You should have seen the explosion! They won’t be walking away from that!’

‘Who?’ The Doctor’s face had a sad resignation about it.

‘The coppers! I got three of them with the bomb!’ Dee was gleeful.

Anji turned away. Dee seemed to revel in her achievement.

Hannah was even more upset than Anji. ‘That’s murder! Those men – they probably had wives and children. Did you ever think about them?’

Dee shook her head. ‘I can’t believe you. They were coming to kill us, to kill you three! What did you want me to do – ask them nicely to leave? They lost the right to any consideration when they joined up.’

The silence was broken by the waitress’s arrival. The Doctor ordered a pot of tea for four and some cream cakes.

‘Sorry, no fresh cream. Deliveries are up the spout as usual,’ the waitress explained. ‘You’re lucky we’re open at all on Easter Sunday. I had a devil of a job getting here this morning.’

The Doctor pondered the menu. ‘How about a teacake?’

‘I can do that,’ she said. ‘They’re yesterday’s batch, but they’ll be as good as new toasted.’

Frank arrived just after the tea. ‘Well, we’re on,’ he whispered in a hush.

Dee smiled. ‘When?’

‘Tonight, at dusk. The other leaders have agreed to create a diversion nearby – a bomb will explode outside Fenchurch Street station at six tonight. That will draw away some of the men guarding the Tower. A dozen people

will go in via the kitchens, let in by your friend Bill. Then the team will fan out and begin searching for the shroud.'

Anji noticed an absence from the plan. 'What about Fitz?'

'If you come with us, you can look for your friend. But our first priority must be finding the shroud,' Frank replied.

'What about weapons?' Dee asked.

'Everyone will be armed. The resistance leaders have approved the use of lethal force – but only when necessary.' Frank looked pointedly at Dee. 'This is not about turning the Tower of London into a bloodbath or pursuing any personal vendettas. It's an extraction mission – nothing more or less. Got it?'

Dee's top lip curled with disdain.

'I said, have you got it?' Frank demanded.

'Yes!' she hissed at him.

'Good. Glad to hear it. Now, let's go. It's swarming with police and security forces between Westminster and Trafalgar Square – the sooner we get out of here, the happier I'll be.' Frank got up to leave but then sank back down into his chair. Anji glanced round to see what had stopped him.

A dozen armed policemen were standing outside the café.

The Doctor bit into a toasted teacake. 'It seems we're staying put.'

The five fugitives spent an uncomfortable hour waiting inside the café before the armed police outside began moving off. 'At last!' Anji said with relief. 'I thought they were never going to leave.'

But her joy was quickly stifled by two policemen walking into the café. Anji shuffled sideways in the booth, so her features were obscured by Frank in front of her. One of the policemen cleared his throat. 'Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. I regret to inform you that this establishment is going to be closed immediately. I have orders to seal you all inside for your own safety.'

'Why?' the waitress asked. 'We've done nothing wrong.'

The policeman smiled. 'Of course you haven't, miss! No, the trouble is outside. We're expecting some troublemakers to come past here on their way to an illegal demonstration at Trafalgar Square. All the businesses on routes leading to the square are being closed for the rest of the day and anyone inside must stay inside – for their own protection.'

Hannah stood up. 'How long will this take?'

'Hard to say, miss. Depends on how many troublemakers we get. Hopefully it'll all be over before you know it.' The policeman got the keys to the café

from the waitress, locked and chained the rear entrance and began sealing up the front doors.

‘What if there’s a fire?’ Frank asked. ‘We won’t be able to get out.’

The policeman thought about this. ‘In that case, I suggest you break the glass in the front windows. That will alert my colleagues to your predicament and help will be despatched to you immediately. Good day.’ The two policemen stepped out into the Strand and locked the front doors. They also put a chain around the door handles and padlocked it in place.

The Doctor, Anji, Hannah, Dee and Frank were trapped inside the café, along with the waitress. ‘Great,’ Dee muttered darkly. ‘Now we’re stuck here!’

Alf was bending over to tie the lace on his right boot when the first shots were fired. For reasons that escaped him, his right bootlace was always coming undone. It was exactly the same as the lace on his left boot, but persisted in undoing itself. The truck driver had tried tying it in a double knot, even a triple knot, without success. How many times he had cursed the bloody lace! It was only apathy that had stopped him replacing the damn thing. But this time it saved his life.

Alf was standing beside one of the lion statues on a dais in Trafalgar Square when the police opened fire. The demonstration had been a success until then. The protestors had seen the massing police on the way to the square, but the law enforcers let the protestors past. Thousands of trade unions and other groups opposed to the Government’s bullying tactics and repressive regime had gathered, for once united against a common foe. There had been songs and laughter. Hip flasks were handed round, adding to the general air of merriment. It was more like a day out than a demonstration for a while.

Then the police appeared, their numbers bolstered by members of the armed forces, all marching towards the square in closed ranks. Every man in uniform was carrying a firearm, many had machine guns. Within minutes the square was sealed off, surrounded by a ring of men five deep. The protestors shouted at and taunted the police, but got no response. A few stones and bottles were thrown outwards but nothing happened. The police forces just stood, silently waiting. For three long minutes, the two sides watched each other. The protest organisers had expected trouble, but nobody had foreseen the authorities mobilising so many men or that they would be armed.

Alf had noticed his bootlace was undone as the distant sound of Big Ben

chiming twelve echoed up Whitehall towards Trafalgar Square. As the last chime rang out, the shooting started. Around the square the police opened fire, randomly gunning down those near the outside of the crowd. The protestors fell, screaming and dying, but the bullets kept ripping into the crowd.

Alf stayed down in a crouch. The man beside him, a factory worker from North London called Mike, was among the first to die. Alf looked up and saw marksmen positioned on the roof of the National Gallery, firing down into the crowd. Alf flung himself off the dais to the ground, just escaping the sharpshooter's next bullet. The truck driver stayed where he was, his hands clasped over his ears to block out the terrible sound of men screaming, his eyes closed so as not to witness the butchery happening around him.

Beside the marksmen atop the National Gallery, a television camera was standing, its lens focused on the horrific scenes below. But this broadcast was not for public consumption.

When Anji first heard the gunfire, she thought it might be fireworks going off. Then she remembered the armed police. They looked like they were going to kill. The sound of men screaming removed all doubt.

Dee and Hannah crowded to the front windows of the café, pressing their faces against the glass. They strained to look down the Strand towards the noise, but still could not see anything.

The waitress rocked back and forth in an upright wooden chair, her hands fingering the beads of a rosary as she prayed silently to herself. Frank watched her with admiration. 'Sometimes I wish I still believed in God. A just God, someone who would punish the wicked and reward the righteous.'

'But you don't,' the Doctor said.

'No. No, not after my wife died,' Frank replied. 'I used to be a lecturer at Imperial College. She was one of my students. We fell in love and got married, all in one term. Caused quite a scandal. People said it wouldn't last, but we proved them wrong. Eight years we stayed together.'

'What happened?' Anji asked.

'Emily – that was her name – Emily decided to speak out. She was quite brilliant, one of the first women accepted into Imperial. But she couldn't stand the way certain subjects were ignored or glossed over in the syllabus. She said a college that specialised in science should have moved on since the nineteenth century. She was right, of course, but you can't say that sort

of thing in public. When the Government announced that no more women would be allowed to study for degrees, she snapped. Said it was turning the clock back to the dark ages. I tried to get her to speak only in private, work behind the scenes. But she wouldn't have it. She seemed determined to become a martyr.'

Frank sighed heavily. 'She succeeded. I was away visiting relatives one weekend. When I came back, she was gone. There were signs of a struggle. When I reported it to the police, they told me she had been arrested for sedition. They claimed she was so full of remorse, she hanged herself in the cells rather than put me through the shame of a trial. It was a lie, of course.'

'How do you know?'

'I demanded to see her body. She had been tortured, bound and gagged before they killed her. It was an execution, but they couldn't even admit to that. So they murdered my wife and called it suicide. I used to cry but I ran out of tears a long time ago.' Frank rubbed a hand across his weary eyes. 'I stopped believing in any notion of God the moment I saw Emily's body. If God could let that happen to my wife and those responsible could just smirk and walk away, he wasn't worth believing in.'

For once, the members of the Star Chamber had come down from their elevated platforms to sit together. The adjutant had gathered five plush leather armchairs and positioned them in a semicircle around a small television screen.

The five members sipped drinks as they watched the broadcast from Trafalgar Square. None of them flinched from the images on the monochrome screen. Each had seen death before, either on the battlefield or in interrogation cells or at the executions of anti-Government dissidents. Most of them had killed in the line of duty.

The Pentarch smiled. Watching the enemies of the Empire being gunned down in black and white was no hardship for him. In fact, he felt rather detached from the whole experience. He would much prefer to have been there himself, watching the spectacle first hand.

'It's for their own good, you know,' he said to Elswit, who was sat on his left. 'These dissidents, they only respect the firm spank of authority. I mean, they must be fools if they can't see this is for the good of the Empire.'

'Quite so, Pentarch,' Elswit replied sourly. His brother Reginald owned several factories in North London and never stopped complaining about

left-wing agitators calling strikes to protest about poor working conditions. Maybe now Reginald would give him some peace when they next met for lunch.

'I say! Did you see that?' Bridges pointed a chubby finger excitedly at the screen. A bloodsports enthusiast, he was savouring every moment of this broadcast. 'Chap caught it right in the head! Broke him open like a watermelon!'

Harris felt sickened by the obese man's rapture. This slaughter was a necessary act, but there was no need to rejoice in the killing. 'What about the other protests – Manchester? Glasgow? Cardiff?'

'We are receiving pictures from several other cities. All the responses were timed to begin simultaneously at midday across the country,' the adjutant replied. He turned a heavy dial on the television cabinet. As the dial clicked from channel to channel, similar scenes to those in Trafalgar Square appeared on the small screen.

'What about witnesses? And who will be cleaning up afterwards?' Arnold asked, his cunning mind on the broader implications, as always.

'Nobody gets out alive, as per your orders,' Rameau said. 'The security forces will be responsible for disposal of all bodies, blood and bullets.'

Bridges was laughing as he watched another wave of protestors dying, the rolls of fat on his body gently undulating. 'Can you believe they decided to stage a non-violent event? That'll teach them! Now they'll see who's got the real power.'

The massacre of Trafalgar Square was over within fifteen minutes. The use of machine guns had considerably shortened the time needed to murder several thousand unarmed people. Only once did a group from the protestors manage to escape the killing zone.

Several dozen Welsh miners clustered together and charged the police covering the end of the Strand. Alf had joined them, running in the middle of the group. The police were not expecting any resistance and fell aside as the men charged at them, content to keep picking off the protestors as they passed.

Suddenly the breakaway group was clear, the sound of gunfire coming only from behind them, instead of all around. 'Keep going!' Alf shouted. 'The further away we get, the safer we'll be!' A dozen policemen ran after them.

The portly man to Alf's left stumbled and almost fell. He was wearing blue overalls, the fabric splashed with fresh blood. Alf grabbed his arm and helped him keep running. 'Thanks!' the man said. 'I'm Tom.'

'Alf.' The two exchanged a smile.

Then a bullet entered the back of Alf's skull and exited through his forehead. He fell to the road, quite dead.

The sound of gunfire and men screaming was getting closer. Anji and the Doctor joined Dee and Hannah at the window. Pounding footsteps could be heard. Suddenly a man ran into view. He was about forty, portly and sweating profusely. He was wearing blue overalls, the material stained a moist crimson by splatters of fresh blood. He saw the three women inside the café and ran towards them.

'Let me in! Let me in!' he screamed, tugging at the front doors.

'We can't,' the Doctor shouted back. 'They locked us in!'

A shot flew past the café. The man turned round to face a policeman marching up the Strand towards him. The policeman had a rifle raised to his face and was taking aim. 'No! Please! I haven't got any weapons!' the quaking man sobbed.

'Leave him!' the Doctor shouted. 'He's unarmed, he can't -'

A single shot rang out, striking the protestor in the side of the face. He reached a hand involuntarily to his cheek, as if stung by a wasp. Then his head lolled to one side and his torso slid to the ground, leaving a broad smear of blood on the glass.

The policeman walked nearer and took aim again.

'He's already dead!' Anji screamed through the window, but the policemen fired anyway, sending three more bullets into the fallen protestor. The corpse jerked and then lay still, a pool of blood spreading out from it like crimson oil across the footpath.

The policeman looked up at the people inside the café, smiled at them politely and then walked back down the Strand towards Trafalgar Square.

'You sadistic bastard!' Dee shouted after him, banging on the café window. 'You sick, sadistic bastard!' Anji turned away from the window and approached the Doctor.

'We need to talk. Just the two of us,' she said. 'Now.'

Frank went to help Hannah comfort the hysterical waitress. The Doctor and Anji retreated to a booth at the back of the café. They sat silently on

opposite sides of the table, regarding each other.

'You were talking before about how not caring would make things easier for you, make what you have to do easier,' Anji said quietly. 'What did you mean by that, Doctor? Make what easier?'

He sighed and began rubbing the palm of his left hand back and forth across his temples. 'If I manage to reset history to what I believe is its proper course, what will the consequences of that be? Who's to say this history is any better or worse than the one we already know?'

Anji shook her head. 'That isn't what I asked you, Doctor. Why don't you want to care about people like Hannah and Alf and the rest?'

The Doctor leaned back in the booth, his face pale and drained. 'If I reset history – what happens to everyone in this year 2003? Will they all be erased, wiped out as the real history reasserts itself? They all have hopes and dreams and fears and lives of their own. What right do I have to take all that away, just to do what I think is right? The people in charge of this reality, they believe what they are doing is right – does that justify their actions? How is what I'm planning to do any different?'

'But we're doing this for the right reasons,' Anji insisted.

