

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE COLONY OF LIES



COLIN BRAKE



According to popular legend, the great humanitarian Stewart Ransom founded the Independent Earth Colony on Axista Four in the year 2439, but the truth is not as neat and simple as the legend would suggest...

The year is 2539. Arriving on Axista Four the Doctor, Zoe and Jamie find the colony in a state of chaos. A breakaway group of colonists – the 'Realists' – has abandoned Ransom's *Back to Basics* ideals and is creating a new high-tech settlement. The 'Loyalists' who remain are dwindling in number and face total extinction.

Meanwhile, a spaceship from Earth has arrived with news that 80,000 refugees are about to descend upon the planet; the Realists are staging raids on the wreck of the colony ship, and in a secret underground bunker mysterious aliens who claim to be the planet's first colonists are beginning to awake.

Who are the doglike aliens who call themselves Tyrenians? What is the secret agenda of the sinister Federation Administrator Greene? And what really happened when the colony ship crash-landed on Axista Four 100 years ago?

This adventure features the Second Doctor, Zoe and Jamie and the Seventh Doctor and Ace.

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THE COLONY OF LIES**

*Commissioning Editor: Ben Dunn
Editor & Creative Consultant: Justin Richards
Project Editor: Sarah Lavelle*

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*To Kerry, Cefn and Kassia, as always
and
in memory of John Somerset, who appreciated a good story,
And may have enjoyed this one.*

Prologue

Ace was bored.

It was His fault, of course. With all of time and space to take her to He had brought her here to a place that was, in essence, nothing more exciting than a museum. And in Ace's book that meant just one thing: that it was dull with a capital 'D'. She could still recall, with mind-numbing detail, the tedium of a school trip to the British Museum that she had endured when she was 11. The younger Ace, then still Dorothy (and annoyingly and all too often Dotty), had trudged without enthusiasm through endless dusty, airless halls that had been filled with glass cabinets displaying ancient artefacts, as if age automatically made a cracked plate interesting. Ace, then and now, thought not. The young Dotty (cringe) had found that only the mummies held any fascination for her, and then only because of the gruesome thought that the desiccated bones and bits of some real ancient Egyptians were actually contained within the crumbling wrappings. Aside from the Ancient Egyptian Hall she'd found the whole trip about as exciting as a Schools' Science Television Broadcast. Ace had decided, there and then, that museums were not for her. Museums were too retrospective, too distanced from the stories they wanted to tell. Ace wanted to see things as they happened, not represented by crappy souvenirs years after the event, and that was what she found so exciting about her travels with the Professor: he offered her the chance to go anywhere, any *when*. In short, he offered her excitement.

Except on this occasion, of course. She had stepped out of the blue shell of the TARDIS and her heart had sunk when, after a quick glance at her surroundings, she realised exactly where it was that the Doctor had brought her. He was clearly still on his teacher-kick, trying to educate Ace on the sly, like

some favourite science experiment. She thought he'd agreed to drop all that after that business at Gabriel Chase, but apparently he had forgotten his promise. Ace started to sulk, almost on automatic pilot, but then she'd been distracted by the reality of the museum in front of her.

With her second glance Ace had to admit that this museum was a little more impressive than she'd first allowed. She was looking at a gravity-defying collection of floating buildings linked by near-invisible walkways and moving pavements, all set in a dazzling purple-hued sky above a deep green ocean sprinkled with what looked, at first sight, to be exotic tropical islands. Ace looked again and realised that the 'islands' were in fact giant terrapins swimming languidly in the becalmed sea. Despite herself Ace had to admit that it was quite a sight. According to the Doctor it was one of the Seven Hundred Wonders of the Universe: the definitive Museum and Archive of the Tellurian Stain. Although she was meant to be sulking Ace had immediately picked up on that.

'Don't you mean "Strain", Professor?' she had asked.

The Doctor had looked a little embarrassed, shuffled his feet and then leant on the red question-mark handle of his umbrella before finally answering. 'No. I meant stain. I'm afraid that's how eternity views Earth's spread through the known universe - as a stain on history.'

'History can get stuffed!' Ace had retorted.

'Don't feel too bad about it, Ace; your planet's contributed much more to Galactic Culture than you could imagine... that's why I've brought you here. To give you a sense of what your incredible race has achieved.'

That had been an hour ago but Ace had seen little to change her mind in the intervening time. In fact the more she walked around the museum, the more down-to-Earth (ha!) it appeared to be. It might have a stunning setting but in the final analysis it was still dust and broken stuff in glass cabinets.

While the Doctor had amused himself with various interactive displays Ace had watched interminable multimedia presentations about Federations and Empires

forming and falling in a never-ending cycle. From what Ace could gather there had been a sequence of expansions and retractions of humankind's presence in the wider universe. There were periods of exploration, then colonisation and settling, the development of complex political organisations linking planets and solar systems light years apart in ever more fragmenting unions until an apex was reached and the whole thing would go into reverse, with human beings abandoning their far-flung colonies and retreating back to Earth. And then the whole thing would happen again. Not for the first time today Ace found herself yawning.

'Ace. Take a look at this...'

Ace found the Doctor at the doorway to a small, dark room. 'Not another naff slide show...' she began, but stopped herself as the Doctor shook his head with a smile. 'I think you might like this one...'

He stepped inside and Ace followed and gasped as hidden sensors registered their presence and immediately began the show. Suddenly Ace was somewhere else: in the open air, in the midst of a crowd of people.

'Professor!' she began, her tone a mixture of complaint and surprise.

'Don't panic, it's just an illusion.' Ace looked over and found the reassuring presence of the Doctor right beside her.

'Some kind of hologram?' she guessed.

'Far more complex than that,' muttered the Doctor, without elucidating further. 'But sshh, it's about to begin.'

Ace took a moment to look at her new surroundings. She appeared to be at some kind of open-air press conference. The air was warm and seagulls suggested a nearby ocean. Amazingly she found she could smell the salt air on the slight breeze. Whatever the technology providing the illusion was, it was multi-sensory and very convincing. On a platform at the front of the small crowd was a microphone-encrusted podium. A man was looking out at the audience from the stage, waiting for the expectant whispering to die down. As a backdrop to the entire presentation Ace could see a giant screen displaying an image of a silver and white vehicle on a

launch gantry; the design was unfamiliar but it was clearly some kind of massive starship. The man cleared his throat and began to speak.

‘Ladies and gentleman, thank you for coming and welcome. I think you all know who I am, so I’ll spare you the tedious details...’

There was a splattering of laughter from the assembled journalists but the humour was lost on Ace. ‘Any chance of a crib, Professor?’

‘His name’s Stewart Ransom, and although you wouldn’t know it to look at him, he’s in his seventies.’

Again Ace was surprised. Even from this distance she could see that the man looked much younger than that. ‘Tucks, lifts and plastic all over?’ she asked cynically. The Doctor nodded. ‘The best that money can buy. He’s a trillionaire several times over.’

Ace noticed that Ransom was talking again. ‘When I look back at my career to date...’ Ace leant over to whisper into the Doctor’s ear again. ‘When is this?’

‘The year two thousand four hundred and twenty three,’ he answered without bothering to lower his voice. Ace noticed that no one seemed to react to his interruption; in fact she now realised that she and the Doctor seemed to be totally invisible to the other people at the press conference.

‘...much to be proud of...’ continued Ransom. ‘The major investments in off-world leisure facilities and space hotels; the desert reclamation projects here on Earth; the building of New Atlantis in the Pacific Ocean; but tonight I have a major new project to announce...’

Ace noticed that the Doctor was smiling, enjoying the moment.

‘Care to share?’ she asked. In answer he just held a finger to his lips. Typical, thought Ace, turning her attention back to Ransom.

‘I’ve had somewhat of a transformation in my old age; undergone what you might call a radical ideological shift. For years I have lived a life of luxury, a good life, but while I and my family have enjoyed all the benefits of modern life - the

health care, the technology, the freedom - all too many of the 60 billion people who live on this planet are living in poverty and fear.'

Ace could sense the intake of breath amongst the crowd: a vivid and sudden shared surprise. Despite herself she found that she wanted to hear more.

'The *Back to Basics* movement has campaigned for years for a return to a simpler way of life, a life less dependent on science and technology, a more self-reliant existence. I have to confess: I've always thought they were cranks. Fools.'

Ransom smiled warmly and shook his head slightly.

'But it was I who was being foolish. It's taken a very special person to make me see the error of my ways, someone who had the resolve, the determination and the arrogance to take me on... my daughter, Kirann.'

Ransom gestured to a woman standing at the side of the stage, a well-built woman with jet-black shoulder-length hair, whose family resemblance to the old man was clear to Ace. The woman, attractive but somehow stern-looking, suddenly smiled, and was instantly transformed. With the smile a hitherto hidden personality was revealed; Kirann now seemed a warm, determined and intelligent human being. Ace could imagine her wearing her father down over years of argument.

'It's probably too late for Earth but not for the human race. Today I'm announcing that I will be establishing a colony to operate on *Back to Basics* principles. It will be a fully independent Earth colony and will begin with 5,000 dedicated men and women, pioneers of a new way of life, a more human way of life. Thank you.'

As suddenly as it had begun, the program ceased and Ace found herself back in the small black room, blinking as her eyes adjusted to the sudden lack of light.

'Whoa, talk about your abrupt endings. What happened next?'

The Doctor smiled, obviously pleased to see that he had managed to spark her interest. He moved across to a small panel on the wall and his hands fluttered over the controls.

'Let's find out,' he suggested. This next sequence is nine years later. And be warned, we're on a space station...'

Ace frowned, not understanding, and then suddenly the moment of transition came again and she found herself floating. What the -?' she exclaimed, taken by surprise.

'I did warn you,' came the Doctor's voice from below and then he was extending his umbrella like a shepherd's crook to capture her and bring her back down to the floor. 'Hold on to something,' he suggested and Ace saw that he was gripping a handrail. Ace did likewise, not quite sure how what was clearly an illusion could affect her physically.

They were standing in front of some kind of massive window or porthole. Through the transparent material Ace could see the extremities of the space station itself, thrusting out into the blackness of space. At the end of one long arm there was a gigantic white and silver spacecraft with the words *The Big Bang* written in large letters along its side. In the background the familiar blue orb of Earth hung in the starry void, sparkling in the glare of the unseen sun.

'Ransom did it, then?' she asked the Doctor, recognising that *The Big Bang* was the realisation of the image she'd seen at the Press Conference.

'It appears that he did. In fact we're about to witness the historic launch.'

Ace and the Doctor joined a crowd of people gathered to see Ransom and his team board the spaceship. Most of the volunteer colonists were already on board, the majority already in cryogenic sleep, in which they would remain for the duration of the journey. Ace wondered what it might be like to sleep for years, to have lost consciousness in a medical room in Earth orbit and then to wake, apparently moments later, on an alien planet. On balance she decided that the time and space travelling she and the Doctor enjoyed in the TARDIS - traversing vast distances in days, if not minutes - was much preferable.

Ransom and his daughter watched the last of the crew enter the ship and then prepared to embark themselves. At the hatch they halted, waved to the crowd and took one or

two final questions from the privileged journalists whose networks had paid top dollar to secure them the exclusives.

‘Why did you name the ship *The Big Bang*? Isn’t it asking for trouble?’ asked one journalist, his combination camera and microphone droid hovering at his shoulder. Ransom just laughed and smiled in his charming way.

‘It is meant to be symbolic - a new beginning, wiping clean the slate. What are you worried about? You think I’m going to drive that thing into a planet?’

Still laughing, Ransom boarded the spacecraft and the hatch closed. There was a time transition; the images blurred and reformed and then Ace found herself watching the launch itself. Slowly the massive craft had detached itself from the space station, manoeuvred itself to a prearranged point, and then when it was a safe distance from the base it activated the Star Engines and accelerated away.

And Ace and the Doctor were back in the black room again.

‘Cool,’ was Ace’s first comment. ‘But that’s only the beginning, what happened next?’

The Doctor shrugged, one of his more inscrutable expressions on his face. ‘Who knows? There are so many stories Ace, so many beginnings, we can’t hope to know all the answers.’

Ace wasn’t having any of that. ‘Bollocks. You can’t just show me something like that and then stop.’ The Doctor sighed, and then continued, ‘Legend has it that after some inevitable ups and downs Ransom’s colony was a success.’

Ace wanted more details than that.

‘He stayed true to those principles. *Back to Basics* and all that?’

‘So legend has it.’

The Doctor had started to walk back towards the TARDIS without Ace really noticing. He suddenly seemed to have had enough of the museum. Ace was almost running to keep up with him.

‘What’s that supposed to mean? What really happened?’

The Doctor stopped at the TARDIS door and fished in his pocket for the key.

‘I don’t know... Maybe I did once... My memory is not what it was, you know. I’m getting old... I used to keep a diary...’

The door was now open and Ace followed the diminutive Time Lord into the console room. ‘You - a diary? What was that, then? Five years to a page?!’

Ace’s attempt at a joke fell flat, though, as the Doctor took it at face value.

‘Yes, I think it was...I wonder what happened to it?’

Ace wasn’t in the mood to be distracted by the Doctor. ‘So can we go, Professor?’ she demanded.

‘Where?’ the Doctor replied vaguely, wearing that expression of intense concentration on something a long way away that he wore all too often. Ace sometimes wondered if he needed glasses but was too vain to wear them.

‘To the colony,’ Ace persisted. ‘What was the planet called - Axe-Eater Five?’

‘Axista Four,’ the Doctor corrected automatically.

‘So set the co-ordinates, let’s go and find out what really happened.’

‘Oh no, Ace. Been there, done that. Let’s find somewhere fresh to go to, somewhere new.’

And before Ace could complain any further, the Doctor pulled the door-closing lever, flipped a few switches and began the dematerialisation sequence of the TARDIS. Frustrated, Ace disappeared into an inner corridor, and started to look through drawers and cupboards in every room she came to. If the Doctor really had once kept a diary Ace was determined to find it, even if she had to search every room in the TARDIS, a task she suspected might take a lifetime or two to complete. But, unwilling to give up on a notion before making at least a decent stab at it, Ace ignored the logic and carried on rifling through the rooms closest to the console room.

Back in the TARDIS control room itself the Doctor crossed to a roundel that concealed a cupboard, opened it and withdrew a large leather-bound book. On the cover were the

words 'Five- Hundred-Year Diary'. The Doctor settled down in a chair and began turning the pages of the book. A smile flickered over his face as he read and remembered.

'Ah, yes... Now I recall...' he muttered. 'Now, I wonder what that's meant to remind me of,' he added in a puzzled tone, seeing a page corner neatly folded over. He looked around and checked that Ace had gone, then returned his attention to the book in his hand and began reading the once familiar handwriting.

EPISODE ONE

Chapter One

After a hundred years the scar was still as visible as ever: an ugly raw wound that sliced through the trees and the ground vegetation: a death-black trail of raw destruction. At the end of the trail, where the devastation was at its greatest, was the wreck itself. Most of the front of the craft had disintegrated on the initial impact and a good third of the bulk of the ship had quickly followed in the intense inferno that had erupted on Planet Fall, but the rear and upper sections of The Big Bang had survived, sheered away by the force of the crash landing. The command deck and main cargo bays now formed a ragged semi-derelict multi-storey building standing at a peculiar angle right at the edge of the forest.

On the nearby plain, a few miles south of the remains of the colony ship, the newly arrived inhabitants of Axista Four had established their first, and to date, their only town, which they had rather ostentatiously dubbed Plymouth Hope City. After one hundred years of existence the settlement still exuded a temporary air, as if at any moment it might be packed up into a few crates and taken away.

The buildings shared a common design; they were low-level, mostly wooden constructions that lined two roads laid out in a simple cross formation. On 'Main Street' the major communal buildings could be found: the General Stores, the meeting hall, the blacksmiths and the inevitable tavern. The one exception to the general rule was the medical centre: a large, two-storey, cross-shaped building made up of prefabricated units. It had been the first structure erected when the survivors of the crash had established their first base and the only high-technology construction in the whole settlement. Over the years efforts had been made to disguise its unusual appearance: wooden panels had been erected over many of its walls but despite these attempts the basic

structure remained visible underneath. Beyond the medical centre small tracks led *off* to the farms and homesteads where the majority of the population of Plymouth Hope lived and worked. It was the very picture of an American Frontier town *circa* the mid-nineteenth century - the point in time that Ransom had decided would be the boundary point of the technology available to the new colony.

About three miles from the city centre, such as it was, was the Kartryte Farm. A large wooden cabin was testament to the importance of the family who had established the plot, but now it was home to just two members of the dynasty. On the wooden veranda an old man sat in a rocking chair, whittling at a piece of wood with a sharp knife. The chair rocked gently, like a cradle, but by contrast the old man's hands moved quickly and decisively, chipping away like some kind of mechanical woodpecker, shaping something wonderful from the wood. The man had a lived-in face; his skin had been exposed to the elements for so long that it had the look and feel of well-worn leather, creased and cracked so much that it no longer looked like a living thing at all. Despite his great age his eyes still shone with intelligence. At the foot of the rocking chair a teenage boy sat, watching the older man work the wood.

'What's it gonna be, Gramps?' he asked at last. The old man said nothing for a moment, concentrating on finishing his work. Finally he stopped and looked down at the boy to give him an answer.

'What it always was, a piece of wood.' As if to demonstrate the answer the old man handed the now finished piece to the boy. The lad examined it eagerly, turning it over and over in his hands. He could see that the wood had been expertly carved into a kind of spoon.

'It's just a spoon,' he exclaimed, clearly disappointed.

'If you like,' the old man replied, smiling to himself.

'But if you wanted a spoon why not just get one from the store?' The old man sighed and carefully replaced his knife in its leather case.

‘Billy Joe didn’t you listen to a thing your daddy told you about this colony?’

The boy raised his eyes, recognising, albeit too late, the trap he had fallen into. Now he was going to get The Lecture - and he had all but asked for it. He tried a pre-emptive strike to curtail the inevitable.

‘Yeah, of course I listened. All that yawn about Ransom and his pledge, to stick to the *Back to Basics* Code -’

‘It’s not “yawn”, Billy Joe; it’s your heritage. Something you should respect.’

‘Wipe that, Pops; I never signed up to no *Back to Basics* Pledge. Your dad did, right, back on Earth, and maybe when he got here and had family it made sense for you and my old man, but I don’t scan it the same way.’

The boy got to his feet, no longer interested in his grandfather’s skills.

‘You know, maybe the Realists aren’t as totally cyboid as you Gen-Two guys are always claiming,’ he said, staring out towards the horizon.

Billy Joe knew that this would hurt the old man and quickly moved away, but his grandfather could still move fast when he wanted to, despite his years, and he was already on his feet.

‘Don’t talk like that round me, Billy Joe, I won’t have it. If it weren’t for those... those traitors, your dad would still be with us. Don’t you ever try telling me they might be right.’

It was the mention of his dad that did it; tears formed without bidding, as the boy’s usually well-buried emotions boiled over. It was hurt most of all, the pain of the loss and the agony of not having him, but it was all hidden beneath an emotional flag of convenience: anger. Billy Joe whirled round and shouted back at his grandfather, not even aware of what he was saying until the words reached his own ears.

‘Come on, Pops, wake up and look around. This colony is dying, can’t you see that? *Back to Basics* is killing us. If we don’t start thinking a bit more like the Realists we don’t have a future. None of us. How many kids have been born here in

the last ten years? How many? Ten. Maybe a dozen? How sustainable is that?’

The initial surge of adrenalin and emotion had broken now; and Billy Joe could see the pain and anger growing in his grandfather. It was a vicious circle. Once the words were out they couldn't be retracted; he had gone too far this time. There was only one thing for it.

Billy Joe turned and began to run.

‘Billy Joe! Come back! Where do you think you're going?’ his grandfather screamed after him.

‘To the future. To join the Realists.’

And then, tears streaming down his face, Billy Joe was gone.

The old man stood for a long moment, leaning on the wooden rail that surrounded the veranda, watching the dust trail his grandson had kicked up.

‘Damn it,’ he muttered to himself. For he knew in his heart that the boy was probably right.

Billy Joe ran without really looking where he was going. He hadn't exactly planned this and wasn't sure what he should do next. Saying that he wanted to join the Realists was one thing; doing it was something else. For a start no one knew exactly where the Realists were. They had some sort of base or township somewhere to the south but its exact location was merely a subject for speculation. In fact, every spring his grandpa, or one of the other Second Generation Colonists, the respected elders who were the sons and daughters of the original survivors of the *Big Bang* crash, would announce that the Realists had probably been wiped out. And then a few weeks later a farm would suffer a Realist raid and the whole city would be put back on alert.

He knew it wasn't a journey he could make on foot. If he was going to hook up with the Realists he was going to need transport. Anywhere else in the known universe this would have meant some kind of car, a hoverpod or a flitter, or one of the many different kinds of mechanical transport, but not

here, not on Axista Four. Here everything was stuck in a time warp of Ransom's devising. His interpretation of *Back to Basics* meant 'really old-fashioned' and in the case of transport that meant two options: walking or horses. Which was a shame because Billy Joe had read plenty about stealing mechanical vehicles - hot-wiring engines, overcoming security locks, and generating false flight data - but taking a horse was something else. For a start horses were a rare commodity on Axista Four; like so many things it had proved extraordinarily difficult to breed horses on this alien planet. Those that were born were closely guarded and looked after by their owners; a horse was a valuable resource for a colonist/former trying to scrape a living from the reluctant local soil. Billy Joe knew that his best bet lay in the city itself, where a horse might be found tied up outside the tavern or awaiting attention at the smithies, but he also knew that wouldn't be the case today. For today was a special day. A holiday. Today was Planet Fall Day.

Billy Joe had stopped running now and was walking, slightly out of breath, towards the cusp of a low hill. As he crested the hill he could see the so-called city spread out in the valley below. Usually it was a quiet place, almost a ghost town, but today it was humming with people. Despite the hard times the citizens of Plymouth Hope were having a party. Every year there was a gathering of the colony to celebrate and mark the day that the original colonists had landed, but this year was particularly special: it was exactly the centennial anniversary of that historic day.

Billy Joe hunkered down on his heels and watched the activity in Main Street from his lofty vantage point. There was some kind of celebration all right, spilling out of the tavern and up and down the length of Main Street. Perhaps later, when more of the raw alcoholic drink brewed by the colonists had been drunk, he might find it easy to procure a horse, but not yet. Not before the speeches and the inevitable debate about the future. Billy Joe didn't want to hear any of that. He had made his decision. But until later he wouldn't be able to act on it. Behind him Billy Joe heard the sound of a wheeled

carriage. Looking back over his shoulder he could just see a dust cloud approaching from the direction he himself had come from. He quickly looked around for a suitable hiding place. To one side of the track there was a low stone wall, beyond which was the cemetery.

Stone crosses and headstones dotted the hillside, a permanent reminder of the high cost of life on the frontier. It had never been a favourite place of Billy Joe's, not even when his father had been alive, and now.. .well, he preferred not to go there at all and that was that. But the approaching horse and carriage were getting closer. Billy Joe quickly vaulted over the wall and ducked down as the vehicle appeared.

It was a simple cart with a platform at the front where Billy Joe's grandfather Tam sat holding the reins of two horses. Billy watched as they rattled past him and headed on into the valley. His grandfather had looked stern-faced, already anticipating the reception he'd be getting later.

Billy sat for a moment with his back to the wall, staring into the sky. He'd seen pictures of Earth in books and databases and he knew what the sky there had been like. His grandfather had never seen it, of course, but his great-grandfather had. Sky of blue. That was the important thing. Sky of blue. Not this dirty orange colour. Billy knew the scientific explanation of course - something about the chemical make-up of the upper atmosphere - but he wasn't interested in the science, he was interested in the feelings. Even though it was all he had ever known, an orange sky felt wrong. Perhaps it was genetic, some kind of race memory; whatever it was Billy knew that it wasn't right. Maybe human beings were just not meant to be here. Perhaps they weren't designed to exist anywhere other than on the small blue watery world where they'd evolved.

Of course mankind had the science now to adapt their design; to rewrite their DNA to make them more at home in all sorts of different environments and locations. The human race was infinitely adaptable when it chose to be. There were all sorts of legal impediments to DNA splicing but a man like Stewart Ransom could have found a way round them if he'd

chosen to. The younger Ransom, the entrepreneur who had made a fortune out of bio-technology that was dependent on DNA engineering, had certainly played high and fast with the regulations, but the older Ransom, his outlook changed by his persuasive daughter, would have none of it. He had declared that any such genetic fiddling would be no better than cheating and definitely in violation of *Back to Basics* principles. In consequence, DNA was strictly protected on Axista Four: no genetic engineering of humans, plants or animals was allowed. Perhaps this, more than anything else, was killing the colony. Adapt and survive: wasn't that how evolution worked? But a colony of 5,000 people didn't have the luxury of time; evolution wasn't an option, not naturally. As far as Billy could see evolution needed a helping hand, something to speed up the process. But that would be a violation of the *Back to Basics* Creed and so would never happen.

Billy hadn't even realised that he had got up and was walking again. On automatic pilot he had found a path through the gravestones, walking down the side of the hill until he reached one particular plot. Billy looked down at the grave in front of him. He wasn't really surprised to find himself here. It had been inevitable from the moment he'd entered the cemetery. He didn't consciously want to be here at all, but his subconscious clearly had other ideas.