'The right reasons? Or just what seem like the right reasons to us?' The Doctor wiped a cold sweat from his forehead. His words were coming ever more slowly as he swayed from side to side in his seat. 'In science... as in morality... the end never... justifies... the means.'

We've got to get out of here.

We've got to get back to –

The Doctor's eyes rolled back into his head and he slumped off the seat on to the floor. Anji crouched beside him, checking his vital signs. His breathing was very shallow and she could hardly detect a pulse. She was putting his body into the recovery position as Hannah came over.

'Is he all right? Passed out again?'

Anji nodded. 'The attacks are getting worse all the time. I don't know how much longer before he slides into a coma.'

'Has he been like this before?' Hannah asked.

'Once. Not far from here, actually. A heart condition – it almost killed him. But he got better.' Anji sat down on the floor, unsure what to do next. 'Maybe it's a relapse, maybe it's something else. I just don't know...'

Professor Joshua Sutton was frustrated. For two days he and his team of scientists had been trying to gain entry to the tall blue box. But it had resisted all attempts to discover whatever secrets were held inside.

Sutton leaned against a laboratory bench and sipped at his mug of tea, but it was cold. If only somebody would invent a way of keeping tea warm.

Sutton was proud to be a scientist. He had studied at Cambridge and outshone all others in his class. Just before his final paper two men in sombre suits had appeared in his rooms. They had offered him a stark choice – work as a Government scientist or find himself another career.

He had been expecting the visitation. It was well known that the Security Service maintained a watching brief on all the leading academic institutions, on the lookout for the best minds. That way the Government could take advantage of their potential – and prevent anyone else exploiting it.

Sutton didn't care about politics, never had. He had no axe to grind with the establishment, no urge to lead protests against the Empire as so many of his fellow students did. He just wanted to be a scientist, to invent new things. It had been his passion for as long as he could remember and that passion had not dimmed, even after thirty years working for the Government. He knew he had achieved great things in that time and was grateful for the opportunity.

But sometimes he still felt frustrated. The lack of equipment, the poor funding, the need to have new experiments approved, the endless reams of paperwork – it all took the joy out of his work. He wished someone else would do all the administration and leave him to do what he did best.

Today's frustration was different. Sutton could solve the most complex puzzles within minutes. But this blue box had everyone stumped. It had a lock that matched no key. Brute force was no more successful than guile at opening it. Sledgehammers, battering rams, even a controlled explosion made no impression. The team had tried tipping the box on its side, but the underneath proved just as resilient as the rest of it.

Most bewildering of all was the humming. When he listened closely, the professor could hear a gentle humming emanate from the box. It wasn't like a person humming a note, or the hum of a machine in operation – it was a curious combination of the two, and yet still unique. One thing about the box was certain – it contained a power source of some description. By placing his hand against the box's surface, Sutton could feel a slight vibration. But there was no visible proof the box was drawing energy from any external source.

Then there were the markings on the external surface. For all intents and purposes, the box was a typical example of a police telephone box, right down to the instruction plaque on one side. One of Sutton's assistants had spent eighteen hours searching through dozens of box files, examining the paperwork for every police telephone box. He could find no record of a missing police box, nor any proof that the design specifications had ever been duplicated or circulated.

The team had even investigated the possibility that the box was not hollow. One of the younger technicians wondered aloud if the box could be solid, formed from some unknown substance. They had weighed it three times, only to discover its apparent mass and density were different each time. If Sutton didn't know better, he could have sworn the box was altering its mass and density just to confuse them. If so, it was doing a very good job.

All in all, Sutton decided, this was the most frustrating and intriguing experience of his long career. He just hoped they could find a breakthrough. Otherwise, the failure would haunt him for years to come.

So, it was with relief and exasperation that he received the silver tube. The object arrived with a Whitehall messenger.

'I'm just a messenger, all right?' the small, ugly man said sarcastically. 'Hence the job title. I deliver messages. This came from someone important, that's all I know. Sign here, here and here.'

The messenger produced the usual fistful of paperwork and Sutton gratefully signed the forms in triplicate before wresting the tube away. Once the messenger had gone, the professor put the new device to one side. He had more pressing conundrums to attend to.

'So, what's the story with you two?' Dee asked, nodding her head towards the unconscious Doctor. She and Anji were sitting at a table in the centre of the café, facing each other. The Doctor was still out cold on the floor. The others had made themselves as comfortable as possible while waiting to be released. The waitress was asleep, curled up on the padded bench in another booth, her right thumb wedged inside her mouth like a baby.

It's a good question, Anji thought. For a long time she had felt apart from the Doctor and Fitz, perhaps because she was the newcomer in the TARDIS. Fitz treated the Doctor like an old friend, although the Doctor did not seem to recall their previous travels.

Anji had tried pressing Fitz to tell her more about the Doctor, but he had

been infuriatingly vague. Fitz claimed his own memories were a little haphazard and would only hint obliquely about some past trauma. Were the Doctor's dizzy spells related to that trauma in some way? she wondered. Was this the past coming back to haunt him, like cancer in the body of a former smoker? Or were the symptoms a reaction to a threat here and now? I've got plenty of questions but none of the answers, Anji decided. She realised Dee was still waiting.

'We travel together, along with Fitz.'

'Are you two – you know... ' Dee smiled coyly.

'No!' Anji's eyebrows jumped upwards at the idea. 'No, we're just – good friends, I suppose... '

'You argue enough to be an old married couple.'

'The Doctor has that effect on you. Makes it seem like he's been part of your life for ever,' Anji said. 'Why do you ask?'

'Well, he's not bad looking and I thought... '

'The Doctor's not interested in –'

'Oh, right! Are he and Fitz...?'

'No,' Anji replied firmly. 'The Doctor has friends, not lovers. At least, not in my experience. No, he's very tactile but he's not romantically inclined.'

'Shame.' Dee folded her arms, leaning back in the chair.

'What about you?' Anji asked. 'How did you get involved in all this?'

'The resistance?'

Anji nodded.

'My chemistry teacher, Mr O'Sullivan. There's always one teacher at school that inspires you, no matter how bad all the others are – mine was Mr O'Sullivan. He had a glass eye. Used to take it out and show it to each class on the first day of term,' Dee recalled, laughing. 'That way you got used to him having a glass eye and stopped staring at it. I remember, he was terrified of electricity. He said it was because he'd been struck by lightning twice.'

'Mr O'Sullivan told me I had an aptitude for chemistry, even gave me special tutorials after class. He said I was good enough to get into any college in the country. But one day the security forces came and arrested him, dragged him out of the classroom. It turned out he'd been part of a underground group, trying to foster scientific progress, instead of just rehashing the same old syllabus over and over again. We never saw him again. I guess he was imprisoned at one of the camps like Larkhill, or else tried and executed.'

Dee stopped to wipe her eyes. 'I vowed to fight the system, fight those who would treat someone like Mr O'Sullivan as a criminal – just because he wanted to teach and he was good at it. So I joined the resistance, turning my chemistry knowledge to good use.'

'Making bombs,' Anji said.

'Yeah, the bombs – my speciality.' Dee stared at her hands. 'I must have made thousands. You know what the worst part is?' Anji shook her head.

'I never knew Mr O'Sullivan's first name. I admired him so much, he was like the father I never had. But I never knew his first name.'

It was nearly three o'clock when the Doctor regained consciousness. He had been out for more than two hours, the longest of his dizzy spells yet. Anji had watched him. He twitched occasionally, his lips mouthing unspoken words. Something was troubling him, something he wasn't telling her. When he did sit up again, he seemed no closer to resolving the questions troubling him.

'Are we still in the café?' he asked. Frank and Dee were stood by the front doors, trying to see what was happening down the road. Hannah and Anji were sat at a table near the Doctor, sipping from china cups.

'Yes,' Anji replied. 'Hours of drinking tea and not much else. We've seen a few ambulances go past, but that's been about it. They took away that poor man's body. It's been quiet for the last few minutes.'

'We need to get out of here,' Dee said firmly. 'The diversion is due to start at six. That only leaves us three hours to get into position.' She walked to the front doors of the café and began banging on the glass, trying to get attention. 'Hey! Help! We're stuck in here!'

She kept banging at the glass. The noise woke the waitress, who joined Dee at the doors, smashing her fists against the glass. The murdered protestor's corpse might have been removed, but the crimson smear of its blood was still clearly visible down the glass frontage.

After a few minutes the noise succeeded in attracting a policeman. He was overweight with a jolly face, just the machine gun in his hands spoiling the illusion of a friendly bobby on the beat. He waved, smiled and walked away.

'Hey! Don't just walk away! Come and let us out!' Dee shouted. 'Git!'

Constable Neil Judd strolled back along the Strand towards the café, twirling a string of keys back and forth round his finger. He had been on duty since two o'clock, so he had been spared taking part in the main operation at

Trafalgar Street. For that the portly policeman was grateful. He hated guns and steadfastly refused to use one, except when required to on the firing range.

Just carrying a firearm made him uncomfortable. He had been issued with a machine gun when he came on duty and he couldn't wait to hand it back in at the end of his shift. All afternoon he had been holding the weapon like it was a poisonous snake, taking great care to keep the lethal end away from himself or anyone else.

Judd had joined the police because his father had been on the beat, and his father's father and at least two previous generations. He didn't mind the job. For the most part, patrolling a beat was a fine way to spend a day. Talking to the local people, keeping the more troublesome elements on the straight and narrow. He felt like he was doing some good. Judd was also aware he had never been the sharpest tool in the box. He had a memory like a sieve and taking the initiative was never one of his strong points. Despite that, he made a good constable and enjoyed his job.

It was only days like today that troubled him. Some of his colleagues couldn't wait to volunteer for armed duty down at the square, but Judd had done his best to avoid it. Truth be told, there was one thing the constable hated more than guns – and that was the sight of blood. It always made his nauseous. So he had happily offered to go round the local businesses on the fringes of the cordon, checking to see if anyone needed to be let out of their premises.

He returned to the café and compared his string of keys to the padlock holding the chains around the front door in place. He eventually found the matching key and undid the padlock, trying hard not to stare at the drying blood smeared over the café's glass frontage. Judd opened the door and stepped through it. 'Is everyone OK?'

There were six people inside – two men and four women. One of the women was a waitress, but the others must have been patrons caught here when the cordon was brought into action. They looked tired and miserable. Still, that was hardly surprising after spending several hours stuck in the café, the constable thought. He noticed one of the women had noticeably dark skin. Judd felt like that should mean something to him but he couldn't recall what.

One of the men, a friendly faced fellow with unusually long hair, stood up and smiled. 'Yes, officer. It's been quite a wait but we're all perfectly safe

now. What's been happening?'

Judd shook his head sadly. 'Agitators and dissidents, they attacked some of my colleagues. Apparently they were carrying rifles and petrol bombs. A lot of them refused to surrender. My sergeant says they turned the guns on themselves, rather than be arrested and face justice.'

'That sounds terrible,' the man replied. 'I hope you weren't involved.'

'No, no,' the constable said, grateful for the concern. 'I only came on duty at two. I haven't been down to Trafalgar Square, it's still being cleaned up. Give it a few hours and you'd never know the sorry incident took place.'

Judd noticed one of the women seemed quite upset about what he was saying. Her pretty, heart-shaped face was turning sour and her hands kept clenching and unclenching. The man with long hair also noticed this and approached Judd, leading him to one side.

'You'll have to excuse my friend. Her brother is a policeman and she's been quite worried about him.'

'Don't you worry, sir,' Judd replied happily. 'Only a few of my fellow officers were hurt. I'm sure her brother is fine.'

'I knew we could depend on our boys in blue.'

'Thank you, sir.' The constable turned to the waitress. 'I think you better get a bucket and some hot water to clean that off. That can be very hard to shift, you know.' She nodded numbly and went in search of her cleaning equipment, mumbling to herself.

The other man stepped forward, a hand-rolled cigarette hanging from his lips. 'Is it safe for us to leave now?' he asked. 'Can we go outside?'

'Yes, sir,' Judd replied. 'But the area around Trafalgar Square is still closed and may be for several hours. I suggest you head towards Covent Garden or the Aldwych. That would be much safer. Well, good day to you all.'

The constable walked out of the café and stood outside, looking up and down the street. This seemed to be the only business that needed to be reopened. All the rest stood empty. Judd tried not to watch as the waitress began scrubbing at the blood smear. The five other people from the café were just coming out on to the street when Judd realised something was nagging at him. He knew if he didn't do something, it would bother him for the rest of his shift. The constable approached the quintet and spoke to the long-haired man.

'Something's bothering me, sir. Have we met before? Your face looks awfully familiar.'

‘No, I can honestly say we’ve never met before,’ the man replied.

One of the women stepped forward to join the conversation. She had a Scottish accent, Judd noticed. ‘We were just saying before, weren’t we, how our friend here has such a familiar face. He reminds you of someone famous but you just can’t recall who.’ The others hastily nodded in agreement. The policeman scratched behind his ear thoughtfully.

‘It’ll come to me, I know it will,’ he said.

‘I hate it when that happens,’ the Scottish woman added. ‘The harder you try to remember something, the further away it seems.’

‘Yes, miss.’ The policeman looked at the dark-skinned woman again. She was obviously with the other four – their servant perhaps? It doesn’t matter, Judd told himself. He stood aside to let them past. ‘Well, I won’t detain you any longer. You can go about your business.’

‘Thank you, officer,’ the long-haired man said. Just as he was passing, the constable realised where he had seen the man before. Judd grabbed him by the arm. ‘I’ve got it!’ he shouted. ‘You’re off the telly – one of those actors?’

‘Yes, that’s it,’ the Doctor said. ‘I’m always pretending to be someone.’

‘You’re very good!’ the constable enthused.

‘That’s very kind of you to say so. Well, we must be going. . .’

The policeman let go of the man’s arm. ‘Of course! Well, if I don’t see you again soon, I’m sure I’ll see you on the telly.’