The headstone was a plain slab of the local rock that the colonists had found so many uses for. Chipped lovingly into the slab was a simple memorial:

Jason Kartryte
B.2479 D. 2535
Father, Husband, Friend

Billy knelt down, unbidden tears rolling down his face again. Nearly four years and he still hadn't got used to it. He had been twelve when it had happened, just twelve. Too young to lose a parent, especially your last surviving one. It wasn't fair. Grandpa had done what he could over the past

years but it hadn't been the same. A boy on the verge of manhood needed his father; wasn't that what all the experts said? Despite the best efforts of his grandpa and some of the other Gen-Two elders, Billy had become somewhat of a recluse. Always reading, thinking, not joining in the games with the other 'kids' (what few there were), always sneaking off to the wreck of the colony ship to look for forgotten knowledge. He'd become the city's solo problem child but no one would have expected him suddenly to declare himself a convert to the Realist cause. Billy Joe Kartryte, a Realist? After what those traitors had done to his father? But Billy knew what had happened that fateful night; he knew the truth. And he'd had enough of the lies.

Tam Kartryte steadied his horses and pulled up outside the building that served as a combined town hall and sheriff's office. He climbed carefully down from the cart and called over one of the deputies to take care of his horses. Further down the street he could see a small crowd gathering outside the tavern where a man standing on a makeshift platform of boxes was making some kind of address. Tam sighed heavily. The dark hair pulled back into a ponytail and the broad shoulders were instantly recognisable even if he hadn't been able to hear the deep rumbling voice. It was a Gen-Three troublemaker by the name of Freedom, first name Val although he preferred not to use it. Although Freedom was technically Gen-Three he was of a similar age to many of the younger Gen- Two citizens; his grandmother had given birth just months after Planet Fall.

With a heavy sigh Tam began walking down Main Street to deal with whatever Freedom was stirring up this time, as if he didn't already know. As he walked he pulled his badge from his pocket and fixed it to his leather vest; the burnished silver shone in the glare of the afternoon sun.

'How long can we go on like this?' rumbled Freedom, his voice booming out over the upturned heads of his audience. The crowd, mellowed already by the consumption of alcohol and in a holiday mood on Planet Fall Day, were lapping it up.

‘We’re dying. Dying. All because of an idea: a pledge made by our ancestors. How can we be so stupid?’

It was the same argument that Billy Joe had made. Tam wondered if his grandson had been talking to Freedom recently. He looked across the small crowd for a friendly face and found Dee Willoughby standing near the back. She caught his eye and winked supportively at him. Tam was grateful that not everyone was swallowing Freedom’s words wholesale.

‘We’ve survived here for a hundred years without compromising the founding principles. Why should we start now?’ Tam asked as he reached the edge of the crowd.

Freedom turned to see that Tam had arrived. His bearded face broke into a smile, pleased to have someone in authority against whom to pitch his argument.

‘Do you honestly think this is what Stewart Ransom would have wanted? A colony dying on its feet because it can’t agree on how to interpret a set of principles laid down over a hundred years ago?’

The crowd looked to Tam to respond, anticipating a tennis-match argument.

‘It’s not a question of interpretation; it’s a question of principle. This colony is founded on certain principles that shouldn’t be overturned on a whim,’ Tam said, speaking firmly but without raising his voice. He was relieved to see a few members of the crowd, encouraged by Dee, nodding in agreement.

‘If Ransom was here today do you not think he might change his mind?’ demanded Freedom, undeterred.

It wasn’t the first time Tam had heard this argument. In fact it had been the point made most regularly by the rebels before their departure. If Ransom were alive today what would he do? But Ransom was long dead and the problems of his colony were for the present-day colonists to solve, not him. Tam knew better than to say this aloud. Although he was Acting Leader of the Colony (a reluctant one at that) he was enough of a politician to be more guarded with his public proclamations.

'I don't think Stewart Ransom was a man to change his mind lightly' he suggested, but even as he was speaking Freedom had already started to shake his head from side to side, causing his ponytail to whip around behind his head. Tam almost laughed; now Freedom looked like a horse's arse as well as sounding like one!

'Okay, maybe we can't ask Ransom for his opinion, but we could and should do the next best thing...'

Tam quickly strode forward.

'No!' he stated firmly, and then repeated himself with equal force. 'No. That is not an option.'

Freedom gestured wildly in the direction of the distant wreck of the colony ship.

'She's over there - in one of those freezers with most of the rest of the originals. We should revive her.'

Tam shook his head. 'You know we can't do that.'

'Can't or won't?' challenged Freedom.

Now the crowd was hanging on every word; this argument had suddenly become serious. One of the biggest problems the colony had faced throughout its hundred-year history was the fact that over half of the original colonists had never been revived from their cryogenic sleep. The cryogenic chambers had been damaged on impact and two of the specialist medics had died in the crash as well. The surviving medic had made one attempted resuscitation; the subject had died an agonising death minutes after the process had been completed. Since then no one had dared make another attempt. If Stewart Ransom himself had survived the traumatic landing perhaps things might have been different, but he had been among the first humans to be buried on Axista Four.

'You know the risks.' Tam kept his argument simple.

But other voices were beginning to be heard - cries from the crowd suggesting that reviving Kirann might be just what the colony needed; fresh blood but with a direct line to the founding principles.

Encouraged by the intervention, Freedom turned back on Tam.

‘It’s what the people want, Tam. You have to listen to us.’

‘No. Not while I’m in charge. You voted me into office to make the decisions and that’s what I’ll do. We will not revive any of The Sleeping. And that is that.’

‘You won’t be sheriff forever, old man,’ warned Val Freedom menacingly.

‘But I am today. Now, I thought this was meant to be a party, a celebration. A hundred years ago our forefathers made a perilous journey across the cold depths of space to start a new life. A new life on a new world. We are living that dream. Isn’t that something to celebrate?’

Tam’s impromptu speech managed to illicit some cheers. Encouraged, he called for more ale for all. Suddenly there was some music in the air - Tam saw with some relief that the house band from the tavern had emerged from the bar with their instruments. Within minutes the crowd of malcontents had become a mass of singing, dancing citizens enjoying a very special Planet Fall Day party. Or at least most of them were. Val Freedom stood to one side, sipping at a mug of ale with a baleful expression on his bearded face. As Tam passed him, on the way to refill his own tankard, he leant over and repeated his earlier threat.

‘I’m not wrong and you know it, Tam. You won’t be sheriff forever.’

Tam carried his ale back to his jailhouse-cum-admin building and found himself a seat on the porch. Absent-mindedly he rubbed the badge with a dirty handkerchief. He felt old, too old for the burdens of office but it was another eighteen months until the next elections. Until then he was the leader of the colony: mayor, sheriff, judge and jailer in one. He sipped at his ale, relishing the raw taste. After all these years the Wildman family, who had made it their business to ensure the colony had a constant supply of alcoholic beverages, still hadn’t quite mastered the art of brewing a decent ale.

The afternoon had dragged into evening but the sounds of the revels still carried up the valley to the place where Billy

Joe was huddled up against the cold. As it had turned out there was no way he was going to get a horse tonight: there were too many people in town to sneak around unseen. For a split second he thought about going home again but he rejected the thought almost before it entered his mind; he had his pride. To go back meekly mere hours after leaving would be too shameful.

Billy Joe shivered. At this time of year the temperature on Axista Four dropped rapidly with the setting of the sun and he knew he needed to find some cover if he was to survive. He didn't have many options available to him. Nowhere to go in the city; no way to go home. He could hike to one of the other farmsteads, get into a barn perhaps, but with the constant threat of Realist raids the citizens of Plymouth Hope were pretty minded to check their barns and outbuildings before retiring for the night, and he was sure to be discovered. No, there was only one place to go to find shelter for the night. His decision prompted him to set off, walking as fast as he could, in the direction of the forest.

It took nearly an hour, and he was beginning to regret the whole day, before he reached the wreck of the colony ship. At night it was even spookier than during the day: a massive dark irregular shape sticking out into the sky, towering above the surrounding trees. Even now there was a constant odour: the smell of mechanical death. There was a security fence around the base but Billy Joe had found ways through the primitive technology years ago. Five minutes later he was inside the craft itself and quickly looked for somewhere that he could lie down. In what had once been a mess hall he found himself a couch to sleep on. He felt safe here, cocooned. Almost as soon as he lay down he was asleep, overwhelmed by tiredness.

Chapter Two

It was the silence of eternity: a moment of pure peace in the inky blackness between star systems. Tiny particles from a long-destroyed planet were slowly drifting through the nothingness, the only movement in a million square miles. Floating in this all-but-empty space was a small man-made beacon, a metallic satellite studded with antennae, bobbing about in the middle of nowhere: a space-farers' marker buoy. Suddenly tiny lights embedded in the beacon flashed, relays activated, electric current surged around the long-dormant circuitry. Something was happening. Earth Federation Navigation Beacon 466/78/HJ/ 3409 had been contacted by incoming traffic.

And then, without further warning, the very fabric of space distorted, rippled and then ripped, revealing a vortex of swirling colours. It was a beautiful yet deeply disturbing image. It seemed to demand an ugly roar of sound, a cosmic scraping of fingernails on blackboard, but, of course, in the vacuum of space there was no sound.

Then something was vomited from the maw of the vortex: a dark and brutal shape. A starship. The colours of the vortex flickered again, flashed and then the whole thing disappeared without trace, save for the new addition to the scene: the spaceship. Earth Federation Navigation Beacon 466/78/HJ/3409 exchanged brief signals with the newcomer and then slipped back into stand-by mode, the event logged and stored in its memory - only the second such entry in one hundred years.

The log entry, if checked, would report that Earth Colony Support Vessel *Hannibal* Ref: ECSV 346/6/J had re-entered Normal Space at a particular point in space/time. Just the basic facts. The beacon's sensors were not aligned to record

anything else. Which was a shame, as the *Hannibal* was an impressive sight.

Eight hundred metres long and half as high, it was a massive construction, bristling with sensors, antennae and sophisticated weaponry. As the envoy of the Federation operating for decades away from home the *Hannibal* had to be prepared for any eventuality, including war. It wasn't a beautiful spaceship by any means but it was a deeply functional one. It had been designed and built to do a job - to be a travelling Federation City; a little piece of Federation Authority on the far frontier - and it performed its role perfectly.

On board Earth Colony Support Vessel *Hannibal*, the duty crew went about their business with quiet efficiency. First Officer Veena Myles looked around the bridge and noted that all was well. Every member of the bridge crew had specific functions. Veena herself, sitting in the central command chair, was the only person who could take the time to enjoy the moment. The emergence from hyperspace was one of the most dangerous parts of their travels: one wrong move, one miscalculation and all that would remain of the *Hannibal* was a cloud of dust. Veena hadn't worried: she had total faith in her crew and her ship and, once again, they had performed a textbook, exemplary transition.

Veena was thirty years old. She had never lived on a planet; all she had ever known was life on a Colony Support Vessel. When she'd come of age her parents had offered her the chance to return to so-called normality; they had decided to retire and urged her to join them on the colony they had chosen, but Veena had refused. Instead she'd signed up with the very authority from which her parents were retiring and had quickly been assigned to the *Hannibal*. In the years since then she had often wondered whether the powers-that-be had deliberately placed her on a Deep Space vessel to stop her from changing her mind.

Veena, like most space-born humans, was tall and thin. Her red hair was cropped short to her head and her looks had earned her the nickname 'The Match'. Her fiery temper

might also have had something to do with it. She checked her status screen, built into the arm of the command chair, then picked up her data pad and headed for the captain's office. Now that they were back in Normal Space and approaching the target it was time for her commanding officer to return to the bridge.

Major Jonn Cartor barked a curt 'Come!' in response to her knock, and Veena stepped through the door as it slid open. The major was sitting at his desk, studying a screen.

'Exited from hyperspace without incident,' she reported.

'Excellent, excellent,' replied the major without looking up from the screen.

Veena stood to attention, waiting for further orders. Major Cartor was an Earth-born man twice her age. Broad-shouldered and bull-necked, he looked solid, as if made from some kind of granite. He came from a military family, a long line of marines and grunts, but he had been the first to achieve officer status. A soldier through and through, he was happier planning strategy and campaigns than in the more prosaic civilian activities he was required to carry out on board the *Hannibal*. One of the things he particularly hated was the long, detailed and very boring briefing documents sent to him from Federation Central.

'Any further contact from the colonists who requested our help?' he asked.

Veena shook her head. 'Nothing sir. No contact from the planet at all.'

'Well, there won't be, will there, from the main mob? No technology and all that... Isn't that their thing?'

Veena fought to stop herself sighing. Cartor was a good commanding officer but he did have a tendency to see everything in monochrome.

'Not exactly. The colony was founded on the principles of the *Back to Basics* Movement,' she explained.

'Which eschews all modern technology, right?'

It was clear to Veena that Cartor had failed to read the full briefing document on this one.

‘The *Back to Basics* movement believes that we’ve come to rely on technology too much, that we’ve forgotten how to live.’

Veena could see incredulity building on her commander’s face and pressed on before he could make any inane comment. ‘But they’re not proposing living like cavemen. They believe in making maximum use of natural and sustainable resources, and using simple technology.’

‘How simple is simple?’ demanded Cartor. ‘The Romans had central heating, didn’t they?’

‘There is no absolute, of course; it’s all relative. But in this case the founding fathers took a precedent. They decided that it was in the twentieth century that technology got out of control, so they drew a line in the sand well before that. Influenced by the pioneers of the Old West, they decided they should build this colony using the same resources and technology available to the settlers back then.’

Cartor raised his eyes to the heavens. ‘So what have we got here - cowboys and crukking Indians?’

Veena allowed herself a smile - she was fairly certain he was joking.

‘Perhaps - but which is which: the so-called Realists who called us in or the Loyalists playing at “Little House on the Prairie”?’

Cartor frowned, not understanding the reference. Typical, thought Veena, he’s probably never read a work of fiction in his life.

Cartor sighed. ‘Looks like we’re going to have to go in and knock some heads together.’

‘Don’t we always, sir?’ Veena smiled.

In her experience, the far frontier colonies tended to be like children, needing the authority figure of the Support Ship to turn up now and again to bring them into line. Intergalactic social workers, that’s what we are, she thought, but she kept the thought to herself; it wasn’t a self-image Cartor would be able to relate to.

‘You had better get the medics to wake our guest,’ he ordered. Veena frowned. She had been aware that they had taken a passenger on board at their last port of call, but

since he had been immediately placed in suspended animation, she had expected him to remain on ice until their scheduled return to Earth towards the end of the year. 'His stop already?' she found herself asking, unable to keep the curiosity out of her voice.

'You might say that,' Cartor answered her, keeping his cards close to his chest. 'No doubt he'll explain everything when he awakes.' With that Cartor turned back to his work, dismissing Veena. Annoyed at his unwillingness to share what he knew, Veena saluted, turned on her heel and left.

Billy Joe didn't know how long he had slept but if the aches in his shoulders were anything to go by it had been some time. He sat up and began massaging the backs of his calves; it felt like his muscles had been replaced with rocks. Why had he woken up now? Everything was as it had been when he'd fallen asleep; it was just as dark and cold (though not as dark and cold as it would have been out in the open, of course) and the steady drip, drip of water finding its way thought the broken decks of the spaceship was still the only sound to be heard. So why had he woken so suddenly, so absolutely? He'd always had a very developed anticipatory sense - not precognitive or any or that paranormal rubbish but just gut feeling - an early warning sign that something was just about to happen. It had happened when he'd broken his leg falling from a horse, when his grandpa had first taught him to ride, and again on that dark day, just before his father had been killed. On both of those occasions, however, he'd been unable to act upon the sense of warning; it had only been afterwards that he could even articulate his strange feeling. Today, however, would be different. He didn't know why the hairs on the backs of his hands were standing up stiffly but he was not going to be taken by surprise again; this time he was ready.

He got to his feet, his aches forgotten now, and he looked around, trying to pierce the gloom to see precisely what was surrounding him. He was in a relatively flat part of the ship, where a dozen decks had concertinaed on one side but not

the other. It was deep inside the wreck, well away from any of the gaping holes in the fabric of what remained of the hull. But, he realised with a sudden leap of his heart, there was a breeze. An impossible but unmistakable breeze. No, more than a breeze: this was a wind, a full-blown wind, but inside, deep inside. How could that be? And now it was stronger still, a veritable tornado and then the noise sounded. Billy Joe slammed his hands over his ears as the aural assault increased in volume. A screeching, groaning, alien noise: the trumpeting of a hundred elephants, the moans of an army of the living dead. If there had been anywhere to run, Billy Joe would never have stayed put, but as it was, he had to settle for seeking cover. He took the best and nearest opportunity he had and dived behind the couch that he had used for a bed. The noise was now accompanied by a strange blue light that waxed and waned, flashing around the room like a nightmare lighthouse beacon, and then - as suddenly as it had started - the noise and light show stopped with a resounding, reverberating series of thumps.

All was silent. Gingerly Billy Joe poked his head above the back of the couch and was astonished to see that, a few feet from his hiding space, something had appeared from nowhere. It appeared to be a massive blue box, over two metres tall, with the words 'Police Public Call Box' written on it.

Mouth hanging open, Billy Joe looked at the impossible craft in amazement, not daring to move. How long he stood there, frozen to the spot, he never knew; perhaps it was hours or merely seconds, but it certainly felt like an eternity. Billy Joe's mind raced with possibilities, his imagination running ahead of him and finding scores of scenarios that ended with him being blasted from existence by some hidden horror from within the blue box. Then, finally, after the moment of infinity had passed, the hairs on the back of Billy Joe's neck stood on end as, slowly, a door on one side of the box began to swing open.

* * *

The image on the scanner could not have been more unprepossessing if it had tried. All Zoe could make out in the general darkness was a plain metallic-looking wall.

‘It’s a spaceship,’ she announced, unable to keep a sigh out of her voice. ‘Or a space station.’

‘Och, well, there’s a surprise,’ muttered Jamie from the far side of the six-sided console. ‘And no doubt there’s a whole horde of monsters lurking just out of sight, ready to jump on us as soon as we step out o’ the TARDIS.’ Jamie was dressed, as usual, in his kilt, his ever-ready skein dhu slipped into his knee-length socks.

Zoe turned from the scanner and smiled at Jamie; he clearly shared her lack of enthusiasm at their new landing site. Perhaps they could persuade the Doctor not to explore for once: they could out-vote him two to one. Not that the TARDIS was run on democratic lines; this space/time ship had but one Captain, and even he didn’t always seem to have much control over the vessel’s journeys. Zoe had a sudden flash of inspiration; the key to getting the Doctor to do what they wanted was to make him think it was his idea. All they had to do was hijack his natural enthusiasm and apply it to the notion of leaving immediately without exploring. But how? Zoe hadn’t yet found an answer to that when the door to the TARDIS interior opened and the man himself - if indeed he was a man; Zoe had her doubts on the matter - emerged, brandishing what appeared to be a small chocolate bar in one hand. The confectionery was partly eaten and a smear of brown around the Doctor’s mouth told the rest of the story. Zoe wondered for a split second whether the Doctor on a chocolate high was more or less likely to be manipulated into a speedy exit.

‘Doctor,’ she began, ‘you’re right -’ but before she could finish her sentence the Doctor had interrupted her.

‘Right? Of course I’m right. That food machine has to go. Taste this.’

He waved the remains of the snack bar in the direction of Zoe who rapidly raised her hands and shook her head. The Doctor turned to Jamie who was already reaching for the bar.

‘Aye, I’m famished,’ said Jamie, taking the proffered bar and devouring it in two quick bites. Almost immediately a pained expression came over his face as he screwed his features up in disgust.

‘What the devil is this?’ he exclaimed.

‘Strawberry jam and peanut butter!’ explained the Doctor simply.

‘But that’s a horrible combination!’ Jamie complained.

The Doctor was nodding in agreement. ‘Terrible, terrible. Like I said, that food machine has got to go. I’ll have to open up one of the galleys. I think there’s one a floor or two below...’ He paused, thinking. ‘Or maybe above. Never mind, I’m sure we’ll find it.’ The Doctor looked around the console room with a critical eye, as if weighing up a spot of redecoration. ‘You know, I always fancied a kitchen area in here, somewhere to make a nice cup of cocoa.. Maybe one day...’ he trailed off, then suddenly seemed to become aware of the scanner, displaying the gloomy view outside the ship.

‘Oh my, have we landed? I hadn’t noticed.’ The Doctor, all thoughts of food, kitchens and redecorating gone from his mind, hurried to the console to check the readings.

Zoe and Jamie exchanged a quick anxious glance. It was now or never.

‘Actually, Doctor, I was just saying you were right... in what you said the other day. About our next stop.’

‘Our next stop?’ questioned the Doctor, not looking up from the dials he was scanning.

‘Yes,’ Zoe continued, gathering in confidence. ‘You were saying we needed some fresh air, some countryside, a bit of sunshine... Anything but another space station, that’s what you said. Isn’t that right, Jamie?’

Jamie was frowning, trying to recall a conversation that had never taken place.

‘I don’t remember th- ,’ he began before Zoe quickly cut him off.

‘Of course you do.’ She shot him a significant look and wiggled her eyebrows and was relieved to see the penny drop.

'Oh aye, that's right, Doctor. You said you'd find us somewhere to remind me of the Highlands.'

'Did I?'

Zoe wasn't sure whether the Doctor was buying this or not. She made a 'go on' sign at Jamie, who floundered for a moment and then continued.

'You said you'd find us somewhere to relax, with plenty of sun, the great outdoors, plenty of peace and quiet.'

'Like this?' asked the Doctor. Jamie and Zoe looked at him and found that he was waving in the direction of the scanner. The Doctor was adjusting a knob that seemed to control the camera' that fed the scanner; the display now showed another section of the grey corridor but one with a great tear in the fabric, beyond which a vast expanse of sparsely grassed plain was visible. Even in the black and white of the monitor the gleaming sun could be seen reflecting off small lakes. It was as tranquil a view as Zoe or Jamie could hope to see. In unison they both sighed. The Doctor turned to them both, steepling his hands and grinning with his regular enthusiasm.

'Shall we explore?' he suggested. And without waiting for an answer he reached for the door-opening control.

Billy Joe watched with fascination as three people emerged from the dark box. How was it possible for the three of them to have been inside in any kind of comfort, he wondered? Come to that, how was it possible for the box to appear out of thin air? Somehow he had managed to get his reluctant limbs to move and while the door had slowly opened, Billy Joe manoeuvred himself behind the seating area in the mess hall. Now, lying flat on the ground, he could see three pairs of feet. Although he couldn't see the rest of their bodies Billy Joe was fairly sure the new arrivals were human. One pair of feet was shod in sturdy-looking boots and thick woollen socks. The three or four inches of hairy leg that he could see above this suggested both that the creature was male and that he didn't appear to be wearing trousers. The second pair of feet was much smaller and delicate, suggesting a woman, an

impression confirmed by the style of the shoe, a silver-coloured boot in soft leather with small, elevated heels. The final newcomer wore rather battered brown suede shoes that looked as if they had been worn for years and bore the scars of frequent repairing. The bony ankles of this man - if indeed it was a man - were clad in mismatched socks, one a dark shade of blue and the other sporting the image of a purple cartoon dinosaur, and the legs were dressed in slightly baggy checked trousers. Billy Joe listened with amazement as they began to speak in his own language.

‘Well, now, this is interesting...’ The voice was low and somehow friendly, full of an inexhaustible passion for new experiences. By the sound alone Billy Joe thought he would like the owner of this voice. ‘Jamie, Zoe, come over and take a look at this.’

Billy watched No Trousers and Silver Boots cross to join Odd Socks. Neither name was familiar to Billy but Jamie sounded a little like James, a name that had been popular among Gen-One parents for their sons, so Billy decided that No Trousers must be Jamie. He wondered what the third character’s name was but he didn’t have to wait long.

‘What is it, Doctor?’ A girl’s voice - Zoe, Billy Joe assumed. She sounded pretty and Billy Joe flushed at the thought. There were only two girls in Plymouth Hope anywhere near his age and neither Betsy-Ann Cahill nor Wendy McKinnock had ever shown any interest in him, leaving Billy Joe severely restricted in his emotional development when it came to relationships with the opposite sex. Nevertheless, he felt instinctively that he would be able to talk to Zoe.

‘You can get a better view from here, see...’ he heard the Doctor say.

‘I was right - it is a spaceship.’ exclaimed Zoe.

‘More like a wreck of one, if you ask me,’ muttered a new voice gruffly. This must be Jamie, thought Billy Joe, marvelling at the newcomer’s unusual accent.

‘You’re right there, Jamie,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’d say we were in the remnants of some kind of colony ship that had a bit of a crash landing. I wonder if any of the colonists survived?’

Billy Joe very nearly jumped up to answer in the affirmative but although their voices sounded friendly he couldn't forget the amazing manner of their arrival. For all he knew they could be allies of the Realists. Or representatives of the Federation; maybe even Earth Gov officials. He dared not reveal himself until he knew more about them. The trio of newcomers was examining a schematic of the ship that the girl, Zoe, had managed to locate on a bulkhead. Taking his chance, Billy Joe began to move, crawling backwards and then sideways like a crab, until he was around a corner and able to get to his feet. Moving as stealthily as he could, he hurried away from the newcomers, not noticing that he was heading deep into the wreck, deeper than he had ever been before.

Thirty kilometres away from the crash site, in the shadow of a mountain range to the south of Plymouth Hope, a ramshackle collection of prefab buildings and survival shelters formed the only other human settlement on the planet. Constructed almost entirely from materials stolen from the parent colony, the Realists' Base didn't even have a name. The Realists just called it Home'. The Loyalists, if they could ever find it, would have other words for it. Amid the prefabs that made up the base the crumbling ruins of an earlier settlement could just be seen, poking through the dusty soil like teeth emerging from a gum.