The man smiled thinly. ‘I’m sure you will. Goodbye.’

‘Goodbye!’

The Doctor strode briskly away from the café, followed by the others. ‘Let’s get out of here – the sooner, the better,’ he urged.

‘Agreed. There’s a safe house near Fenchurch Street station,’ Frank replied. ‘We should split into smaller groups, we’ll attract less attention. Hannah, you come with me, we’ll go along the Embankment. Dee, you take the Doctor and Anji round the back streets by Temple and Cheapside. Let’s go!’

The five walked a little faster, ready to start running should the policeman call out. Behind them, the waitress was still scrubbing at the glass frontage of the café. A trickle of blood and water ran across the footpath and into the gutter, before disappearing into a storm water drain.

The professor and his team were no closer to solving the mysteries of the blue box. Sutton sat down on a stool by one of the laboratory benches. He

noticed the silver tube and decided to have a better look at it. They had been given the curious item for a reason. Perhaps it would help them with their other enigma?

It took him a few minutes of experimentation to discover the tube's usage. When an indentation on the side of the tube was touched with the right pressure, a sliver of shimmering black light extended outwards a few inches from one end. The professor peered at it.

'Some sort of torch?' He waved it around the room. The end of the light touched the side of a laboratory bench and sliced clean through it. That brought a collective gasp from the team members. Sutton dropped the tube in shock, the black light disappearing as soon as he removed his finger from the indentation. The tube bounced on the floor and rolled under a bench. The professor examined the smoking cut while one of his assistants retrieved the tube.

'It's as if the light were a hot knife that passed through the wood! Some sort of cutting device.' Sutton gingerly took the tube from the nervous assistant and reactivated it, this time taking more care. The professor tested it on a variety of solid objects – metal, stone, concrete and wood. The cutting beam sliced through them with ease. 'I've never seen anything like this before! We could just study this for the rest of our lives, unlocking its secrets. I wonder where it came from. . .'

Sutton saw the tall blue box stood in the corner of the laboratory and remembered what he was meant to be doing. 'First things first!' The professor advanced on the mysterious box, the cutting device extended in front of him.

Inside the TARDIS, machinery screamed as the unearthly object cut into the exterior of the tall blue box. The cry of pain was shrill and inhuman. . .

The Doctor, Anji and Dee were just passing St Bride's Church near Fleet Street when the Doctor cried out. He clutched at his head, face contorted in agony.

'Doctor! What's wrong?' Anji stood by helplessly as he staggered and then fell to the footpath, still clawing at his face. 'Doctor!'

Dee and Anji crouched beside him. The Doctor was having spasms, his body twitching in pain for several seconds before relaxing. Moments later the process would start again, sending him into convulsions.

'What do we do?' Dee asked. 'We can't leave him here.'

‘And we certainly can’t carry him, not if he keeps thrashing about,’ Anji said. She tried to rest a soothing hand on his head but the Doctor beat it away.

His spasms kept recurring for several minutes before finally subsiding. When they had passed, Dee and Anji helped him to the wall of a building where he could lean against the stone and get his breath back.

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t frighten you, did I?’ the Doctor asked.

Anji rolled her eyes. ‘You nearly scared the life out of us! What happened? What’s wrong?’

‘It’s the TARDIS. I could hear it screaming in my mind.’

Dee was perplexed. ‘The Tardis?’

‘It’s what we travel in,’ the Doctor said helpfully.

‘What you travel in?’

‘Yes.’

‘And it was screaming in your mind, you say?’

The Doctor smiled weakly. ‘Yes, that’s it!’

Dee shook her head, worry and confusion on her face. ‘No, sorry, you’ve lost me again.’

‘I’d offer to explain,’ Anji began, ‘but I’m not sure it would do any good.’

‘Right. I see,’ Dee said. ‘No, I don’t.’

The Doctor clambered to his feet. ‘Dee, why don’t you go on and check the route ahead? We’ll have to cross a major road or two soon and I don’t want another close encounter with the police. Not yet, anyway.’

‘OK,’ Dee replied. ‘That I can do.’ She walked away towards Ludgate Circus, muttering and shaking her head. Anji waited until Dee was out of sight before questioning the Doctor.

‘What’s wrong with the TARDIS?’

‘I told you, it was screaming in my mind.’

‘Yes, but why?’

‘Someone was hurting it,’ the Doctor said. ‘They were trying to cut it, slice it open. The TARDIS was crying out in agony.’

‘Like a distress call?’

‘More a cry for help. There was something else...’

‘What?’ Anji asked.

‘It wasn’t just the TARDIS, I could feel another voice intermingled with it.’

‘Whose voice? Fitz’s?’

‘No, it sounded like a woman.’

‘Did you recognise her?’

‘Yes. No.’ The Doctor sighed. ‘I don’t know. She seemed familiar and yet different, both at the same time.’

‘Doctor, you’re talking in riddles.’

‘Sorry I can’t help being enigmatic.’

‘Trust me, it’s not enigmatic. It just means you don’t know the answer and don’t like to admit it,’ Anji commented. ‘After all we’ve been through, I know a little about how your mind works.’

Dee returned from her scouting mission. ‘OK, it’s clear ahead but we need to get a move on. We haven’t got long to reach the safe house, let alone get ready for our visit to the Tower.’

Anji nodded. ‘Doctor, how are you feeling? Can you go on?’

‘Yes.’

‘OK then, let’s –’

‘But I’m not going with you,’ he said.

‘What?’ Anji was bewildered. ‘Why not?’

‘This is where your paths must diverge,’ the Doctor replied.

‘Look, you’ve already told us you think it’s a trap,’ Dee said impatiently. ‘But that doesn’t mean we have to get caught in it.’

‘There’s more to it than that,’ he said. ‘A prickling sensation at the back of my mind. Almost as if I can sense...’

‘What?’ Dee demanded.

‘There is something else I must do.’ The Doctor’s face was cold and hard. He looked at Anji intently. ‘Alone.’

Dee was having none of this. ‘You’ve been acting strange since you turned up. You asked us to trust you. You tell us we’re walking into a trap. But when it comes right down to it, you decide to walk away. What’s going on?’

‘Come with us,’ Anji urged.

‘No,’ the Doctor replied firmly.

‘What about Fitz? Are you just going to abandon him? Don’t you even care what happens to him?’

‘Of course I care.’

‘Then prove it!’ Anji said vehemently. ‘Come and help us save him!’

‘I can’t.’

‘Why not? Give me one good reason.’

‘There is something else I must do, something I must face on my own. I dare not go with you to the Tower.’

‘That’s not good enough,’ Anji said.

‘It’ll have to be.’

‘No, it’s not good enough, Doctor,’ she replied. ‘You know what I think it is? I think you’ve given up on me and Fitz. You’ve been trying to drive me away since we got to London. Hell, you’ve been pushing me away since we first arrived in Edinburgh. You couldn’t wait for me to leave you and Fitz. Now he’s awaiting execution and you’re happy to leave him to die!’ Anji stared at him, a dawning realisation spreading across her face. ‘You’re planning to leave us both behind, aren’t you?’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘You couldn’t be more wrong.’

‘Really? Well, it sounds like the truth to me – even if you don’t want to admit it!’ Anji said, her suspicion turning into anger.

‘I have to recover the TARDIS –’ he began.

‘I bet you do! How else are you going to make your getaway?’

‘No, that’s not it. I have to get the TARDIS back before its secrets fall into the wrong hands. Don’t you see that?’

‘How very convenient! When the going gets tough, the Doctor goes missing. Running away again, just like you did before!’

‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

‘When we first met, you said you’d had some sort of accident, a trauma. You lost your memory, couldn’t recall what had happened.’

‘That’s right, I can’t –’

‘Maybe you don’t want to remember. Maybe it’s just another way of running away from the truth, from whatever you’ve done. It must be something pretty horrible to make you forget your entire life!’

‘I don’t know,’ the Doctor whispered. ‘I can’t remember.’

‘You know what this sounds like to me?’ Anji asked, her anger getting the better of her. ‘Betrayal!’

The Doctor’s eyes narrowed. ‘And you’d know all about that, wouldn’t you, Anji Kapoor?’

Dee shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another. ‘Er, I don’t think this is the time or place to have this –’

‘Shut up!’ Anji snarled. She turned back to the Doctor. ‘What did you say?’

‘Betrayal. I think you know what I’m talking about,’ he replied coldly.

She shook her head in disbelief. ‘I can’t believe you’re bringing that up now. Now, when we should be working together to save Fitz!’

‘That didn’t seem to be your priority on Hope, did it?’ the Doctor asked.

Anji's face hardened. 'I should have known. I should have known that one day you'd throw that back in my face!' Dee was perplexed. 'What happened on Hope?'

'She betrayed me and Fitz, just to satisfy her own selfish desires. That's all you need to know,' the Doctor replied.

'I said I was sorry for what happened.'

'I've always thought sorry ought to be a four letter word.'

'I thought you'd forgiven me,' Anji said, getting progressively angrier. 'I should have known better.'

'Yes, you should,' the Doctor agreed.

'You can't forget what I did on Hope, but you can't remember what you did that made you forget everything,' Anji said accusingly.

'That was different.'

'You're so fond of talking about consequences and responsibility, yet you can't wait to run off after your precious TARDIS.'

'You're wrong, Anji. . .'

'What sort of man are you, Doctor? Abandoning your friends, turning them against you, pushing them away. Why? Why are you doing this?'

'You couldn't be more wrong.'

Anji snorted in derision. 'Well, I guess this is all about priorities, isn't it? You've got yours and I've got mine. I've always been very good at prioritising – how about you? Are you sure you know what you really want, Doctor?'

'Anji, please – you don't understand. . .'

'I understand perfectly well! You talk about betrayal – well, at least you practice what you preach.' She turned and began walking away. 'Goodbye, Doctor. I hope you find whatever it is you're looking for.'

Dee stood between the two of them, watching Anji stride away. She glanced back at the Doctor. 'I'm sorry, I've got to go with her.'

He just nodded numbly. 'Good luck. Look after Anji.'

'I will. Goodbye!' Dee ran off. In less than a minute she was out of sight, leaving the Doctor alone. He began walking back towards the Strand.

Rameau ran into the Oracle's room. The child was screaming for him. The adjutant bowed and began apologising.

'I'm sorry, O Harbinger. The Star Chamber demanded my presence. The resistance plans to attack the Tower of London tonight and –'

'Silence!'

Rameau winced, the single word echoing around his mind like a shout.

‘The artefact is screaming now, I can hear its cry.’

The adjutant listened but could hear no sound. The child laughed.

‘The Elemental hears it too. He will come for the artefact. He is already on his way. Have the toy brought to me here. I want to play with it one last time – before the end.’

‘The end?’ The adjutant listened, fear and excitement catching his breath. ‘Then it will soon be time?’

The child nodded, its tiny fingers flexing. ‘Yes. Time enough is enough. The pieces are nearly in place. You know what to do next?’

Rameau smiled. ‘He will be brought here as soon as he arrives.’

Anji didn’t say anything while she and Dee walked to the safe house in Fenchurch Street. The streets she had known so well while working in the City were now so different as to be almost unrecognisable to her, but she hardly noticed. She was too busy replaying the acrimonious conversation with the Doctor over and over again in her mind. She felt purged of an anger that had been building up inside her for hours, even days. But she also knew she’d gone too far, said too much. She should go back and find the Doctor, apologise for the worst of it. But her anger kept pushing her forwards. She would just have to hope they saw each other again soon.

The two women reached the safe house just after five o’clock. Frank and Hannah had already arrived. Only a handful of other resistance members were present. The rest were out setting up the diversion. A fierce glare from Anji silenced any comments about her ethnic origins before they could be made. Dee briefly explained about the argument and the Doctor’s suspicion that the Tower was a trap. Hannah dismissed the notion out of hand, but Frank was not so sure.

‘How do we know it isn’t a trap? How do we know that one of us isn’t a traitor?’ he asked.

‘We don’t,’ Anji replied. ‘But we can’t wait any longer to take on the Tower. It’s now or never. The shroud will be moved out within forty-eight hours and Fitz will be dead by morning.’

Dee agreed. ‘The bulk of the security forces in London have been busy smashing the demonstration at Trafalgar Square. There will only be a limited force on duty at the Tower. We’ll never get a better chance.’

‘For what it’s worth, I think we should do it,’ Hannah urged. ‘But I’m new here, so you will have to make the decision.’

Frank nodded. ‘All right, we go. Dee?’

‘Bill is waiting for our signal. I’m to turn up at the delivery entrance, pretending to be his angry girlfriend. Security is weakest in the kitchens. Once inside, we can gain access to the other buildings. The rest is up to us.’

Anji had a question. ‘Do we have any idea where Fitz is being held? Or where the shroud might be? The Tower of London is surprisingly big.’

Frank produced a rough map of the structure. ‘This was drawn in the nineteenth century, but hopefully most of it is still accurate.’ He rolled it out over a tabletop. Hannah, Dee and Anji gathered round, along with the other resistance members present. ‘What little information we have suggests all prisoners are held in the White Tower – that’s the tall structure in the central area. We think the shroud may be in the Jewel House adjoining the White Tower, where the Crown Jewels used to be stored.’

‘How many men will be in the Tower grounds?’ Hannah asked.

‘Unknown. Not less than twenty, hopefully not more than fifty.’

‘And how many people have we got to go in?’

‘Everyone here,’ Frank said.

‘A dozen,’ Anji said. ‘A dozen of us against perhaps fifty of them. Those aren’t the best odds I’ve ever heard.’

‘The diversion should draw many of them out, giving us a better chance,’ Dee pointed out. ‘But once we get inside, we can’t hang around. We’ve got the element of surprise on our side, but that will only last so long. We get in, we find the shroud –’

‘And Fitz,’ Anji interjected.