Hali Devine carefully reassembled her replica-41 calibre Colt Lightning, having spent the last half hour oiling and cleaning it. She loaded six bullets into the chamber and slipped the gun into her holster. She wished she had an energy weapon rather than this brutal instrument; a weapon that could be adjusted merely to stun rather than one that would tear into flesh reeking bloody havoc. Of course it was all Ransom's fault, as with everything that was wrong with life on this godforsaken colony. According to the rules of *Back to Basics*, an energy weapon was considered a high-tech product and thus banned, whereas the simplistic, mechanical and, in Hali's opinion, unsubtle Colt revolver was

an acceptable alternative. Not that Ransom had envisaged a life of constant warfare on his perfect colony world, but the cursory results of the Planetary Survey Probe, which he had consulted when deciding on his target planet, had alerted him to the presence of native wildlife from which the colonists might need to protect themselves.

Hali checked her watch and, slipping her jacket on, hurried out of the building. Over by the corral, where the Realists' precious quartet of horses was held, Hali could see her three companions were already waiting for her. Like Hali, the trio was dressed in dark, tight-fitting clothing. The largest man wore a wild bushy ginger beard, perhaps grown as compensation for his shiny bald pate. The second man was darker-hued and diminutive; his dark eyes darted all over the place, missing nothing. The third waiting figure was female, like Hali, but that was where the similarities ended. Where Hali was tall and thin, Saro was short and thick-set; Hali's hair was blonde and cut in a sensible bob, Saro wore her dark hair shaved at a length of a few millimetres.

'Are we doing this or what?' asked the darker-skinned man as Hali arrived.

'All in good time, Chamick,' she said tartly, as she joined the trio. Chamick was young and impetuous; his energy was undeniable but he was given to overenthusiasm and needed to be reined in.

'Remember, we need food more than anything else on this raid,' she said to the group in general. 'In and out as quick as possible and let's try to avoid any fighting.'

'If they start shooting I'm not leaving my gun in its holster,' Chamick began hotly.

'If we do this right they won't even know we were there,' rumbled the big bearded man, Gathan. Chamick looked up into the face of the older man and, seeing his expression, decided to avoid further comment. He turned back to Hali, who was now putting a saddle on to one of the horses, a well-built chestnut mare.

'We do need some electrical bits and pieces too. If I'm to improve our signal...' Chamick was a bit of a techie and was

responsible for the group's slightly ropey communications equipment.

'Why not use some from the alien bunker?' suggested Gathan. Chamick shook his head firmly. 'It's not compatible technology,' he explained. 'Maybe given time to study it... But we don't have the time do we?'

'Anyway,' added Saro with a grin, Max would never let you take anything from his find in a million years. Not until he's finished with it.'

Hali nodded, as she mounted her horse. 'Max does rather treat that thing as his own special project.

'I don't know how you put up with it,' grinned Saro as she hoisted herself into the saddle of her own horse.

'Actually, we'd better check in on Max before we go. In case he has anything to add to our shopping list,' said Hali, leading the horse out of the corral.

'What, like a full First Contact lab, language analyser, bio-scanner, that kind of thing?' asked Chamick, a little sarcastically.

'Maybe not,' replied Hali, grinning.

When they reached the entrance to the caves a few minutes later, the quartet found Max's horse wandering around looking lost, the rope that had tied him to a tree trailing behind him. Throwing her own reins to Saro, Hali had quickly dismounted, recaptured Max's horse and found a more secure place to tie him. 'Max Forde might be a master of a dozen scientific disciplines but he can't tie knots to save his life,' she commented. 'Anyone else coming in to see Max's toy?' she asked, but the other three shook their heads, maybe a little too quickly. Hali couldn't blame them, the passageway through the rock was both dark and cold and although it started out in quite a large cave, it rapidly became little more than a tunnel. No one in their right mind would ever have explored it for fun, but Max had been on the trail of a faint electro-magnetic signal and had hardly been aware of his surroundings. Although the last fifty metres or so were traversable only on all fours, all thoughts of

discomfort had evaporated once he reached the metal hull of the alien bunker.

Max had a theory that the aliens' settlement had been wiped out by some conflict or natural disaster and the survivors had retreated to the bunker. Exactly how long ago this had all happened was still a subject of some dispute - the ruins were clearly ancient but, by contrast, the materials in the bunker were very well preserved.

Since he first discovered the bunker, Max had tried to make the approach to it slightly easier to navigate, but he had been limited by the fact that using explosives might damage the whole cave system. He had managed to persuade some of the men at the Realist camp to aid him with picks and shovels but they had quickly grown uninterested in the manual labour. As one volunteer had put it, 'This is exactly the sort of thing I wanted to get away from at Plymouth Hope!'

As she reached the bunker, and the crude entrance hatch Max had cut with the last power pack they had for their solitary energy weapon, Hali pulled out her communicator. Although no longer bound by the ridiculous *Back to Basics* ideology that so limited life for the Loyalists, they still found their cache of high technology was very limited. Each raid on the colony ship gave them more and more supplies but the results were extremely random. And the colony ship itself had never carried that much high technology on the orders of Ransom himself. Nevertheless, month by month, the Realists were getting hold of bits and pieces, although never the things they really needed like power generators or solar chargers. The communicators had small solar chargers built in but the power packs they charged were relatively tiny and consequently they avoided using them unless absolutely necessary.

The alien bunker was nowhere near as big as the colony ship but it was still a sizeable complex and Max had not explored all of its many levels. Without arranging a rendezvous, Hali could have spent hours walking round the bunker looking for him.

When he bounded up a few minutes later she could see that he had made a new discovery. Max was a little older than Hali, in his mid-thirties. Tall and thin, he would have been good-looking if he'd made the effort, but he rarely did. His sandy-coloured hair was sticking up in clumps as usual, and he had a couple of days' beard-growth on his chin.

'What have you found now?' she asked as he greeted her with a swift kiss on the cheek.

'I think I've worked out how their suspended animation works,' he announced happily. 'Come and see.'

'Maybe later,' suggested Hali, resisting his attempts to drag her down the corridor. 'We're going on a raid.'

'Oh right. In that case can you try and get some chocolate?' he smiled.

Hali returned the grin. 'Like that is a priority?'

'Okay, then, at least let me tell you about my discovery...'

A few weeks earlier, while exploring, Max had discovered some survivors of the disaster that had befallen their predecessors. The aliens - Max hadn't been able to identify the race - were lying in coffin-like cabinets in some kind of suspended animation. Max had been frustrated at his inability to study them fully, but had done his best with the scant resources he had at his disposal.

'I think the deep sleep they're in is a sort of hibernation...' he explained to Hali, unable to contain his enthusiasm.

'What, like bears?' Hali asked.

'No, not really. But it is organically maintained; that marking on their chests I noticed, I think it's actually another life form, some kind of parasite. And I think it's the parasite that's keeping them alive,' he told her.

'And if you remove the parasite,' wondered Hali, 'would they wake up or die?'

Max shrugged. 'I really don't know. If I could just get hold of a revival kit from the colony ship...'

Hali frowned, confused. 'But we use a cryogenic system. Surely it wouldn't be compatible?'

'But I might be able to amend it. Can you look out for one? Please, Hali, for me?'

'I'll see what I can do,' she assured him, 'but food is the priority. The vegetables we're growing are feeding more of the local insect population than any of us!'

She gave him a quick kiss and a hug, and headed back towards the surface.

'Be careful,' he called after her, but she was already out of earshot, leaving Max with the echo of his own warning reverberating around the tunnel.

Chapter Three

The four horses galloped across the plain, a massive cloud of dust trailing behind them. Hali led them in an arc, taking them around the area of Plymouth Hope, well clear of the outlying farmsteads, and bringing her raiding party to the more exposed side of the crashed colony ship. At the forest they slowed their pace, allowing their steeds to find a safe way through the undergrowth and the trees. Occasionally they could hear noises of movement somewhere amongst the trees and Hali would hold out a hand, bringing their progress to a halt. The four of them would sit alert in their saddles, not daring to speak, the only sound the slightly laboured breathing of the horses. Then, when Hali was certain that they weren't about to run into any Loyalists, they would resume their forward progress. Through the treetops, they began to get tantalising glimpses of the dark tower of metal that was the colony ship, each time seeming to loom larger over the thinning forest. After a while, Hali signalled for them all to dismount. Efficiently and without words, they fed and watered the horses and tethered them before beginning the final stage of their journey on foot. As they walked they began to find bits and pieces of debris, parts of the ship that had shorn off in the final destructive descent. At last, they reached the edge of the point of first impact, where the destruction of the trees began. Even now, a hundred years after the event, the natural habitat was struggling to reassert itself and the raiding party were now able to see their target, still half a mile away, at the end of the trail. Hali beckoned them on and, keeping to the shadows, they began to follow the line of destruction towards their target - the wreck of *The Big Bang*.

What Hali and her companions didn't know was that, for once, the colony ship was not entirely devoid of life. Deep in

its dark depths, Billy Joe was looking for a way out and, not far away, the Doctor, Jamie and Zoe were engaged on a similar quest. The Doctor had popped back inside the TARDIS and emerged with a pair of torches, which he had handed to Zoe and Jamie. For himself, the Doctor had managed to locate a battered miner's hat, complete with lamp, which to the astonishment of all three of the TARDIS crew, actually worked when the Doctor switched it on. The Doctor had then led the way, taking his friends into the lower decks.

'Do ye nae think we should be heading for the outside, Doctor?' enquired Jamie, pointing back towards the blue sky they had seen, which was no longer visible directly but which contributed to the light in the area they had left behind.

'I rather think that tear in the hull will be quite some distance from the ground, Jamie. And I don't know about you but I don't really fancy jumping from a great height.'

'You think there might be a way out at ground level?' asked Zoe. The Doctor nodded.

'Put it this way, Zoe, I certainly hope so...' The Doctor turned to give her a reassuring smile and continued on his way. There was a sudden gasp, the Doctor's arms windmilled wildly and then he shot from view, like a cartoon character realising it has run beyond the edge of a cliff. 'Oh my giddy aunt,' exclaimed the Doctor, his voice echoing and diminishing at the same time. There was a muffled crash and then silence. Zoe and Jamie exchanged anxious looks and then cautiously hurried forward as fast as they dared.

'Doctor, are you all right?' Jamie shouted, trying to keep the alarm out of his voice.

Relief washed over him a moment later as the Doctor's voice floated up to him.

'Ah yes. Still in one piece, Jamie, thank you for asking. But step carefully up there, both of you, the floor's not exactly stable.'

Zoe and Jamie were both training their torch beams on to the floor just in front of them and could see the jagged edges of the hole through which the Doctor had fallen. Creeping

further forward, they peered over the edge and were relieved to see the Doctor getting to his feet and brushing down his already shabby jacket. 'Terribly dusty in here,' they heard him mutter. Zoe had more practical issues on her mind.

'Doctor,' she asked, 'how are we going to get down there?' Although the Doctor seemed to have survived a drop of some five metres without damage, Zoe rather doubted that she or Jamie would be so lucky. And although the TARDIS contained all manner of high-tech medical devices from many eras and locations, they wouldn't be much help to them if they broke a limb here, floors below where they had left their craft. The Doctor had clearly been thinking along similar lines.

'There must be an emergency staircase or access shaft somewhere - maybe even a lift shaft you can climb down - see what you can find. But be careful, eh?

'Och, don't worry about us. Just you stay where you are Doctor, and don't go wandering off.' Jamie indicated a direction to Zoe with his torch. 'I'll try this way, you go the other. Call me if you find something.'

Zoe nodded and headed off in the opposite direction. She could recall, in perfect detail, the schematic they'd seen on the upper deck but didn't want to tell Jamie that she knew exactly where the service shaft was until she was sure that it was unblocked by debris. She knew how much he hated it when she denied him the chance of a bit of exploring.

Jamie moved as quickly as was possible on the irregular terrain, letting the flashlight in his hand swing in a wide arc, illuminating as much of his path, and the immediate surroundings, as he could. Although concentrating on the job in hand, part of his mind was occupied with concern for the Doctor. Jamie trusted him implicitly and had travelled with him for what sometimes seemed like forever, but he could be incredibly frustrating. He certainly had a knack for getting into trouble, and dragging Jamie and Zoe into it as well. No doubt there would be more problems than just searching for a staircase before they would get safely back to the TARDIS - there always were. The thought of the many strange and

fearful creatures he had encountered during his travels with the Doctor made Jamie suddenly very conscious of the dark areas beyond his torchlight. Was it his imagination or had he just heard a movement over to his right? It couldn't have been Zoe - she was somewhere behind him. Was it just his mind playing tricks on him? And then he heard it again and when he swung his torch around in the direction of the noise he caught a fleeting glimpse of something moving. There, behind a pile of broken furniture...

'Come out, I know you're there...' Jamie spoke boldly but his gut churned with fear. If it were a Cyberman or a Yeti he wouldn't stand a chance. But during the split-second that he'd been able to see his stalker he hadn't seen any silver or fur; if anything Jamie would have sworn it was a human he'd seen, and a young one at that. Perhaps the Doctor had been right - the would-be colonists who'd come to the planet in this spacecraft might have survived.