‘– and we get out again. Fast.’

‘Any questions?’ Frank asked.

‘Weapons?’ Hannah looked round the rest of the group. ‘I don’t know about you, but I’m not going in there empty-handed.’

Frank pulled out a trunk from under the table and opened the lid. Inside were more than a dozen machine guns and rifles. ‘We’ve been collecting these for months. We haven’t got much ammunition, so use it wisely.’

‘But we have got this,’ Dee announced proudly. She pulled back a curtain to reveal a cupboard laden with glass bottles. Each was half filled with a clear liquid and a rag had been stuffed into the top of the bottle, sealing it.

‘Molotov cocktails,’ Anji said.

‘Molo-who?’ Dee asked.

‘It doesn’t matter.’

Frank rolled the map back up as everyone began helping themselves to weapons. ‘We’ve got just under an hour before the diversion, so get yourselves ready. Dark clothes are best and don’t take anything that can identify you or link you to this place. I doubt we’ll all make it back alive, so if you want to leave a message for any loved ones, now’s the time to write it. We go in twenty minutes.’

‘What’s the diversion going to be?’ Hannah asked.

Dee smiled. ‘Very loud and very explosive.’

The Doctor paused in Trafalgar Square. The screams of the TARDIS had stopped some time ago and he had been walking toward their echo. But the memory of those cries was too distant now. He would have to wait for the screaming to recur, before he could re-orientate himself.

On the roof of the National Gallery, two men in overalls were disassembling a television camera. A squadron of men with brooms were strung out in a line across Trafalgar Square, sweeping the wet paving slabs. Ahead of them two street-cleaning trucks were washing the square clean. All were too intent on their tasks to notice the new arrival.

The Doctor looked down and noticed a steady trickle of water and detergent mixing with blood on the footpath, running past his shoes. Something terrible had happened here, an atrocity. He was about to investigate further when another distress cry from the TARDIS stabbed into his thoughts. This time the sound was more a sob than a scream. It was coming from within Whitehall.

The Doctor walked away, towards the pain in his mind.

‘Boss, there’s a bloke here says we’ve got his property. What do you want me to do?’ The policeman at the gate was talking into a telephone. His right hand was placed firmly on the Doctor’s arm, making sure the strange visitor did not leave. Behind the policeman a ramp descended into the bowels of Whitehall.

‘He’s a funny looking bloke, dressed up like he’s going to a costume party. Says we’ve got a box of his.’

‘It looks like a police telephone box,’ the Doctor offered helpfully.

‘Looks like a police telephone box, he says.’ The policeman listened to a spiel of invective from his superior before turning back to the new arrival. ‘What’s your name then?’

‘The Doctor. Everyone just calls me the Doctor.’

‘Says his name’s the Doctor.’ A pause. ‘Yeah, just like the terrorist.’ Another pause. ‘What do you mean, have I seen what the terrorist looks like? Course I have, I’ve got that drawing of him right here. . .’

The policeman let go of the Doctor to retrieve a small square of paper from a pocket. He unfolded the page to reveal the artist’s impression of the Doctor. The policeman glanced at it, looked up at the Doctor, then glanced back down at the drawing with dawning realisation.

‘It’s not a very good likeness,’ the Doctor said helpfully.

‘Blimey! It’s him! It’s him! It’s the Doctor – I’ve got him right here!’ The policeman threw the drawing aside and scrabbled for his revolver. He aimed it at the Doctor, his hands shaking so much the barrel was waving in the air. ‘Send someone quick, before he gets away! I’ve got him!’

‘Congratulations,’ the Doctor said. ‘Now, can I have my property back?’

‘If you’re coming to rescue me, Doctor, you better hurry,’ Fitz mumbled to himself. He was staring at the sliver of sky visible beyond his cell. Dusk was closing in and soon it would be night.

‘What was that?’ Alan asked from the next cell, his voice just audible through the thick stone walls. Fitz walked back to his bench so they could communicate more easily.

‘My friends, the ones I was telling you about?’

‘The Doctor and Anji?’

‘Our captor told me they’re in London. They’re probably coming for me.’

‘Is that wise?’

‘No, but they’re my friends. We look out for each other. That’s what we do.’ Fitz leaned against the wall, his knees drawn up to his chest. ‘It seems like forever since I saw them last. I know it’s only been three days but. . .’

‘Time does funny things,’ Alan said. ‘I’ve been a prisoner for almost three-quarters of my life, but I can still remember moments from my youth like they were yesterday. The smell of the newly mown grass outside my rooms at Cambridge. The look of shame on my mother’s face at the trial. . .’

‘Trial? What were you charged with?’

‘Immoral practices and sedition.’ Alan gave a hollow laugh. ‘There was a student called Robert, he couldn’t have been much younger than me, perhaps twenty-one. We were friends, at least I thought we were. Just after I finished my paper on computable numbers, he visited me in my rooms. He seemed nervous about something. I remember he put a record on the gramophone, he said it was so others couldn’t hear us. He started taking his shirt off. . .

‘Suddenly, three policemen broke into my rooms. They claimed to have been told about my “activities”, that I was a notorious corrupter of young men. They arrested me and took Robert in for questioning. I remember he kept apologising as we were being dragged through the college, I couldn’t understand why. I only realised what had happened later.’

‘He betrayed you,’ Fitz said softly.

‘Yes. We were friends, but never lovers. Someone put pressure on him to arrange the incident so I could be arrested. While I was being questioned, the authorities “found” a box of documents in my rooms. Apparently I was planning to assassinate the King and used my “unnatural” tendencies to recruit young impressionable men to my cause. My membership of the Anti-War Council was used as proof of my anti-Empire urges.

‘The trial was more like a circus. Many people came forward to protest my innocence, but they were shouted down and discredited. The proof against me was overwhelming. Robert spoke in court, but he could not even look me in the eye. Halfway through his evidence, he asked for a break. He went to the roof of the building and threw himself off. It was a tragedy, he was so gifted. . .’

‘You were found guilty?’ Fitz asked.

‘Sentenced to death, but that was commuted to life imprisonment – I don’t know why. So here I am, a lifetime later. I can’t deny who I love. The feelings of your heart shouldn’t be a crime.’

It was dark outside now. Fitz wished the Doctor could hear Alan’s story. Somewhere in the old man’s reminisces was a clue to a larger puzzle. But what that clue meant was beyond Fitz.

The sounds of approaching guards brought the two prisoners back to the present. Here we go again, Fitz thought to himself. He could happily live without another beating for quite some time.

But the guards stopped outside Alan’s cell. The bolts were drawn back and the door opened, surprising the old man. Fitz could hear Alan’s protests through the wall. ‘What do you want?’

‘Time to leave, old man! We’re taking you to see someone.’ The voice was unfamiliar. It must be one of the guards, Fitz decided.

‘Where are you taking him?’ he shouted. But the guards ignored him.

‘Goodbye, Fitz,’ Alan shouted. ‘Good luck!’

‘To us all!’ Fitz replied, but the guards were already dragging Alan away. Fitz was alone again, with just his thoughts to keep him company. All the strains of the last four days were catching up with him. He stretched out on the bench and closed his eyes. I’ll just doze for a few minutes, Fitz told himself. . .

Dee and Anji volunteered to lead the resistance fighters into the Tower, with Frank and Hannah at the back of the group. They changed into navy-blue trousers, tops and black boots. Anji was relieved to have shed the vicelike underwear she had been wearing since Friday and got into something more comfortable. She decided against taking a weapon. There would be enough bullets flying without her adding to all the death in the air. Besides, if she wasn’t carrying a gun, she hoped it was less likely she’d be shot on the spot.

Now they were approaching the Tower of London, Anji was regretting her decision. It was all very well being noble, but that didn’t protect you from random gunfire. But it was too late to change her mind now. Dusk was closing in around them and there was no time to go back to the safe house.

Anji and Dee led the resistance members towards the western side of the Tower. ‘There’re two entrances – through Middle Tower on this side, near the Thames,’ Dee whispered, ‘and the postern gate on the north side. We’ll go through Middle Tower.’ The group was just about to emerge from cover and approach the gateway when the wooden doors ahead of them swung back. ‘Everybody – down!’ Dee hissed.

A dozen men in the dark, forbidding uniforms of the security forces marched out of Middle Tower and took up positions, six on each side of the pathway. ‘The Doctor was right! Someone has betrayed us,’ Dee cursed. ‘They’re reinforcing defences around the gates – they’re expecting us!’

‘No, wait,’ Anji said. She pointed through the gates. An armoured vehicle was lumbering forwards, out of the Tower. As it cleared the gateway, the twelve guards fell in step around the truck – four each at the front and rear, with two each on either side. They ran along beside the vehicle as it rolled forwards, away from the Tower. The turret of a small cannon swung from side to side atop the vehicle. Behind them the wooden gates swung closed

again.

The resistance team watched from the shadows as the armoured vehicle and its escort passed, making slow progress as it rolled towards Westminster. 'That's a stroke of luck,' Dee said. 'If those guards were drawn from the complement inside the Tower, we'll have fewer men to fight.'

'What's so important it needs an armoured truck and a twelve-man escort to guard its progress?' Anji asked.

That troubled Dee. 'The shroud?'

'Or one of the prisoners from the Tower.'

Dee shrugged. 'Nothing we can do about it. We've got to stick to the plan, it's too late to change now.' A nearby clock began chiming. 'It's quarter to six – the diversion begins in fifteen minutes.'

The Doctor had almost fainted twice as he was shuffled around the many holding areas and offices of the underground complex. The waves of dizziness were coming every few minutes now, accompanied by churning nausea. 'I must be very close,' he muttered.

'Silence!' an armed guard commanded, his machine gun aimed at the Doctor's head. 'Nobody told you to speak!'

The Doctor was about to engage the guard in conversation but decided better. The man looked twitchy and nervous enough.

Eventually the Doctor was escorted to a small antechamber. Two ornately carved doors emblazoned with Masonic symbols and a pentagram stood in front of him. The armed guard rammed the barrel of his machine gun into the Doctor's back, propelling him forwards.

'In you go! They're waiting for you!'

'Who's waiting for me?'

The guard smiled cruelly. 'You'll see.'

The Doctor pulled the lapels of his frock coat downwards, straightening out the fabric. He brushed a curl of hair back from his forehead and walked forwards, pushing the heavy doors open before him.

'So, you're the terrorist we've been hearing about. The man who's created so much trouble since appearing in Edinburgh. You're the Doctor.' The Pentarch glared down at the lone man standing in the centre of the room.

'And you five must be the Star Chamber; the Doctor replied. 'I can't say I've heard so much about you, but what little I have has been all bad.'

‘You surprise me,’ the Pentarch snapped back. ‘Our own security forces would be terrified to stand here before us, yet you arrive at our door as if collecting a misplaced umbrella. What gives you the right to be so arrogant?’

‘What gives you the right to turn the world into your private plaything?’ the Doctor asked. ‘Suppressing the truth, butchering those who dare question your authority, meddling with the development of humanity. What gives you the right to do all of that?’

‘We are the Star Chamber.’ The Doctor swivelled round to see who was addressing him. The obese, blubbery Bridges was sneering at him from one of the raised platforms. ‘For centuries the five men in these chairs have guided the affairs of the Empire, helping to preserve proper values.’

‘And what might these precious values be?’

‘Decency, respect, a place for everything and everyone in their place.’

‘Even if that place is being murdered in a massacre less than a mile from this room? How can you sit there and condone such an atrocity?’

‘Condone it? We ordered it.’ This time the speaker was Arnold. He stared down his nose at the Doctor. ‘You seem to think we should be ashamed of that. We take pride in it!’

‘What has your pride achieved? You have stood in the way of progress and development, denying mankind the chance to evolve, to change –’

‘No, Doctor! We have protected humanity from change! We have protected the Empire from people like you, fools who would tear it all down in the name of progress. We are proud of what we have done, what we have achieved.’

The Pentarch held up a hand to silence his fellow members. ‘Gentlemen, let us not turn this into a shouting match. Doctor, you perceive us as criminals, even butchers. But, all those with power must be ruthless in the way they use it.’

‘Use it – or abuse it? What good have you done, besides what is good for yourselves? What benefits has your regime brought?’ the Doctor demanded.

‘We have held back the advances of science to protect mankind from the consequences of progress. Several times our intervention has stopped scientists and inventors creating weapons of mass destruction. Are you telling me the world would be a better place if it possessed the ability to destroy itself a dozen times over? A hundred times over?’

It was just after six when the ground shook. Three mighty explosions rent the

air, flashes of light and colour illuminating the darkening skyline. In less than a minute the wooden gates below Middle Tower opened and nearly twenty men spilled outside. They ran as one towards the scene of the explosions, still visible from the plumes of black smoke and flames reaching up into the sky.

‘They’re taking the bait!’ Dee said excitedly.

‘Where were the bombs?’ Anji asked, sickened by the woman’s blatant enjoyment of the spectacle.

‘Fenchurch Street Station and surrounding buildings. We’ve seeded the area with incendiary devices. They’ll be going off for hours yet.’ Another fireball rose into the air, followed quickly by the distant thump of its explosion. ‘Now’s our chance to get inside.’

Anji watched as Dee marched up to the small door set within the large wooden gates. Within moments the door swung open and Dee stepped inside. Soon after she opened one side of the gate and beckoned the others forwards.

Anji was first inside and found a guard slumped on the ground, blood oozing from a gaping head wound. ‘He won’t be trying to get the better of me again,’ Dee commented. ‘Ever.’

The insurgents ran across a cobbled pathway to a wooden portcullis. A swarthy young man appeared on the other side, dressed in the white garb of a cook. He turned a wheel set into the wall, raising the portcullis just off the ground. ‘Roll under!’ he hissed. The raiding party followed his instructions, one by one dropping to the ground and scuttling through, below the fearsome spikes underneath the portcullis. Anji stood up again on the other side and watched the others roll beneath.

‘You haven’t got long,’ the cook said. ‘The fire brigade will soon respond to the bombings and the security forces will return here.’

Frank and Hannah were the last two through. Once they were inside, the cook lowered the portcullis again. The others ran on but Anji stayed behind. ‘You’re Bill?’ she asked.

He nodded. ‘Aren’t you going in with the others?’

‘I’m looking for a man, he’s being held prisoner here.’

‘You’ve just missed him. Orders from Whitehall, top priority – they even sent an armoured truck to transport him in,’ Bill said.

Anji’s heart sank. To have come so far and missed Fitz by just a few minutes... ‘How was he? Is he still OK?’ she asked.

‘Same as he’s always been. He’s pretty old, of course –’

‘Who are you talking about? The man I’m looking for is in his thirties.’

‘Oh, him! I thought you meant the old guy. He’s been here longer than any of the guards. They called him the Ghost, he was so old,’ Bill said. ‘I don’t know what he did to be locked up for so long, but it must have been –’

‘Alan! Was his name Alan?’

‘Yeah, I think so. . .’

‘So the Doctor was right,’ Anji mused.

‘What are you on about?’ Bill was scratching his head. in bemusement. The sound of the first petrol bomb exploding inside the grounds snapped Anji back to her surroundings. Two more explosions followed the first and then machine-gun fire joined the din.

‘It’s begun,’ Anji said. ‘You better get to cover, but before you go – where are the other prisoners kept? I have to find Fitz and fast!’

‘Fitz? He’s the only prisoner left now the Ghost has gone. He’s in a cell there, two floors up,’ Bill said, pointing at the central building, the White Tower.

Fitz was dreaming. He was driving a clapped out Triumph Herald across London and the exhaust kept backfiring. With each bang, Fitz felt himself sinking lower in the driver’s seat, trying to hide his embarrassment from the startled faces of people on the footpath and other motorists. Finally, with one almighty explosion of sound and smoke, the car’s engine resigned in protest. Fitz glided the vehicle to the side of the road and stopped, pulling on the handbrake. There was nothing but silence, until another backfire shattered the illusion.

He woke up, quite bewildered. How could a car keep backfiring when its engine wasn’t even running? Another loud bang answered his question. The noises were coming from elsewhere in the Tower. The staccato rattle of machine guns removed all doubt. The Tower was under attack.

Fitz jumped from his bench and ran to beneath the window. He bounced up and down on the spot, but could not see any more than sky outside. The smell of burning and cordite in the air was unmistakable, however. There was trouble outside and he felt the Doctor and Anji were probably involved.

Shouting voices echoed along the corridor outside Fitz’s cell. It was Hastings, an edge of panic and disbelief in his voice. ‘Get more men and get out there. This is the Tower of London! It will not be taken by some rabble!’

‘But sir – most of the men are away on escort duty or investigating the explosions,’ a guard protested.

‘I don’t care! Do your job or I will shoot you myself!’ Hastings promised.

‘Yes, sir!’ The guard ran past Fitz’s cell, accompanied by three others. Fitz smiled. The Doctor and Anji were definitely involved. Who else would even imagine launching an attack on the Tower of London?

The bolts were drawn back from Fitz’s cell and the door swung open. Hastings was standing outside, a revolver in his hand. ‘You and your friends are proving to be most troublesome, Mr Kreiner.’

‘I did warn you.’

‘So you did. But if your comrades-in-arms think they’ve got the better of me, they’re wrong.’ He gestured at Fitz to shift into the centre of the cell. ‘Move!’

‘I keep telling you, I’m not a terrorist,’ Fitz said calmly. Hastings was obviously bewildered and twitchy. He was certainly capable of executing Fitz on the spot, if he saw fit. Best not to make any sudden movements – yet.

‘No, no, of course you’re not a terrorist! You just happen to know people willing to launch an attack upon this building!’

‘Well, that’s what friends are for,’ Fitz replied placidly. ‘Of course, you’d know that if you had any –’

‘Shut up! Shut up or I won’t be responsible for my actions!’ Hastings spat.

‘How many people have you killed, Hastings? How many lives have you ended?’ Fitz said, slowly raising the volume of his voice. ‘I don’t mean arranging for a suspect to accidentally fall down a flight of stairs in custody, or having them shot while trying to escape. It’s easy to get someone else to do your dirty work, isn’t it? Easier than doing it yourself. That way you can believe you’re not responsible, that so-called terrorist scum like me aren’t really human and so our deaths don’t really count!’ He was shouting now, bellowing at the top of his voice. ‘Well, I am real, I am human and my life counts for something!’

Hastings was about to reply when a rifle butt cracked into the back of his head. He slumped to the stone floor in a daze, the revolver spilling from his grasp. A young woman clad in dark blue stepped over him and into the cell, picking up the handgun as she entered. ‘Nice speech,’ she said, pocketing the revolver. ‘You must be Fitz. Anji never told me you were so eloquent.’

‘I’m not usually,’ Fitz admitted sheepishly. ‘I was just trying to distract him while you crept up behind. Who are you? Where’s Anji?’

Anji raced up a stone staircase. The rattle of a machine gun echoed around the walls, and the stench of burning petrol and scorched flesh assaulted her nostrils. Dee was enjoying herself, Anji thought with a shudder.

She emerged on to a landing. A familiar voice was shouting. 'Well, I am real, I am human and my life counts for something!' It was Fitz. She ran along a corridor towards the voice. A sickening thud of metal against flesh and bone guided her closer. Anji turned a corner to see Hannah entering a room, stepping over the legs of a body on the floor.

Low voices spoke as Anji ran down the corridor, skidding to a halt by the open door of the cell. Inside a startled Hannah swung round, ready to fire her rifle. 'Don't! It's me!' Anji cried out.

Hannah relaxed and stepped aside to reveal Fitz. His face was a mess of bruises, his skin mottled with yellow and purple and black. His split lip was still swollen and his forehead showed fresh cuts and bleeding. His shoulders sagged as he saw Anji, relief cracking his face into a grateful smile.

'What took you so long?' Fitz said.

The Doctor slowly revolved on the spot, fixing his eyes on each member of the Star Chamber as he turned. 'You say all this, all that you have done is for some greater good,' the Doctor said. 'But what about the price of your tyranny?'

'What tyranny?' the Pentarch asked. 'This is the British Empire, not some banana republic! Britannia rules eternal!'

'Britannia rules eternal!' echoed the four other members.

The Doctor shook his head. 'Britannia still rules the waves, is that it? Or does Britannia waive the rules to suit itself? This is not about helping mankind, this is about helping yourselves. You might believe this talk of a Golden Age and maintaining a proper, decent society. But your cosy little worldview can't deny the fact that everything you do, every life you twist, every chance for change you suppress – it's all about power, about maintaining control. As if you are the only arbiters of what is right and wrong!'

'You speak passionately, Doctor, but your words are hollow,' the Pentarch replied. 'We have heard such speeches before. Those who made them are history.'

'Murdered, you mean.'

The Pentarch sighed. 'Silenced. For the greater good.'

The Doctor laughed bitterly. 'Life without progress is a living death. Your glorious Empire is a sham and you know it. This whole façade is collapsing in upon itself and soon you will all be swept away.'

'You're wrong.'

'No, I'm right and that's what terrifies you! If this cosy little members only Empire was meant to be, why the need for propaganda? Why the need for suppression? If you truly believed your way was best, you would step aside and let others do what they want. If you are right, they would prove you so.'

The Pentarch shook his head. 'We are not prepared to take that risk.'

'How very convenient!' The Doctor threw his hands up into the air despairingly. 'You know best and nobody ever gets the chance to prove otherwise. I'm starting to think you actually believe this nonsense!'

The Pentarch stood up furiously. 'This is not nonsense, Doctor – this is the truth! You shall not contradict us!'

The Doctor smiled. 'Of course. What a fool I've been! You do believe it. You think all of this has just been about preserving some mythical, non-existent past where everyone was happy and decent and proper. I was wrong – you're just obedient dogs, jumping at the sound of your master's voice. All of this – it's all just a means to an end. You five, you're just puppets. But who's pulling your strings? And why?'

'Bravo!' Mocking applause echoed around the room. The members of the Star Chamber looked around themselves, searching for the source. A lone figure stepped out of the shadows, slowly clapping its hands together.

The Doctor stared at the figure.

'Sabbath.'

England, 1732

Saturday morning was a curious time to die, the drowning man thought to himself. Lead weights tugged at his shackled limbs, dragging him further down into the murky depths of the river. The lower he sank, the greater the forces tugging him along, sending his body tumbling over and over, turning slow somersaults in the water. Thirteen chains were bound with thirteen locks about him. A hood of sackcloth covered his face and shoulders, but holes had been cut in the rough fabric to let him see death as it approached.

Every initiation into the Service was unique, the drowning man knew, each specially devised to test the cunning and resilience of the inductee. His sharp mind and skills in occult engineering had marked him out as one with the ability to escape the impossible. So his ceremony had been made the most difficult of all. If he survived – and just how was a question his oxygen-starved brain continued to ponder with ever-increasing panic – he would be worthy of the Service. If he died, then his sponsors had been right to doubt him. Only those who could face an inevitable death and defeat it were fit for the highest of honours.

The drowning man stopped fighting against the current and let it take him where it chose. He needed what little strength he had left to concentrate on finding a way to escape this inescapable death. He closed his eyes and emptied his mind, thinking back over all the lore and legend he had ever heard about death by drowning.

It was said those who survived such an experience awoke with a new sense of purpose – but that was common to many who cheated death. But drowning was supposed to bring an especial clarity and calmness. You realise your death was inevitable and you let go of life. It was only then, when you had surrendered your mortal existence and abandoned the bodily cage of flesh and blood and bone that true insight could be found. Or so it was said.

He was jolted back to the moment by his feet brushing against the river bed. The drowning man opened his eyes and saw. . . It was dark, a glistening blackness that somehow shone in the murky blue-green of the water. Light

seemed to fall into it, tumbling down from above and being drawn up from the slime and silt below.

The drowning man blinked and saw the blackness shimmer towards him. Was this just a hallucination? The last vision of a dying brain, a final mystery to puzzle and beguile? Or was it death itself, manifest as some monstrous aquatic being? The particles of water before him swirled into ornate patterns, as if time itself were slowing to nothing. He no longer needed to breathe, no longer needed to know. He felt assured. Everything he had ever suspected was true.

He reached out – not with his hands, they were still bound at his sides – with his mind, inching forwards to touch the darkness, to become one with it, to embrace whatever eternity had to offer. They would become one and then...

In the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral, the men looked down at the Thames from an elongated platform reaching out over the river. Twelve minutes had passed since the initiate had been pushed into the water below. Air bubbles had burst the surface of the water for nearly a minute, but after that – nothing.

Agents had scoured the riverbank on both sides for a mile, downstream and up. But there was no trace of the twenty-one-year-old. He must have drowned, there could be no other solution. The men turned away without sadness. It happened. Some initiates, no matter how promising, were not able to pass the final ritual. Their deaths, however regrettable, kept the integrity and sanctity of the Service intact. There would be others and they would succeed where the dead man had failed. It had been thus for decades, even centuries, and it would always be thus...

Sunday, April 20, 2003

Anji gave Fitz a hug, making him wince in pain. 'Not too tight,' he gasped. 'I think I've been tortured enough, don't you?'

Anji smiled, just happy to see him again. 'You're probably right.'

Fitz affected a mocking self concern. 'They haven't destroyed my matinee idol good looks, have they?'

'Hardly likely, since you never had any.' Anji stepped back to look at him. 'Can you walk? We need to get out of here and fast.'

'I think so. Where's the Doctor?'

Anji bit her bottom lip. 'I don't know. We argued. The last time I saw him was near Fleet Street. He said the TARDIS was in pain and had to be rescued. I wanted to rescue you. We split up.'

'None too happily, from the sound of it.' Fitz smiled. 'I don't know, I leave you two on your own for a few days and you'd think the world was ending.'

'Someone's coming,' Hannah hissed. The sound of running footsteps could be heard, growing ever louder. She raised the rifle to her shoulder, ready to aim and fire. Hannah relaxed again when a woman appeared. 'It's Dee.'

'Who's this?' Dee asked, pointing at the unconscious man on the floor.

'I don't know,' Anji replied, before turning to Fitz. 'Friend of yours?'

Fitz grunted. 'He's no friend of anyone. That's Hastings – a sneaky bastard who works for the Security Service. He interrogated me in Edinburgh, tricked me into giving him descriptions of you and the Doctor. He runs this hellhole.'

'Good, maybe he knows where they keep the shroud.' Dee squatted down beside Hastings and rolled him over. She started slapping his face.

Fitz looked at Anji. 'Shroud?'

She shook her head. 'It's a long story, one we don't have time for.'

Hastings stirred and opened his eyes. They widened at seeing Dee crouched over him with a pistol aimed at his face, Hannah standing behind her. 'What are you doing here?'

'I ask the questions,' Dee replied. 'Where's the shroud?'

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

Nearby a man screamed in agony as another petrol bomb exploded. ‘Hear that? It’s your men dying,’ Dee said with relish. ‘Unless you want to join them, you’ll stop lying and start talking.’ She slapped him repeatedly. ‘Where is the shroud?’

‘I’ll show you,’ Hastings quickly replied. Dee stood back and allowed him to get up, all the while keeping her pistol aimed at his midriff. ‘It’s on the ground floor of this building.’

‘Adjutant! What are you doing here?’ the Pentarch demanded.

Sabbath glanced up at the leader of Star Chamber. ‘Silence. I did not give you leave to speak.’

‘What? How dare you! This is outrageous.’

Sabbath snapped his fingers. Seven massive apes lumbered out of the shadows. Each was clad in a dark jacket adorned with golden braid, a cruel mockery of a British naval uniform. Their faces betrayed a ravenous hunger as each of the beasts contemplated its surroundings, saliva hanging from their gaping mouths. Sabbath snapped his fingers again.