'I won't harm you,' he promised.

He waited, keeping his torch trained on the area where he thought the stranger was hiding. Suddenly there was movement - but from a point some metres to the right. Jamie swung his torch again, and this time there was no doubt - a humanoid boy, a few years younger than Jamie, had emerged from cover and was running away as fast as he dared. Jamie realised that he must have crawled on his belly away from the point where he had first seen them until he dared get to his feet to run.

'Hey, no, wait...' he shouted after the fleeing boy but it was clear he wasn't going to stop. Throwing caution to the wind Jamie began to run after him. If nothing else it was clear the boy knew his way around the wreck, perhaps he could help Jamie get to the Doctor.

* * *

Zoe's arms ached. The metal ladder she had discovered was in an extremely dark, and very claustrophobic, tube. Unable to climb down and hold on to the torch, she had been forced to turn it off and had managed to secure it down the front of her jumpsuit. Now it was digging into her ribs in a very

painful way but she didn't have a hand free to adjust its position. She dare not take either hand off the ladder for fear of falling. It hadn't been designed with someone of her stature in mind and each rung was a long way from the next. For Zoe this meant an agonising climb dangling from each rung, stretching out her legs blindly for the next one she could step on.

When she'd discovered the access tube, she had tried calling Jamie but all she got in return was an echo of her own voice reverberating off the metal walls. It was a big ship and, if Jamie had gone as far as she had in the opposite direction, he could well be a hundred metres away by now, if not more. Zoe considered her options - what was the most logical plan of action? She had decided to check that the ladder actually took her somewhere before trying to find Jamie, a decision she was now regretting. She let go with her left hand, and let herself swing from her right, stretching her left leg down to where she knew the next rung had to be. Pointing her toes she just made contact. Relieved, she let her weight down onto the new rung, grasped the side of the ladder with her left hand and relinquished the grip she had with her right hand. Her stomach lurched as the rung she'd just reached gave way under her weight and she plummeted down. Her hands, sweaty from the effort of the climb, were unable to keep their grip and she fell at least a metre before her descent was arrested. Breathing heavily Zoe locked her right arm round the nearest rung and reached for the torch with her free hand. When her trembling fingers had located the switch and turned on the beam she nearly laughed. She was at the bottom of the tube and there, right in front of her, his attention on something that she couldn't yet see clearly, was the Doctor.

'Ah there you are, Zoe,' said the Doctor, casually glancing back at her, as if he'd been expecting her all along. 'Come and have a look at this...'

Billy Joe ran for his life, all the built-up tension and fear exploding into action. He did not really know why he was

running, the man in the skirt with the strangely accented English didn't seem particularly threatening, but the manner of his arrival had been so unusual (coupled with the fact that Billy Joe was somewhere he shouldn't be), that had been enough to set him off. And now he had started to run he dared not stop. He could hear the stranger coming after him. Billy Joe darted between the debris that filled the corridors, clambering over rickety piles of the stuff with reckless haste but, despite his best efforts, he could tell that he was failing to put any distance between himself and his pursuer. He glanced back to see exactly how far away Jamie was. His eyes had adjusted to the lack of light on this level by now and he was shocked to see the stranger only a few metres behind him. He turned back and scrambled up a fallen support beam that lay over a pile of debris. At the top his weight was sufficient to shift the balance of the beam on its fulcrum. He steadied himself with his arms outstretched and stepped forward tentatively. Like a primitive seesaw the beam shifted, and Billy Joe slid along what was now the down side. As he neared the bottom he cast caution to the wind and jumped forward only to find the floor giving way under him.

He had time for a startled cry and then he was falling. Desperately he stretched his arms out and managed somehow to grab hold of the end of the steel beam that was now poking into the new hole he had just made. With a great effort he got a second hand on to the end of the beam and hung there for a moment. He didn't dare look down; the broken pieces of floor had fallen for a good couple of seconds before he heard them impact on the ground below. His heart leapt into his mouth as a metallic scraping sound filled the air and he felt the beam begin to move. It was sliding, slowly but with increasing speed, into the abyss. Was his pursuer pushing it, intending to make him fall? A second later a man's hand burst through the hole.

'Grab hold. I'll pull you up,' offered Jamie. Billy Joe hesitated, not sure whether he could trust him. The beam shifted again, lowering him further into the darkness and almost beyond the reach of his would-be rescuer's hand. Billy

Joe couldn't be certain about the stranger but he could trust gravity; it wasn't really a choice at all. He grabbed the man's hand. Jamie was not a big man by any means but he was strong, and Billy Joe was wiry and lightly built; with a grunt or two Jamie was able to haul the boy up and out of the hole. He scrambled on to safe ground as the steel beam hurtled past him into the darkness. A moment later a loud boom announced its landing below.

Still panting from his exercise, Billy Joe turned to look at his rescuer.

'I guess I owe you my life, stranger,' he said.

Jamie was also breathless. 'Don't mention it,' he gasped, self-deprecatingly.

Zoe was a little upset that the Doctor had shown so little interest in her well-being but she soon felt better when she saw why. The Doctor had found some kind of secure bulkhead, intact, and made of a more resilient metal than the rest of the spaceship. Where most of the wreck was showing signs of the inevitable entropy, metal fatigue, rust and decay, this section was gleaming as if it were new. Zoe was reminded of the old joke about space distress beacons: if they're made of such indestructible material why don't we use the same stuff to make the spaceships?

The Doctor was exploring the surface of the bulkhead with his fingertips. 'Can you feel it?' he asked Zoe in a fascinated tone, 'I think these panels are more than just decoration, I think they're doors.'

'Doors to what?'

'I don't know but I've seen their like before somewhere, if only I could remember. There's something of the Tombs of Telos about them.'

Zoe was immediately concerned. She had heard from Jamie all about the Doctor's adventures on the Cybermen's adopted planet. 'You don't think there are Cybermen behind there, do you?'

'Oh goodness me, of course not. What would Cybermen be doing on a ship like this? No, Zoe, I think there must be

something else behind here, something that was important to the colonists but something they've managed to do without.'

Zoe looked along the length of the shiny bulkhead - it disappeared into the distance in both directions. If these panels were doors then there were lots of them: maybe hundreds of them. What might they be concealing?

The Doctor had his hands pressed together, fingertip to fingertip, and the tip of his tongue was sticking out of the corner of his mouth, a sure indication that he was deep in thought about something. Zoe knew the signs well. The Doctor was weighing up the odds, battling with his incurable curiosity.

'Do you want to try and open it?' she asked, although she already suspected she knew the answer. The Doctor could no more resist a locked door than he could a nice cup of strong tea; however, on this occasion he surprised her.

'No,' he said finally after a long pause. 'No, I don't think I do. Not yet. Let's see if we can find out a little bit more about where we are first. Come on, I'm sure there must be some people here somewhere.'

And with that the Doctor turned away from the bulkhead and started to look for an exit. The passageway running along the front of the bulkhead disappeared into darkness in both directions but the Doctor thought he could see a faint glow of daylight from one end and began to lead the way.

Some hundred metres back in the other direction, Jamie and his new friend Billy Joe were just coming across the shiny bulkhead themselves. They'd found a twin to the service ladder Zoe had used earlier and had climbed down. Billy Joe dropped to the floor and found Jamie examining the unusually pristine section of wall.

'This disnae look as old as the rest of the place,' he commented as Billy Joe joined him.

'I've never scanned it before,' Billy Joe confessed, 'I've never been this deep into the wreck. I don't think anyone ever has.'

Jamie frowned as a thought hit him. 'You say this was the ship your people sailed in -' he stopped, seeing Billy Joe's

look of disbelief. I mean travelled in, to start this colony?’ The boy nodded. ‘So why haven’t they stripped this whole place? Surely all these materials could have been useful to them.’

Billy Joe smiled wryly. ‘You’re not wrong there. But that’s not what the Gen-Ones thought. They had this idea, this rulebook to live by. They call it *Back to Basics*. More like “Back to the Stone Age” if you ask me.’

Now Jamie was confused. ‘*Back to Basics*? So what’s that all about, then?’

Billy Joe sighed. ‘The reason this colony was finished before it even began...’

Jamie took another look at the rectangular patterns cut into the surface of the bulkhead. ‘Do you think these might be doors?’ he wondered. Billy Joe shrugged. Jamie gave a panel a little shove but nothing happened. Using his shoulder he tried again but he just bounced off. ‘Reckon it’s solid,’ he decided.

Somewhere behind the bulkhead a sensor registered the motion and activated a sequence of signals. Something long dormant began to stretch and move.

‘There’s someone in the ship,’ stated Freedom bluntly.

Tam looked up from his desk and with cold eyes regarded the man who had just burst into his office with nary a by-your-leave.

‘Folks usually knock before barging in,’ he suggested levelly.

‘Didn’t you hear what I said? There are people in the wreck,’ Val Freedom repeated, leaning forward heavily on the desk. Tam wrinkled his nose with disgust; the liquor fumes on Freedom’s breath were unmistakable.

‘Your imagination must be working overtime Val. Go home, sleep it off.’

‘I’m telling you I heard it with my own ears,’ insisted Freedom.

Tam looked at the man again; for all his faults - and there were many - Freedom wasn’t the type to make up a story like

this. Even when he'd been drinking. Tam realised that he needed to hear more of this story.

'What were you doing up in the exclusion area anyway? Looking to do a little pillaging?' The flush of anger that burst on to Freedom's face told Tam that he was wrong on that front.

'I'm not a lawbreaker, Tam. Don't you go accusing me of a thing like that.'

'I'm sorry, Val, of course you're not - apart from the laws you don't take too kindly to, like the ones about brewing your own ale. Is that what you were doing up there; have you set up some kind of distillery in the shadow of the wreck?'

'What if I have? The important thing is that I was up there and I heard noises in the wreck. Movement.'

'That's why we keep out of it Val - it's a dangerous place, falling to bits.'

'I heard voices. I swear I did. We need to get a posse up.'

'You think it's a Realist raid?' asked Tam, taking his visitor seriously now.

'Who else is it going to be?'

As the Doctor and Zoe made their way towards the light, neither of them was aware that a security system had been triggered by their travelling companion. Relays that had been inactive for over a century suddenly burst into life. Electronic messages ran back and forth from sensors in the bulkhead to a central command-processing unit. Rendered in audible fashion the signals would have sounded like a trill of bleeps and high-pitched tones. Translated into colloquial English they might have sounded more like this:

What the hell was that banging?

No idea.

Check it out.

I'll just send Bob. No need for a general call-up, eh?

Just get him down there now and get him to tell us what's happening then!

Okay, okay, keep your hair on...

Impatient to reach some open air Zoe had taken the lead, but found that she had to keep going back to fetch the Doctor as he became fascinated by some piece of equipment or another. Finally she'd grabbed his hand, and started to drag him along. She suddenly felt his hand pull away from her and heard a strangled cry. Turning, she saw that the Doctor was being held by a newcomer - some kind of humanoid robot. For a moment Zoe thought that the Doctor had been wrong and it was a Cyberman, but a second glance told her that this wasn't one of the semi-organic monsters who had attempted to invade the Wheel. This robot was white and silver, its limbs solid steel cylinders with bulkier hands and feet. Zoe could see that one of the panels on the bulkhead had opened and she guessed this was where the robot had come from so quickly and silently.

Unlike the robot servitors she had known on the Wheel this was a basically humanoid creature, a primitive android, although the metallic arms and control cables made it look more like an animated drawing of a human skeleton and nervous system than a real person. It had gripped the Doctor around the neck, tightly. Zoe could hear the Doctor gasping for breath and knew she had to act quickly. The robot attacker didn't seem to have any means of expressing itself and Zoe had a hunch that it was a relatively unsophisticated machine. It seemed to be a fighting robot, programmed for defensive and offensive action, but little else. If she could just make it regard her as a more immediate threat surely it would leave the Doctor alone.

Zoe cast about for something she could use to attack the robot. Her eyes lighted upon what was could only be a fire extinguisher. She grabbed the small metallic tube and pointed the nozzle in the direction of the robot. She felt a bit of a fool but it was a weapon of sorts.

'Let the Doctor go,' she ordered the robot, more in hope than expectation. The robot took a step forward, without releasing its grip on the Doctor at all. Zoe fingered the firing mechanism and shot a burst of the chemical fire retardant into the metallic face' of the warrior robot. Instantly it re-

evaluated her status, and elevated her to enemy number one. Dropping the Doctor like a sack of potatoes, it strode forward with unexpected speed and wrenched the extinguisher from her grasp, before advancing on Zoe. Unable to help herself, Zoe let out a high-pitched scream.

On the floor the Doctor was recovering from his ordeal with his customary speed. He had already pulled out his trusty sonic screwdriver and was making adjustments to it. By now Zoe was in the grip of the robot, which had lifted her by her neck into the air. Zoe was sure it was about to snap her neck like a twig but to her intense relief the Doctor activated the sonic device and the robot instantly froze. The Doctor helped her prise the robotic hands from her neck and she dropped to the floor.

While Zoe recovered her breath the Doctor took a quick look at the robot, uncovering a service panel and exposing its electronic innards. 'A kind of walking weapon?' suggested Zoe.

The Doctor nodded. 'Effective but limited. I'll just have to wipe its short-term memory. We don't want its command systems to get the wrong idea about us, do we?'

The Doctor made a few passes with the sonic device and then sealed the unit back up. The robot sprang back to life and retraced its steps into the bulkhead. A smooth door slid back into place and, a few moments later, there was no sign that the robot had ever been there.

'What was something like that doing on a colony ship?' wondered Zoe. The Doctor shrugged. 'To defend the colonists from any hostile local wildlife, perhaps? They don't appear to have needed it though.'

'Do you think there are any more of them behind there?' Zoe asked, looking back along the length of the bulkhead. The Doctor shook his head. 'What would be the point of that? If each of those panels contained one of those you'd have a virtual army. I hardly think a colony ship would make space for a robot army, do you?'

Zoe had to admit that it was unlikely. But then, she added, it was fairly unlikely that the systems to waken a defence

drone like that were still active after the crash. The Doctor shook his head in disagreement. 'Some of these things can remain dormant for centuries, even longer. You'd be surprised, Zoe.'

In fact, hundreds of kilometres above the surface of the planet, something was happening that perfectly demonstrated the Doctor's point. Slowly and majestically the ECSV *Hannibal* was moving into orbit. On board, the crew were still scanning in vain for further radio contact from the rebel colonists. Their communications equipment scanned every conceivable wavelength and frequency but found only static.

However, there were signals travelling in the other direction: from planetary orbit to the surface of the planet. Signals that were cloaked and shielded and beyond the *Hannibal's* ability to detect.

Inside an artificial satellite, disguised as an asteroid, the arrival of the Earth Colony Support Vessel had been registered by automatic systems that had been dormant for even longer than the ones the Doctor and Zoe had just tripped. Recently reactivated when Max Forde had first powered up some of the systems inside the alien bunker on the planet, the Planetary Defence System was now, once again, primed and ready for action. The asteroid-based weapons were brought on line and targeted on the approaching ship. After scans failed to recognise the *Hannibal*, an electronic decision was made and the signal to fire was given. But although the defence systems had survived in standby mode for over a century, the ammunition had not. The offensive weapon energy cells were depleted: no offensive firepower was available to destroy the ship.

Unable to fulfil its primary programming, the system moved to a secondary function and sent a signal to its base on Axista Four from which the artificial asteroid had been launched a hundred years ago.

Although the *Hannibal* was incapable of registering the signal, there was another facility with the ability both to

receive the signal and react to its instructions. In the alien bunker communications computers that had not functioned for years suddenly flickered into activity.

Max Forde, checking the aliens in their suspended animation cabinets, saw no clue to this activity. The faint hum of the alien technology that had been a constant since he had first found the hidden bunker merely increased by a tiny fraction, but Max didn't notice the minor change in tone. He took one last look at the strange canine-like but humanoid aliens - and the parasitic creatures stuck to their chests - and headed for the exit.

Moments later, the main computer responded to the instruction from the orbiting defence station and fired a sequence of signals to the first of the sleeping pods. There was no immediate reaction from the aliens themselves, but had Max still been there he might have noticed a subtle twitching in the parasite creatures as their skin began to turn from brown to a vivid green.

It was not much of a posse, but this late in the Planet Fall celebration it had been hard to round up many who were capable of mounting any defence against the suspected Realist raid. In the end, Tam had to settle for a small party consisting of himself, the inevitable Val Freedom and the Fison brothers, two Gen-Two boys who had an allergy to alcohol and were, therefore, the only volunteers that he could guarantee to be totally sober. All four were armed with a combination of rifles and handguns.

Cal Fison led the way, carrying a heavy searchlight-style torch to penetrate the dark of the ship. The raiders would no doubt be looting the stores in the remaining holds and that was where the posse would look for them first. But they would at least have the advantage of light.

The Doctor and Zoe had come to an enforced stop. Their path blocked by a small mountain of debris above which, tantalisingly, was a rip in the fabric of the ship's hull displaying the darkening sky.

‘I don’t think we can get up to it, can we, Doctor?’ Zoe said in a disappointed tone.

The Doctor sighed and shook his head. ‘No, I rather think we can’t,’ he said, extending a comforting arm around her shoulders and pulling her around to face back the way they had come.

‘Are you sure we can’t get back to the TARDIS and go, just for once?’ she pleaded.

‘Not without Jamie,’ was the Doctor’s only reply. Zoe felt a pang of guilt. How could she have forgotten Jamie like that?

‘Did I hear someone mention my name?’ A familiar voice emerged from the darkness, followed a moment later by the equally familiar figure that accompanied it. Jamie was slightly embarrassed when Zoe flung her arms around him and gave him a welcoming hug, no doubt all the stronger for her moment of guilt.

‘And who’s your friend, Jamie?’ asked the Doctor with interest.

Zoe disentangled herself from her Scottish friend and looked past him to see what the Doctor was talking about. Another figure stepped forward from the darkness. To Zoe’s relief it was a young boy, tall and handsome but hard to put an age to. Zoe thought he was probably in his mid-teens but he could easily have been older. Jamie made the introductions, happy for once to be in possession of more facts about the place where they had landed than even Zoe and the Doctor.

‘This is Billy Joe,’ he began but before he could complete the social niceties he was caught in the glare of a powerful spotlight. Peering through the slit between his fingers he could just about make out a humanoid figure shining a torch down on them from an upper deck, through the gaping hole in the floor. Three other men were with him.

‘Put your hands up and don’t move,’ ordered a voice from another position and a man emerged from the shadows pointing a rifle at them. As he approached he clicked the safety off. As usual, the Doctor didn’t seem to be at all

surprised to be surrounded by strangers pointing weapons at him.

‘Well, which is it?’ he demanded petulantly. ‘Do you want us to raise our hands or not move? We can’t do both. They’re mutually exclusive you see...’

Shielding his eyes with his hand, the Doctor peered up in the general direction of the newcomers. Seconds later he had an answer as a shot rang out...

‘Doctor!’ cried Zoe as the Doctor spun round and fell to the floor.

EPISODE TWO

Chapter Four

A single shot rang out, and Jamie watched in horror as the Doctor spun around on his toes and fell heavily to the floor. ‘Get down,’ he heard his own voice cry out and he was pleased to see Zoe and Billy Joe doing just that as he flung himself to the side and down, rolling out of the glare of the spotlight.

The beam of light swung around looking for them, but Zoe, Billy Joe and Jamie had taken the chance to find better hiding places. From his position, tucked in behind what had once been some kind of drinks machine, Jamie looked back into the area where they had been caught. As the arc of light swept over the area again he noted with a combination of amazement and concern that the Doctor’s prone figure was no longer anywhere to be seen. A voice in his ear nearly made Jamie jump out of his skin. ‘I thought that might make them stop and think.’

Jamie whirled round and there was the Doctor, smiling broadly as if this was all a game of hide and seek. ‘Doctor,’ he whispered, ‘could you nae have let us know you were okay when you went down?’

‘Was it very convincing?’ the Doctor asked hopefully. ‘I do hope so. You see, in my experience people firing a warning shot like that rarely expect to hit anything. Always do the unexpected, Jamie. Keeps people on their toes.’

‘Ah well, it did that sure enough.’

‘Let’s work our way round to Zoe over there and get out of here before they find us.’

They could hear the angry voices of Tam’s posse clambering down from their lofty positions, clearly intending to pursue them on the same level. And then they heard some more shooting. But this time it was clear that they were not the targets.

‘I don’t Like the sound of that,’ said the Doctor as he and Jamie rejoined Zoe and Billy Joe. ‘Are they confused as to where we are?’ he asked the boy Billy Joe shook his head. ‘Guess they’ve found someone else in the No-Go Zone for shooting practice.’

‘No-Go Zone?’ repeated Zoe, puzzled.

‘Yeah, this entire wreck is off-limits. That’s why the Gen-Twos get so totally flat-lined over intruders. Don’t matter to them whether it’s Realists or anyone else.’

Jamie was shaking his head. ‘I didnae catch a word of that!’

Zoe couldn’t resist digging him in the ribs with her elbow. ‘Now you know how we feel trying to decipher your dialect!’ she teased.

‘At least I’m talking English!’ retorted Jamie.

‘And so is our friend here. Aren’t you?’ added the Doctor, addressing Billy Joe directly. ‘Mid-twenty-sixth century, unless I’m much mistaken...’ The Doctor pondered a moment and then spoke again to the young colonist. ‘Those Gen-Two guys just don’t scan a ‘cept do they?’

Zoe and Jamie exchanged a look of horror; the Doctor was talking nonsense, surely? But Billy Joe was slack-jawed in amazement, grinning and nodding his head.

‘You’re pretty high-spec for a Gen-Zero.’

‘Why, thank you,’ replied the Doctor, pleased with himself. ‘I’ve always felt I had a certain way with language...’

Zoe’s mind was on more practical matters. The sounds of gunfire were continuing, and she had a nasty suspicion that they were getting nearer. ‘So who are the Realists, then?’ she asked, picking up on something Billy Joe had said a moment ago.

‘Really, Zoe, this is no time for abstract philosophy,’ muttered the Doctor before the conversation was completely overtaken by events as a man suddenly fell from the sky, dropping his rifle. Billy Joe realised that it was a man he’d not seen for years, one of the rebels who’d left at the time his father had died. He thought the man’s name was Gathan. But his identity was not really important any more, as he was

dead as a doornail. Suddenly the gun battle that had been raging was all around them. Run!' ordered the Doctor, not for the first time in his long life, and, taking Zoe by the hand, he started zigzagging away from the conflict. Jamie would have followed but he noticed that Billy Joe was transfixed, rooted to the spot, looking at the blood still pouring out of the multiple wounds on the Realist's chest.

'Come on,' Jamie said urgently, 'we have to get out of here.' He grabbed the boy by the shoulders and shook him. Come on!' Billy Joe seemed to come to with a start, as if suddenly aware of his surroundings. 'This way,' he suggested and led Jamie towards a wall where a grille led to a service duct.

'But the Doctor and Zoe went the other way,' Jamie began to complain, but even as he spoke he knew it was too late. The two opposing forces were now between them and the Doctor; there was no way to take the same route. Despite his best intentions, they had been separated.

Hali couldn't work out what had gone wrong. They'd reached the ship without being seen and used one of their regular routes into the remains of the cargo holds. They'd quickly filled their bags with as much loot as they could reasonably manage and within an hour of entering they had been ready to begin the journey home. And that was when everything had become complicated. *En route* to their exit they'd suddenly heard gunfire. Gathan, thinking he had been shot at, fired off a shot in return, which rather exposed their position. Suddenly, they'd found themselves face to face with a quartet of Loyalists, armed and in a dangerous mood. They'd tried to make a run for it but the Loyalists had the advantage of knowing the territory better and it was a struggle to make any progress. Then Gathan had suggested that they split up - Lord knows why she had listened to him but she had. Gathan had set off at angle, intending to draw their fire - which he did. Unfortunately he did it too well and paid the ultimate price. Chamick had been next, shot in the back as they had stopped to discuss their next move. Now it was just herself and Saro.

Hali moved slowly along a corridor, trying to progress as quietly as she could. She stopped, listening hard, trying to work out where the posse was now. She knew they were outnumbered and was beginning to wonder whether she would ever get back to Max. She couldn't hear the Loyalists; the guns had gone silent, but she could hear a metallic rustling. It seemed to be coming from behind the wall. Suddenly a grille popped out and a face appeared.

'Don't shoot, don't shoot me!' said the youth who squeezed himself out of the grille keeping his hands held high. A moment later a second youth appeared, older than the first and wearing some kind of skirt. He too held his hands up and let the younger man do the talking.

'Are you Realists?' he demanded. Hali nodded. The boy smiled. 'Promise to take me to your base and I'll get you out of here. I know my way around.'

Hali frowned, trying to weigh up the boy.

'You want to leave Plymouth Hope?'

'I want to live in the twenty-sixth century not the Dark Ages!'

Hali glanced at Saro, who shrugged. It was up to her. Hali looked again at the two youths, unarmed and innocent-looking, and decided to risk it.

'Okay. Deal.'

Jamie watched as the blonde-haired woman shook Billy Joe's hand. He wasn't sure that going with these people was the best idea but it had to beat staying here with people shooting at him. And he knew that Zoe would be all right with the Doctor. Or at least he hoped she would be. He climbed back into the service duct to take up the rear position in their little convoy and pulled the grille back into place.