Five of the apes leapt into the air, each landing atop one of the platforms. The cabal members cried out in fear and terror, calling for their footmen – but nobody came. The slaving apes towered over the Star Chamber, who sank back into their chairs, cowering before the twitching fingers and fetid breath of the mighty beasts. The other two apes took positions on either side of the Doctor, grabbing his arms and holding him in place. ‘That’s better,’ Sabbath said. ‘You five men – hold your tongues or my crew will remove them for you.’

The impetuous, impatient Harris could not stop himself protesting. ‘Your crew? Adjutant, what is the meaning of this? I demand to know –’

Sabbath just nodded to the ape on Harris’s dais. The beast grabbed Harris by the throat and squeezed. Harris began choking, his mouth flapping open and shut, gasping for breath. With its other hand the ape prised open the terrified man’s mouth. The beast reached inside Harris’s mouth and, with a dainty tug, ripped the tongue out. A gout of blood emerged from Harris’s mouth, splashing down over his clothes. The ape held the tongue in front of Harris’s weeping eyes, dangling it in the air.

Satisfied with its work, the beast tossed the severed tongue on to the floor in the centre of the chamber. It released Harris, who collapsed backwards

into his chair, coughing up more blood. His trousers were stained with his own urine. In the other four chairs, the remaining members of the Star Chamber sat petrified, as if they had been turned into living statues.

Sabbath gazed round the room at the other men. 'Anybody else got something they have to say?' A pause. 'I thought not. Now be silent, all of you!'

'There was no need for that!' the Doctor protested.

'Just making a point. A little demonstration of where the true power lies.'

Hastings led Dee, Fitz, Anji and Hannah down a flight of stairs and along a dusty corridor to a corner of the White Tower. He gestured at a heavy wooden door. 'It's in there,' he said.

'Open it,' Dee demanded. 'We don't know what booby traps you've got hidden away in this place.'

Hastings smiled. 'There are no booby traps. We didn't believe you'd make it this far.' He began turning the heavy metal ring set into the door.

'What do you mean?' Anji asked. 'You were expecting us?'

'Of course,' he replied. 'The so-called resistance is riddled with double agents. We knew you were coming almost before you did. The diversion was a nice touch, drawing my men away. But you wouldn't have got past the first gate if the Star Chamber hadn't requisitioned my best troops to escort that old man.' Hastings pushed open the door.

Inside, the chamber was filled with dozens of wooden crates, all stamped TOP SECRET. Several had been prised open and wood shavings hung out of them. Shattered equipment was scattered on the floor.

'What's in there?' Fitz asked cautiously.

'All the prototypes and inventions that have been confiscated over the decades, plus the notes and drawings for their creation,' Hastings said. 'All impounded to ensure the status quo is maintained.'

'But why? For what purpose?'

'You learn not to ask too many questions when you join the Service. Curiosity and ambition do not make comfortable bedfellows.'

Dee nudged Hastings in the side with her pistol. 'Go in – get the shroud.'

He put his hands up in the air, his face contorted with sarcastic mockery. 'If you insist.' Hastings strolled into the room and turned round to face the quartet outside the room. 'See? There's absolutely nothing to fear here.'

A single shot rang out. Hastings looked startled and then perplexed, his eyes crossing as he tried to focus on the bullet wound just above his nose.

Then he collapsed to the floor. Dee lowered her pistol and grinned.

‘That’s for being such a smug bastard.’

Anji was horrified. ‘You murdered him!’

Now it was Dee’s turn to be perplexed. ‘He’s Security Service – or was. Do you know how many people he’s probably tortured or had killed? Trust me, that wasn’t murder – it was a mercy killing.’ She stepped into the room and began searching through the open crates. ‘Come on, help me look for the shroud.’

Fitz was about to walk in but Anji held him back. ‘The Doctor was right,’ she said. ‘He had a feeling that we would be betrayed.’

‘Who by?’ Fitz asked.

‘I don’t know, he didn’t say.’

‘Well, it isn’t me and it isn’t you, so who does that leave?’

‘Put your hands up,’ Frank commanded. He was walking along the corridor towards them, machine gun raised and ready to fire. ‘The attack is all over. You failed. A valiant attempt, but doomed from the start sadly. The rest of your resistance friends are already dead or dying by now.’

‘He’s right – listen!’ Hannah said. The noise of gunfire and explosions had died away in the last minutes. The crackling of burning fires and men moaning in pain were still audible, but the battle was history.

Anji let her eyes slide sideways, so she could see what Dee was doing without turning her head. The resistance woman was creeping towards the door of the room, her pistol drawn. Anji realised she needed to draw Frank nearer and began talking to help mask the noise of Dee’s movements.

‘So, you’re the traitor? That heartbreaking little speech you gave at the café about your wife – was that all lies too?’

‘Not entirely. There was such a woman, quite a firebrand she was. But Emily wasn’t my wife. Let’s just say I knew her intimately in the cells before I put the noose around her neck.’ Frank smirked at the memory.

‘You sick bastard,’ Hannah hissed. ‘It’s people like you –’

Frank silenced her by smashing the butt of his machine gun against her head. She collapsed to the floor. ‘That’s enough out of you, Hannah. I don’t need a lecture from a –’

Anji grabbed Fitz and pulled him out of the way as Dee dived into the corridor, firing her pistol repeatedly. Frank fell and did not move again.

Dee got up and kicked the corpse bitterly. ‘That’s for all the men and women you sent to their deaths. To think I looked up to you! Slept with you!’

Scumbag!’ She leaned over and spat in Frank’s face.

Anji and Fitz walked into the stone chamber. They began sifting through the open crates. ‘There’s nothing inside them,’ Fitz said. ‘They’re all empty. There’s just broken fragments.’

‘What?’ Dee rushed back into the room. She tipped a crate over on to its side so the contents spilled out on to the floor. Inside were just some bricks and shavings of wood. ‘But it can’t be! Hastings said –’

‘Hastings said they were expecting us,’ Anji recalled. ‘Frank must have told them we were coming. If there was anything stored here, it probably left in the back of that armoured truck.’

‘No! No!’ Dee protested. ‘We can’t have come this far, can’t have sacrificed so much for nothing!’

Fitz thought about mentioning how grateful he was to be rescued, but decided perhaps now was not the time to share the sentiment.

Out in the corridor, Hannah groaned and rolled over, pulling herself up into a sitting position. ‘You should have listened to Frank more closely.’

‘Why would I want to listen to that toerag?’ Dee asked.

Hannah fired twice and Dee collapsed among the crates, gasping for breath. ‘Because he was about to blow my cover. Frank was about to say he didn’t need a lecture from a junior operative like me.’

Dee’s mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water, but the holes in her windpipe stopped her from speaking. She died, blood gurgling from the wound in her throat. Fitz and Anji turned to face Hannah.

‘You too?’ Anji asked.

‘Like Hastings said before – the resistance is riddled with double agents. Why have one person infiltrating your enemy when you can have more?’ Hannah replied. ‘We worked together in Edinburgh, that’s why he recognised me earlier. I infiltrated the resistance and then tipped him off about its meeting place.’ She got painfully to her feet. ‘I could have done without the head wound. As I was about to say before Frank so rudely interrupted me, it’s people like him who give the Security Service a bad name.’ Hannah waved her rifle at Fitz and Anji. ‘Step away from the crates.’

The pair retreated to one side. Hannah pulled the machine gun from Frank’s lifeless hands before entering the room. ‘This room and what it’s supposed to contain, the legend of the shroud – it’s a very well-established trap, bait to lure the likes of Dee into the open. And it’s succeeded very well. But we don’t need it any longer.’

Hannah picked up Dee's pistol and jerked it at Fitz. 'You – open that box in the corner.'

Fitz turned to see a single wooden crate standing beneath a stained glass window. He pulled off the lid.

'Now stand by your friend,' Hannah commanded. Fitz retreated to Anji's side. They watched as Hannah went to the crate and pulled aside a layer of wood shavings to reveal the true contents – a very large bomb. Dozens of sticks of dynamite were bundled together with wires and an old-fashioned alarm clock on top.

'What are you going to do?' Anji asked.

Hannah smiled. 'Blow up the Tower of London, of course. Imagine the public outrage when the corpses of resistance members are pulled from the wreckage – a national monument destroyed, desecrated by terrorists. Nobody would dream of collaborating with such people after today.'

Fitz began to slowly applaud, grinning as he did so.

'Fitz? Have you gone quite mad? What are you doing?' Anji asked.

'Well, I have to applaud the audacity of this latest effort,' he explained. 'That bomb in Edinburgh that nearly killed you and got me sentenced to death? It was planted by a Security Service agent. I recognised him at my hearing when he gave the vital evidence against me. But this – now this deserves our admiration. It's not enough that the Government is having its own secret agents blow up the population to make people believe there's a terrorist campaign being waged against the Empire – now they're starting on the monuments too!'

'I'm glad you find it so amusing,' Hannah said as she set the timer on the bomb. 'I wouldn't want all my efforts to go unappreciated.'

'Now what?' Anji asked. 'Tie us to the bomb and a quick spot of gloating before you march off and leave us to die?'

Hannah shook her head slowly. 'Nothing so unimaginative. The people I work for have promised a generous promotion to whoever brings you in alive.'

'That's all this is? A career move?' Anji was disgusted. 'I've met people who were willing to stab their own mothers in the back to get ahead but you take the cake. Fitz was right – you do deserve a round of applause!'

Hannah smiled thinly. 'You really have no idea, do you? I was just a junior operative assigned to the reference section of Edinburgh's Central Library. It was my job to monitor the sort of books people were taking out and get close

to anyone I thought might have affiliations with the resistance.

‘Your friend the Doctor was my passport to the top. As soon as he walked in I knew he must be a dangerous radical – why else would he dress that way, deliberately drawing attention to himself? So I latched on to him and look where it’s taken me. Once I’ve delivered you two safely to the Star Chamber, I’ll only be offered the best assignments from now on.’

Hannah jerked her head towards the door. ‘Move! We’ve only got a few minutes before this bomb goes off. There are explosive charges placed all round the building. In ten minutes’ time, the Tower of London will be rubble.’

The Doctor looked at Sabbath thoughtfully. ‘I’m not sure the uniform suits you, but at least you’ve lost some weight. You also seem to have aged several decades since we last met. Job-related stress, by any chance? Being adjutant to these five can’t be easy for one with your delusions of grandeur.’

‘Doctor, you are mistaken – we have never met,’ Sabbath replied.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I have never left this world. I was initiated into the Service in 1762, at my coming of age. A momentous event happened that day, changing my life forever. I had planned to use the Service, acquire its lore and knowledge for myself and then move on. Instead, I chose to remain within the Service and use it to further my quest. For nearly two hundred and fifty years I have been manipulating history in anticipation of this day. Now, the moment is nearly upon us!’

‘But how have you lived for so long?’

‘The same as you, Doctor – I travel through time. Alas, my machine is only able to move forwards through time. But that has been sufficient to take me from one crucial moment in mankind’s development to the next. At each stop I influenced and reshaped Earth’s history.’

‘And the Star Chamber?’ The Doctor gestured at the five terrified men.

‘My puppets, as you said. Successive generations of the Star Chamber have carried out my orders during my long absences. Lately I have served them as adjutant, but in truth they have been serving me, acting on my instruction.’ Sabbath smiled at the Pentarch. ‘Now their usefulness is at an end. . .’

The Doctor tried to move towards Sabbath but the two apes held him immobile. ‘If you’re the puppet master, then you can answer my question – why corrupt Earth’s history? Why suppress the development of the computer?’

Sabbath shook his head sadly. ‘Corruption, suppression – such pejorative terms. You’re starting to put the pieces together but, as always, you begin from a false premise. You think of yourself as Time’s Champion, Doctor. You believe everyone should subscribe to your cosy, libertarian values.’ Sabbath approached the Doctor. ‘The universe would be a nice, safe place if only everyone followed your proper, civilised code of conduct. Everywhere could be a green and pleasant land.’ Sabbath sneered at his captive, their faces only inches apart. ‘You couldn’t be more wrong. Everything you believe is a lie. You’re an anachronism, a leftover from a previous reality – I see that now.’

The Doctor’s body went into spasm and his breath became shallow and desperate. He swallowed back a mouthful of acrid bile.

‘Feeling a little queasy, are we? Dizziness? Nausea?’ Sabbath chuckled. ‘I’m surprised you can stand. The nearer you get to the truth, the worse you feel.’

‘Why?’ the Doctor gasped.

‘You don’t hold the solution to anything any more – you’re part of the problem. The sooner you step aside, the better for all concerned. A new history is coming!’

Fitz, Anji and Hannah emerged from the Tower to find a sleek black car and driver waiting for them outside, along with a dozen men from the security forces. Hannah handed over her excess weapons, retaining just one of the pistols she had collected.

‘You’ve got five minutes to evacuate our men from inside,’ she told the leader of the security forces. ‘After that the whole place is going to explode.’

‘But shouldn’t we try to defuse the bomb?’ he asked nervously.

‘This detonation will be a symbolic call to arms for the entire Empire. It will help us rid ourselves of the terrorists once and for all.’

‘I’m not sure I understand –’

‘You’re not being paid to understand. You’re being paid to follow orders,’ Hannah replied. She motioned for Fitz and Anji to get into the car, then climbed in herself and sat opposite them. ‘All right, driver – take us to White-hall.’

The vehicle pulled smoothly away, accelerating into the night.

Anji cleared her throat. ‘Since we’ve got this little trip together, can I ask you a question?’ Hannah nodded. ‘Does the shroud even exist? Or was that

just part of this trap?’

‘Oh, it’s real enough. I’ve never seen it but the people I work for wouldn’t lie about such a thing.’

‘You seem to put a lot of faith in them,’ Fitz noted.

‘And why not?’

He shrugged. ‘Call me old fashioned, but I find it hard to trust anyone with such a cavalier attitude to murdering innocent people. If they can’t be trusted with the lives of ordinary citizens, how they can be trusted with the truth?’

Hannah glared at him. ‘You ought to know that the phrase “dead or alive” was used to describe how best you should be delivered to my superiors. So I’d advise you to remain silent for the rest of the journey – if you wish to survive it.’

‘But I –’ Fitz was silenced by a sharp jab in the ribs from Anji.

‘This reality is flawed,’ the Doctor protested. He was sweating profusely and was having difficulty focusing his eyes, but this was one argument he had to win. ‘This is not how the history of mankind unfolds. What you have done is wrong!’

Sabbath shook his head. ‘Right and wrong. You still think in such black and white terms. What would you do if I gave you the chance – go back in time and make everything the way it was?’

‘Yes, if I have to.’

‘Just rewrite history to suit yourself, to reinstate what you believe to be right?’ Sabbath smiled to himself. ‘Have you ever thought that history is better like this?’

‘No.’

‘Really? Let me give you an example. In the history you want to restore, towards the end of the nineteenth century, an American inventor created a forerunner of the computer. That machine was used by the Nazis during the Holocaust to make the identification and extermination of the Jews more efficient. My agents made sure that machine did not exist. The result – the Holocaust was less efficient, saving hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of lives.’ Sabbath sneered at the Doctor. ‘But you believe those people should be condemned to death so you can be right.’

The Doctor closed his eyes. ‘You don’t fool me, Sabbath. You don’t care about saving those people’s lives. It’s just a side effect of your crusade!’

‘Perhaps, but it is still true. What price your pious morality now? How many lives is it worth? Thousands? Tens of thousands? Millions? You’re just as deluded as the members of the Star Chamber.’

The Pentarch could take this indignity no more. ‘I must protest! You have served us faithfully for decades, adjutant – why are you acting this way?’

Sabbath gestured for the two apes holding the Doctor to follow him. As they left the Star Chamber, Sabbath snapped his fingers. The Doctor could hear the screams of agony behind him. ‘My crew needs to feed,’ Sabbath explained, ‘and those fat, pampered fools should make a hearty meal.’

‘Do you gain pleasure from killing, Sabbath?’ the Doctor demanded.

‘No,’ Sabbath replied, as if the thought had never even occurred to him. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘You just condemned five men to a brutal, horrific death at the hands of your beasts. What possible use could their deaths have?’

Sabbath stopped and looked back at his captive. ‘I told you – my crew required feeding. What other reason could there be?’

‘You are utterly amoral, aren’t you?’

Sabbath smiled. He adopted the accent of an English upper-class twit. ‘By Jove, I think he’s starting to get it!’ Sabbath strode away, laughing at his own joke. He snapped his fingers and the apes followed close behind, dragging the Doctor between them.

The ground shook for a moment and a distant rumble could be heard through the walls. ‘What was that?’ the Doctor asked.

‘The Tower of London exploding,’ Sabbath answered. ‘Just as the Oracle predicted. I wonder if your friends from the resistance were inside? Still, that hardly matters now.’

‘Fitz? Hannah and Anji?’

Sabbath did not reply. He led the Doctor through a bewildering series of tunnels and staircases, finally emerging into twilight on the banks of the Thames. In the shadow of the Houses of Parliament floated a silver-black battleship, the *Jonah*. Sabbath strode on board, followed by the two apes dragging the Doctor between them. They went below deck, making their way to the heart of the vessel.

The Doctor’s curiosity forced him to ask a question. ‘You said before we have never met – yet you presume to lecture me on the morality of my actions. That seems to be a contradiction.’

‘Indeed, it is. But it is also the truth. I have seen your actions through the eyes of another, just as I have seen my own lives – all the different paths I could have taken, all the choices I could have made, all the mistakes and the triumphs. How else would I have the absolute knowledge to manipulate Earth’s history across hundreds of years?’

The Doctor tried another approach. ‘How did you know I would come here? To this place, at this time?’

Sabbath paused outside the door to his study. Standing opposite was the TARDIS. It was the worse for wear, with notches cut into its corners and slice marks visible on the exterior. But the doors remained closed and the lock appeared to be undamaged. ‘Just as I would never surrender the *Jonah*, so I knew you would come for your time machine. The Oracle predicted that too. It wants to meet you.’

‘I know,’ the Doctor said. ‘I’ve felt its hunger in my mind.’

Welcome, Elemental.

Sabbath opened the door to his study and stood aside to let the Doctor and his escort enter, before following them in.

Welcome to your doom. . .

The study was constructed of black metal, gas lamps flickering around the walls. In the centre of the room was a circular platform. Above it was a small child, human but without gender. The head and body were hairless and smooth, the face a beaming smile. The child floated in mid air, surrounded by a glowing, transparent globe of energy. The Doctor sagged in the arms of his captors. Sabbath strode past him. ‘Let me introduce you to – the Oracle!’

The child’s face lit up upon seeing the Doctor. ‘At last. . .’

Can you hear me?

The Doctor collapsed to the floor, his hearts beating out of time. The voice in his head – it was the Oracle, speaking into his mind, reading his thoughts. It was all the Doctor could do to keep from vomiting on the black metal. I hear you, he thought.

Good. . .

Sabbath stood by the edge of the platform. He dismissed the two apes. They retreated from the room, fearfully avoiding the child’s gaze. The Oracle gurgled happily, its eyes filled with hunger. Sabbath smiled at the Doctor benignly.

‘I know your fear. I felt the same the first time I met the Oracle. It was my final initiation into the Service. I was bound, weights attached to my body, and pushed into the Thames, not far from here. All I had to do was survive.’

He was dying when I found him. . .

Sabbath shook his head at the memory. ‘I was dying when the Oracle appeared to me. We touched minds and it loosed my bonds.’ *Simplicity itself. . .* ‘The next day I made myself known in Cambridge – sixty miles from where I was thought to have drowned. I was noted as an important addition to the Service.’

As Sabbath spoke, the Oracle interjected its own telepathic commentary.

‘The Oracle foretold the way things would be. Soon, it became the Service’s greatest weapon –’ *Commander. . .* ‘– and I its sole confidant.’ *Slave. . .* ‘The Oracle is the true Harbinger of Tomorrow.’

I am tomorrow. . .

The sound of approaching footsteps broke Sabbath’s reverie. He strode out, leaving the Doctor prostrate on the floor. Sabbath’s voice could be heard in the corridor outside, talking with a woman. The Oracle laughed to itself idly.

Why did you come here? the Doctor asked in his mind.

My domain was invaded. So shall be yours.

Why have you brought me here?

The Oracle licked its lips. *I hunger. To feast on an Elemental, one of the last still alive – none of my kind has ever known such a meal. . .*

Sabbath returned, with Anji and Fitz following him. The two captives’ faces lit up at the sight of the Doctor. They both started talking at once.

‘Doctor! Are you OK?’

‘What’s with the freaky kid?’

‘The TARDIS – it’s here!’

‘What is going on? We –’

‘Silence!’ the Oracle said. ‘Speak nor move no more.’

Anji and Fitz tried to protest but could not. Their mouths would not open and their bodies were frozen in place. *That’s better. . .*

‘Thank goodness for that,’ Hannah said. She was standing in the doorway of the study, a revolver in her hand. ‘They’ve been talking non-stop. I tried to deliver them to the Star Chamber, but the footmen wouldn’t let me in. They sent me here, said you would explain.’

Sabbath – kill the girl. . .

‘Come here, my dear.’ Sabbath waved her forward. Once Hannah was by his side, he relieved her of the firearm. ‘I must commend you on a job well done. Without individuals like you, people willing to follow orders without question, my task would have been so much more difficult. Are you ready for your reward?’

‘Yes,’ Hannah said, smiling.

‘No!’ the Doctor cried out.

Yes!

‘Then here it is.’ Sabbath killed her with a single shot.

Anji wanted to look away, but could not move. Fitz watched numbly. He knew Hannah only as a traitor but seeing her slain still sickened him.

Sabbath’s brow furrowed in bewilderment. ‘Doctor, how can you protest at the death of a woman responsible for the slaying of dozens?’

‘Murder is still murder, not matter who is the victim,’ the Doctor replied.

‘Your pompous morality will be the death of you,’ Sabbath sneered. *Bring him in. . .* ‘Since we’re having a reunion, there’s someone else you might like to see.’ He snapped his fingers and an ape entered the room, shepherding an old man. His face was heavily lined, liver spots blotching the features. Wisps of silver hair hung limply from the scalp. The man’s back was curved and bent, the legs shaking as they walked unsteadily forwards. ‘I believe you already know him.’

‘Alan,’ the Doctor said, a hand clawing at his own chest. The dizziness, the nausea, it surged through his body.

Now do you understand?

It wasn’t you making me dizzy, making me sick, the Doctor thought.

It was the old man. He is the key. . .

Fitz was shocked to see how old Turing was, how debilitating a lifetime of incarceration had been. So this was where Alan had been taken. . .

‘He’s been a prisoner of the state since 1936,’ Sabbath said, ‘held captive in the interests of security.’

‘Why?’ the Doctor demanded.

To prepare for this day. . .

‘He tried to publish this.’ Sabbath produced an aged piece of paper and unfolded it carefully ‘A diagram for his universal machine.’

The old man looked with wonder at the drawing. ‘My schematic!’

Sabbath walked to one of the gas lamps. He removed the glass casing and dipped the paper into the flame. The schematic burned away in seconds,

crumbling to ash as it floated to the floor. As it did so, the Doctor felt another wave of dizziness, as he slowly lost control of himself.

You sense it now, don't you? Reality being torn away. . .

'No! My work. . . my creation. . .' Turing sobbed, sinking to his knees. Sabbath nodded and the ape guarding the old man left the study. Turing stared at the embers. 'I'm sorry, Chris. I tried to carry on for both of us. . .'

'He was too dangerous to remain free,' Sabbath said.

He was needed here. . .

'Turing's theoretical work on computers would have changed the course of human history,' the Doctor said. 'But why keep him alive? If you believe what you say, Sabbath, you should have killed him decades ago!'

'I am not a monster,' Sabbath replied. 'I don't kill without reason.'

'What about Hannah?'

'She outlived her usefulness. Turing has not – yet.'

'You knew we would try to rescue him. You've kept him alive all this time to be bait for your trap,' the Doctor snarled. Sabbath shook his head sadly. 'You seem to think I'm some power-crazed megalomaniac, tinkering with history for my own amusement. You couldn't be more wrong. Alan Turing is crucial to the future of mankind.'

He must die if I am to survive. . .

Sabbath pointed at the child. 'The Oracle has shown me the future. It foresaw a terrible cataclysm. An infinite number of universes and realities exist, all held in check by the Time Vortex. Beyond that vortex are creatures too terrifying to imagine.'

I have seen them. I was one of them, long ago. . .

'According to the Oracle, something has happened, something has changed. The places beyond the Vortex have been invaded. Now the Vortex is coming apart, fraying at the edges – nobody knows why. Whatever once sustained it has been removed from eternity.'

You know all about that, don't you, Elemental?

I can't remember, the Doctor protested in his mind. I can't remember!

'Time and reality are eroding, splintering,' Sabbath said. 'When the Vortex collapses, all time and space will be shattered. Infinite universes will try to replace each other. And what waits beyond the Vortex will invade, feeding on time and space as if they were carrion.'

That is why I came here – driven from my domain. So I shall make this world my own. . .

You fled, the Doctor thought. But what could possibly force creatures like you into the Vortex?

Think back, Elemental. . .

Sabbath looked down at the cowering form of the Doctor. ‘The Oracle told me how I could save Earth, become its protector. The Vortex is made up of focal points, places where the distinction between universes is narrower. In 1762 the history of Earth was changed to manufacture just such a focal point – centred on this timeline, this reality, this world.’

You have already seen what is to come. . .

‘Every intervention has rippled forwards in time, gradually creating the conditions for the coup de grâce. The focal point is ready,’ Sabbath continued. ‘When triggered, it will collapse and fold itself around Earth, shielding the planet from the fracturing of the Vortex, from the horrors that will unleash.’

Remember? It was black. . .

Sabbath weighed the firearm in his hand. ‘Turing is the trigger.’ *Like a hole in space, sucking light from eternity. . .* ‘The Oracle says the focal point I have helped create hinges on Turing’s existence.’ *Like a great eye, looking down, searching. . .* ‘Kill him and Earth will be safe for eternity.’ Sabbath offered the gun to the Doctor. ‘I’ll even let you have the honour.’

Do you remember, Elemental?

‘And you believed all this?’ The Doctor pulled his head up to glare at Sabbath. ‘Can’t you see what that abomination is?’

Do you remember, Time Lord?

‘The Oracle warned me you would try to sway me from the right path.’

The Doctor shook his head sadly. ‘What happens afterwards, once you’ve supposedly saved the Earth?’

Sabbath’s smile faltered. ‘Afterwards?’

‘Or maybe you hadn’t thought that far ahead.’

‘Shut up!’

‘Apparently not.’ The Doctor looked at his friends, stuck in place like living statues. ‘This is rather ironic, don’t you two think? The Sabbath we know works for the benefit of some shadowy unknown force lurking beyond the Vortex. This Sabbath is trying to protect Earth from that same force, yet he hasn’t the wit to think about what happens afterwards. But surely you already know this, if the mighty Oracle has truly let you see all your lives. . .’

Sabbath looked at the Oracle. The child gurgled to itself, then nodded.

It is time...

'It's time,' Sabbath announced.

'Time for you to start thinking!' the Doctor yelled. 'The Sabbath who colluded with that unknown force must feel the Earth can survive whatever is to come. Presumably he feels it'll thrive as a result. And with the realities crashing down, you're working against him. Sabotaging his plan in favour of one hatched by this scheming little animal!' The Doctor held out his hands to Sabbath. 'You've been lied to, you fool, surely you can see that?'

'This is the right path,' Sabbath maintained. 'And it is time.'

'Time for what? What about Fitz and Anji? What happens to them?'

'Your friends may well survive, Doctor. I only permitted their presence to ensure you behaved yourself. As for you... The Oracle has plans for you.' Sabbath again offered the gun.

'Murder is murder,' the Doctor said.

Sabbath smiled. 'I knew you would refuse. Still clinging to the same delusions. Still thinking you can save the universe by playing a straight bat.' Sabbath cocked the weapon and aimed it at the Doctor's forehead. 'The Oracle tells me you can die and live again. How many times would I have to kill you before you stop coming back to life? Three? Six? Nine?'

It is time, Sabbath...

'Yes, O Harbinger!' Sabbath swivelled and fired at Turing.

'No!' the Doctor cried out, but he was too late.

I remember walking across Cambridge one evening with you, Chris. We were with Heatley, your friend from prep school, remember? We had been to the cinema. I can still feel the chill of the air. As we walked back, I decided to test how much you wanted my company. I hung back and walked with Heatley.

I must have looked rather lonely as you beckoned me to walk beside you (mostly with your eyes, I think). You knew how much I adored you, but you hated me showing it publicly. All the same, we walked back together. It pleased me ever so much. I always wanted to tell you, Chris, and I never had the chance. Maybe now, at last, I will...

Alan's dead body slumped to the floor. As his head hit the black metal surface, the impact reverberated outwards, becoming increasingly louder, booming around the walls of the study. The air around Turing's body seemed

to fracture and crack, as if reality itself were a window of stained glass, shattering outwards before some vast, unseen weight.

Sabbath clasped his hands to his ears, trying to block out the deafening noise. He stared in horror as reality broke into splinters, assaulting the senses. ‘No! Something’s wrong!’ He turned to look at the Oracle, but it was a child no longer. Its humanity melted away in moments, replaced with something terrifying and unearthly. The creature laughed maliciously, drawing wide its smile to reveal row upon row of razor-sharp teeth.

At last! Now I shall feed on your soul, Elemental. . .

‘Oracle! You must help me!’ Sabbath cried out, stepping towards the energy globe just as the creature launched itself towards the Doctor. Sabbath screamed as the Oracle slashed downwards with talon-like arms, the clawed digits slicing back the scalp from his skull. Blood spattered the alien creature, distracting its attention. The Oracle turned on its faithful servant, teeth bared, eyes gleaming angrily.

You would stop me?

‘Something is wrong,’ Sabbath spluttered, his hands trying pathetically to push the dripping red flap of skin and hair back into place on his head. ‘The Doctor – he can help us! We need him!’

I need no one!

The Oracle’s arms became a frenzy, tearing at Sabbath, the sound of flesh rending mixed with his horrific screams. ‘Help me! Doctor, help me!’

Face me, Doctor! Face me!

Fitz and Anji jolted to life, able to move again. They both rushed to the Doctor’s side. He was dry retching, unable to help himself. ‘Doctor! What’s wrong?’ Anji shouted, trying to be heard over the din of echoes and pain.

The Doctor looked at Sabbath being torn to pieces. ‘It’s too late to save him. We’ve got to get to the TARDIS. There’s still a chance we can prevent all of this. . . There may still be time. . .’ He fainted dead away.

Anji and Fitz dragged the Doctor towards the door of the study. Fitz took one last glimpse back. Alan was gone, the space where his body had been just a yawning blackness. Then the blackness blinked. ‘Almost looks like an eye,’ Fitz mumbled. He felt himself drawn towards it but Anji dragged him away.

‘Come on!’ she shouted. Together they carried the Doctor’s unconscious body over to the TARDIS. Anji was already pulling the TARDIS key out from inside the Doctor’s waistcoat. She jammed it in the lock and twisted. From

behind them came a drooling noise, something gurgling in blood. She didn't look back, just shoved the TARDIS door with all her might.

'Doctor! Help me!' Sabbath screamed. 'Help me!' His cries were cut short by a vicious swipe of the creature's claws, severing the vocal chords. Sabbath looked up into the inhuman eyes of the Oracle as it screamed in frustration. The cry was echoed by the mechanical bellow of the TARDIS dematerialising...

The Doctor began recovering quickly once they were inside the TARDIS. 'Thank you, both of you,' he whispered. He stumbled to the machine's controls and sent it spinning away from the horrors on board the *Jonah*.

'What was that thing?' Fitz asked. 'It wasn't human!'

'No,' the Doctor agreed. 'A creature from beyond the Vortex.'

'That was one of them?' Anji said.

'Partly. It was half human, or else it could never have survived on Earth.'

'That's why it was in that bubble,' Fitz realised. 'It tricked Sabbath...'

The Doctor nodded. 'The Oracle told him about creatures from beyond the Vortex, terrifying beyond human imagining. It just neglected to say it was one of those creatures.'

'Sabbath also believed beyond the Vortex had been invaded,' Anji said. 'That the invasion would soon turn inwards...'

'That's what he was trying to save Earth from. So he altered Earth's history to manufacture a focal point centred on the planet. He thought collapsing that would protect the planet. But the results are, well...'

'End of the world as we know it?' Anji offered.

'The end of that world, that reality, that version of Earth's history.'

'What about the Oracle?' Fitz asked.

'What little humanity it had left is torn away by now. It needed to feed to sustain itself.'

'And we took you off the menu,' Anji said with a smile.

The Doctor noticed her expression. 'I'm not sure you understand the damage that Sabbath and the Oracle have done. Collapsing the focal point – think of it like an explosion in time, in reality itself. The shrapnel from that blast is now flying forwards, backwards and sideways through time, destroying everything in its path. It is destroying the Earth we just left. Not just in 2003 – in the past, the present and the future.'

‘So all the people we met, all of their hopes and dreams and achievements...’ Anji realised.

‘Wiped away?’ Fitz asked.

‘It’s far worse than that,’ the Doctor replied. ‘There are an almost infinite number of possible Earth histories, possible realities in the quantum universe. By destroying one of them – the effect reaches out, changing, altering everything around the point of impact.’

‘Like throwing a brick into a pond,’ Anji said.

‘Exactly. One reality is destroyed, causing the death of all the others around it. When they go, it affects all the realities surrounding them. And so on and so on and so on... It could lead to the destruction of the entire Vortex.’ The Doctor slammed a fist against the central console. ‘Sabbath hasn’t saved the Earth – he’s set in motion the very cataclysm he sought to protect it from!’

‘He altered history. Let’s go back and stop him,’ Anji suggested.

The Doctor nodded. ‘We’re already on our way.’

‘But we’d need to know the right time and place, wouldn’t we?’

‘We do. It began the day Sabbath was initiated into the Service, in 1762. He told me before you arrived.’ He was tweaking the TARDIS controls, fine-tuning the time and place of their destination. ‘There’s still no guarantee we’ll be in time. The collapse of the focal point is tearing across reality. I’m not sure we can outrun it.’ Satisfied with his adjustments, the Doctor left the console and sank into an armchair.

Fitz was thinking over their last few moments in the year 2003. ‘So that’s it – Sabbath is dead, gone, good riddance and all the rest.’

‘He looked a lot older than before,’ Anji noted.

The Doctor sighed. ‘That Sabbath is dead – but he was merely part of the alternative reality Earth, like Hannah or Alan. That Sabbath never left Earth. Alas, another Sabbath did – the Sabbath we know – and he’s still out there.’

Fitz was still not satisfied. ‘So how did that Sabbath know all about you, what you would and wouldn’t do?’ Fitz asked.

‘The Oracle told him. It exists both within and without the Vortex. That enables it to see all realities, all possible times and spaces,’ the Doctor said. ‘That’s how it could instruct Sabbath and the Star Chamber on how to alter history, thus creating the focal point.’

‘Like the Absolutes of the System,’ Anji said.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor agreed, ‘only far more dangerous.’ He closed his eyes, resting while the TARDIS took them backwards through time. ‘I’m sure there’s something I’m overlooking. Sabbath – the real Sabbath – he’s convinced that our Earth will come to no harm.’

‘Can that be possible?’ Anji asked.

‘No,’ the Doctor assured her. ‘He’s working for a power he must have absolute trust in. Lying low while events work through.’ He clenched his fists. ‘But how can he know what will happen?’

‘Maybe the Oracle?’ ventured Fitz.

‘I don’t think so. Our Sabbath wouldn’t need to bargain with that thing.’

A tense silence settled over them. When it seemed the Doctor had nothing further to add, Fitz gave Anji a gentle nudge. ‘Now’s as good a time as any,’ he said.

‘For what?’

‘Burying the hatchet.’

Anji blushed, but knew Fitz was right. ‘Doctor, I . . . I owe you an apology.’

The Doctor opened one eye. ‘Why?’

‘The things I said after you heard the TARDIS screaming. I didn’t mean them. Well, not all of them.’ Anji stared at him, trying to discern his mood. ‘I couldn’t understand why you were acting that way at the time. . .’

The Doctor looked away from her. ‘I was only trying to protect you. The Oracle was clawing at my mind, taunting me with visions of the future. I wanted to face it alone.’

‘So you tried to push me away. . .’

‘I knew you could rescue Fitz without my help. Facing the Oracle – that was what I had to do.’ He stood up. ‘Can you forgive me?’

Anji laughed. ‘Hey! I’m trying to apologise to you – wait your turn!’

The Doctor stood up and gave Anji a hug. She squeezed him back.

The sound of the TARDIS materialising got their attention. The Doctor activated the scanner screen. ‘Let’s see where we are. . .’

The monitors showed a grubby grey-blue atmosphere outside, specks of dirt floating past. The screens were lighter at the top than the bottom.

‘Underwater?’ Anji asked.

‘The bottom of the Thames. Sabbath should be arriving any second. . .’ the Doctor muttered. He jabbed a finger at the monitor. ‘There!’

A bound and weighted body plunged into view, sinking towards the riverbed. The Doctor began adjusting the TARDIS controls. ‘No time to save

him ourselves. Perhaps I can do a short hop sideways, rematerialise around him...'

Fitz waved his hands in dismay. 'Now, hold on! I don't fancy sharing the TARDIS interior with the River Thames!'

'Look!' Anji was peering at the screen. Outside a glistening black shape was shimmering into view. It pulsed darkly, reached out to envelop Sabbath. In less than a second he was gone...

The twenty-one-year-old opened his eyes in amazement. He could breathe again, and the crushing weight around his chest and arms was gone. He looked around and saw a glowing ball of light in the distance. Sabbath got up and began walking towards it, through the darkness. 'Where am I?' he called.

'You are safe,' a childlike voice replied. 'Come to me...'

'We're too late,' the Doctor said despairingly. 'Too late.'

'Well, can't we just go back a few more minutes and have another try?' Fitz asked. 'What's to stop us?'

'The focal point's collapse – it's caught up to us,' the Doctor replied.

On screen the Thames began to boil. Red lights flickered into life across the TARDIS console and muted warning bells began to chime.

'It's too late. We have to go.' The Doctor reactivated the time machine, sending the TARDIS spinning away from the dying reality.

Anji sank into the armchair. 'The domino effect has begun. We failed.'

'Not entirely, it seems.' The Doctor was examining readings on the console. 'At the moment Alan died, a powerful, anachronistic paradox was present. It warped the focal point's collapse, softening the effects.'

'What presence?' Fitz wondered.

'You two! That was something the Oracle hadn't considered.'

'And Earth?'

'According to the TARDIS, the history we saw has been replaced by a multitude of alternative histories – all vying to become the real history of Earth.'

'That doesn't sound so good,' Fitz ventured, hoping to be contradicted.

'It isn't,' the Doctor agreed. 'There can be only one true history within our own quantum universe. We have to make it our history, the design we know to be true, whatever Sabbath's masters want. We have to find our way back

to our own universe and put things right on Earth – and hope that’s enough to stave off the cataclysm.’

‘So basically, we’re back where we started,’ Anji said.

‘No. The Oracle has partly succeeded. The whole of reality is another step closer to total collapse.’

All three of them stood silently, contemplating the consequences of what had just happened. Finally, Anji asked the question they were all thinking.

‘How long before the end?’

The Doctor sighed. ‘It’s only a matter of time. . .’

About the Author

David Bishop was born and raised in New Zealand. He developed a passion for *Doctor Who* when *Spearhead From Space* was first broadcast there in 1975. Fifteen years later he emigrated to Britain, intent on writing for the long-running television series. Unfortunately, the programme was cancelled just before he arrived. Talk about bad timing...

This is his third *Doctor Who* novel, following *Who Killed Kennedy* for Virgin Publishing and *Amorality Tale* for the BBC.

Acknowledgements

The following works of non-fiction proved useful in shaping ideas and providing an historical background for the events of this novel: *Turing and the Universal Machine* by Jon Agar; *Alan Turing: The Enigma* by Andrew Hodges; *Before The Computer* by James W. Cortada; *Groundbreakers – Charles Babbage* by Neil Champion, and *The Tower of London* by Edward Impey and Geoffrey Parnell.

I am indebted to the following authors of other *Doctor Who* novels, whose work provided fuel for the fires of my imagination – Michael Collier, Paul Leonard, Colin Brake, Lawrence Miles, Mark Clapham, Justin Richards, Simon Messingham, Nick Walters and Stephen Cole.

Special thanks to the read-through crew, who provided invaluable clarity and guidance in shaping the final draft – Paul, Jon, Peter, Robert, Dave and co.

Soundtrack: *Magnolia (Original Motion Picture Score)* by Jon Brion.

Editorial guidance, confidence and trust: Justin, Jac and Ben.

Love and understanding: Alison.