Zoe was running as fast as she could, still holding the Doctor's hand. She'd never had much time for exercise in her old life, on the Wheel. Oh, she'd put in the regulation hours on the treadmills and exercise bikes, but she'd never found much pleasure in the task, preferring to spend her leisure time absorbing data from every source she could lay her

hands on. Since leaving the Wheel, however, all she ever seemed to do was run. Running for cover, running for her life, running away from some monster or another. At least here it was just people she was running from, albeit people with guns. She was beginning to tire of monsters. The Doctor stopped suddenly and Zoe, caught by surprise, thundered into his back.

‘Sorry Doctor, what -?’ she began but then she fell silent as she saw the reason for the Doctor’s sudden halt. A large angry-looking man with a scruffy beard was standing in front of them holding an old-fashioned rifle in his hands, which was pointing directly at the Doctor’s chest. The Doctor raised his hands, slowly. The man let the rifle drop slightly, acknowledging the Doctor’s surrender.

‘Don’t do anything hasty,’ he implored the stranger who, having now had a chance to look at the Doctor and Zoe, was clearly bemused.

‘You’re not Realists,’ he observed eventually. ‘Who are you?’

The Doctor gave him one of his most charming smiles. ‘We’re visitors here. I’m the Doctor and this is Zoe.’

‘Now I’ll have something to put on your tombstones,’ replied the man, threateningly bringing the rifle back to bear on the Doctor.

‘Wait, you can’t kill us just like that,’ complained the Doctor, an edge of panic in his voice now.

‘Can’t I?’ challenged the man and Zoe could see his finger begin to squeeze the trigger.

‘No! Val, no!’ A new voice interrupted and another man, older and more weather-worn than the first, appeared from the darkness and battered down the rifle just in time. A shot rang out but the rifle was now pointing away from the Doctor. Unfortunately the bullet ricocheted wildly, causing all four of them to take cover. But when the bullet finally came to rest only three figures got to their feet.

‘Zoe!’ exclaimed the Doctor, hurrying over to where his young friend was lying motionless on the ground. He saw an ugly red blood stain growing on her tight-fitting silver jumpsuit. ‘What have you done?’

He turned to look at the two strangers, a sudden anger in him. 'If Zoe dies...'

The man who had knocked the rifle away at the last moment, stepped forward.

'We've medical facilities in town. Can we move her?'

'I think so.'

Tam nodded at Freedom. 'Pick her up, Val. I'll take this.'

For a moment Freedom looked like he might have wanted to argue but he took another look at the small figure of the girl he had inadvertently injured and had second thoughts.

'We still need to know who these people are,' he reminded Tam as he bent to pick the girl up.

'I'll answer any question you want to ask me,' the Doctor promised, 'as soon as we've made sure Zoe is all right.'

'I'm sure she will be...Doctor, is it?' said Tam. 'I'm Tam Kartryte. And this is Val Freedom.'

The Doctor looked them up and down, taking in their simple clothing and the anachronistic rifle and gun they carried. 'Well then, Mr Kartryte, as is customary in these circumstances you had better take me to your leader!'

Freedom, carrying Zoe, managed a bitter laugh. 'Tam here is our leader. We call him Sheriff,' he explained, but the tone of his comment made it clear to the Doctor that he was not a leader with universal support.

Jamie had been amazed at the transformation in Billy Joe. Now they had managed to hook up with this pair of 'Realists' he seemed much happier and more confident. He had quickly taken them back up a service ladder to the decks of the wreck that he was more familiar with and, once they'd reached those levels, he knew their progress had been much more rapid. Within five minutes of leaving the dark and gloomy depths of the cargo hold they were climbing out of one of the many tears in the fabric of the upper decks and, by way of a rope ladder that Billy Joe had concealed on an earlier visit, they were able to reach one of the nearby trees.

Once they had climbed down through the broad branches of the tree Hali and Saro had kept to their word and had led

Jamie and Billy Joe back through the woods to where their horses were waiting for them.

Since they were still very much in Loyalist territory, the group kept speech to a minimum, although Billy Joe was clearly bursting with questions. For his part, Jamie would have liked some questions answered himself, but for now he was happy to go with the flow.

When they came to the horses he found himself grinning. 'Can you ride a horse?' asked Hali as she untied the four horses. Jamie nodded. 'Aye, just a wee bit.'

In fact, he loved to ride and took the opportunity whenever it arose. His travels with the Doctor had shown him a myriad of exotic creatures and strange vehicles powered by energies Jamie couldn't dream of understanding, but nothing compared to the feeling of freedom and sheer joy of riding a horse.

The four of them mounted up and began to trot in single file back through the forest, retracing the path Hali and her team had taken some four hours earlier. Hali noted with interest that the stranger calling himself Jamie handled his horse with great confidence and natural ability - perhaps he would be a useful addition to the Realist group after all.

It was getting dark now, however, and the setting sun was struggling to penetrate the trees, making the floor of the forest a carpet of sinister shadows. Billy Joe kept looking behind him, expecting some kind of pursuit.

'I can't believe no one's following us,' he commented. 'My lot may be a bunch of wiped bytes but they don't usually give up so easily when a raid comes.'

'They don't usually have to deal with the Doctor,' answered Jamie with a grin.

* * *

In the shadow of the wrecked colony ship the Loyalist posse had a handful of horses waiting for them, and Tarn's wagon. Freedom had carefully placed Zoe on a blanket in the cart and had gone on ahead to get her some medical attention, leaving the Doctor and the three other colonists to follow on

the horses. The Doctor rode behind Tam, holding on awkwardly and looking more than a little uncomfortable.

It was growing dark now, and he could feel the chill in the air getting into his bones, but the Doctor had still looked about him with great interest as they left the wreck behind them and began to pass the cultivated fields of the outlying farmsteads. The Doctor noted that the farm machinery he saw was all fairly primitive: mechanical horse-drawn harrows and ploughs. There were also no power lines visible on any of the houses themselves. It didn't really add up - the Doctor was quite sure that these colonists were humans from Earth and both the ship and the boy's slang had suggested the twenty-sixth century but the colony itself seemed to be from another era.

After a short ride they reached the town itself and the Doctor's confusion continued to build as he recognised the style of the place. To all intents and purposes it was a town of the American West, an old-fashioned frontier settlement. He remembered visiting something similar in his previous body, a rather unpleasant spot called Tombstone, he recalled with a shudder. This place was on a larger scale but very much of the same ilk. There were differences he noted as the posse pulled up outside Tarn's office and they all dismounted. There was more artificial light than he would have seen in Tombstone, streetlights that appeared to be powered by solar batteries and internal lights powered, he suspected, from the solar panels that covered each roof. The town was not quite as primitive as a first glance might suggest. In addition, at one end of the town there was a building that stood out like a sore thumb. Although partially clad in wood it was clearly constructed in metal and high-grade plastic and it just didn't fit in. It was all very interesting...

Tam led the Doctor into one of the two holding cells in the back of the building. The Doctor was delighted to see a small barred window in the back wall and the fact that the entire front wall of the cell was given over to floor-to-ceiling bars. In addition the lock was an old-fashioned affair, secured with a large metal key. The Doctor considered himself somewhat of

a connoisseur when it came to secure cells and this, although old-fashioned, was a classic. It made a nice change from sliding doors and motion detectors. Of course it meant that the sonic screwdriver might struggle to get him out of there but for the moment the Doctor was happy to wait where he was.

'I'll be back to get some answers shortly,' Tam explained before leaving. The Doctor nodded at his retreating back. I wouldn't mind some of those myself,' he called after him.

Back in the safety of his own office Tam sat at his desk and considered for a moment what to do next. Where had the strangers come from and what did they want? The man calling himself the Doctor had an air of harmlessness about him, but was it an elaborate sham to fool him into a false sense of security? In a hundred years of its existence the colony had only ever had one set of visitors and that had been a standard Earth Colony Support Vehicle check-up some fifty years ago. Were they due another one? Did Earth Gov want to keep tabs on their outlying colonies? Tam shook his head. From what he could gather from the records the colony here on Arista Four had been set up as a fully independent state. The visit from the ECSV had been a courtesy call; it hadn't been an emissary from home. For a moment, Tam was tempted to consult the surviving part of the ship's computer, which as Sheriff he alone had access to. It would have been a direct violation of *Back to Basics* principles, to make use of such high technology, but, as he had learned when he had first been elected to high office, sometimes a leader had to break his own rules. He remembered the day well: exhilarated after the excitement of the vote he had slipped away from the inevitable party and gone to see his predecessor here, in this very office.

Myles Boole was an old man then, one of the last surviving Gen- Ones. He congratulated Tarn on winning the election and then surprised the newly elected leader by activating a hidden control on his desk, causing a panel in the wall behind the Sheriffs desk to slide open to reveal a secret room

containing a computer console and screen. Myles invited Tarn into the room and activated the screen. To Tarn's amazement, a recording of Stewart Ransom himself had appeared.

Tam learned later that this message from Ransom was played to every incoming leader and that he was the third such to hear the words of the colony's founder since his death. Ransom, speaking to as yet unborn descendants, kept his speech simple and brief, repeating his reasoning for applying *Back to Basics* principles to the colony, explaining his decision to draw the technological cut-off line at pre-twentieth-century levels, and advising those who came after him that there might be times when, in certain circumstances, the colony might need to turn to more contemporary technology and where, in the ship, certain items had been hidden for just such an occasion. Of course Ransom had no way of knowing that much of the ship would be destroyed during landing. Tam later learned that quite a bit of high technology had survived and much of it was for the private use of the leader alone. When he took office, Tam had made a personal vow to leave as much of it as possible to gather dust: he couldn't face the idea of being a hypocrite.

Now, deciding against an immediate move to consult the ship's computer, he headed over to the medical centre to see how the patient was doing. Dee Willoughby lived and worked in the odd-looking building at the end of town. Dee was an important member of the community, fulfilling the roles of dentist and nurse, and by some strange tradition that no one could explain she was also the town's barber. At least she was now, since the Realist split four years ago. Before then the town had enjoyed the services of a proper doctor, a qualified surgeon, who had received a full medical education from his father (who himself had been trained by his father, the Chief Medical Officer on *The Big Bang*). But Dr Forde had been a prime mover in the Great Split and, with him gone, the townspeople had turned to his occasional assistant, Dee, to fill his shoes.

Dee was a small woman in her forties, with sharp features and a sharp mind to match. Her real interest was in herbal remedies and non-traditional medicine; she considered herself a healer rather than a doctor. Right now, though, she was acting more like a nurse. She had bathed and dressed the stranger's wound but there wasn't much else she could do.

The girl had regained consciousness briefly and had called for a Doctor. 'You'll have to make do with me, dear,' Dee had begun but the girl had already lowered her head and lapsed back into a deep sleep.

'Another patient saved from certain death?'

Dee looked up and saw that Tam was standing in the doorway. Well?' he added with a smile.

'No call for sarcasm, Sheriff.'

'I was only teasing you, Dee. How is she, really?'

Dee glanced back at her patient, considering her answer carefully.

'We'll have to wait. I've done what I can,' she told him simply. 'The wound wasn't bad but she may have picked up an infection - you know how unhealthy the wreck is.'

'Any idea *who* she is?'

Dee shook her head. 'Sorry. Nor where she came from.'

Tam looked disappointed. 'Shame. It might have helped when I question her friend, the Doctor.'

Dee perked up, a sudden hope in her eyes.

'The man you brought in is a doctor?'

Tam smiled, knowing what she was thinking. 'He assures me it's merely an honorary title.'

Dee shrugged. 'Now that is a shame!' She grinned and glanced back at her charge, who moaned and shuddered on the bed. 'I'll let you know if there's any change,' she promised.

Returning to Zoe's bedside, she placed a cool, wet cloth on the sleeping girl's brow. Tam hovered in the doorway for a moment, watching, then turned and left.

When Tam returned to the jailhouse he found Val Freedom waiting for him. The excitement of the past few hours had clearly sobered the man up. As Tam sat at his desk Freedom nodded in the direction of the cells.

Have you interrogated him yet?’ he enquired. Tam shook his head. ‘I was just about to. You want to sit in on it?’

‘I thought you’d never ask, Sheriff.’ That was when Tam knew for sure the man was no longer the worse for drink; he’d never attempt something as subtle as irony when he was two sheets to the wind. Taking the keys from the nail where they hung behind his desk, Tam led the way down the corridor to the cells. ‘I’m asking the questions, though,’ he pointed out.

‘Whatever you say, Sheriff.’

Tam decided he preferred Freedom when he was drunk - he knew where he was then.

As they approached, the strange little man leapt to his feet. He had been sitting cross-legged on the floor but he managed to get up in one fluid movement. He was clearly a lot more agile than a first glance would suggest. His face was well lined but not sun-beaten like many of the colonists’; the lines suggested intelligence and a sense of fun rather than a lifetime working in the great outdoors. His dress was peculiar too. The colonists wore simple, practical clothes - plain trousers, cotton shirts, leather waistcoats and jackets and hard-wearing boots - but the stranger seemed to be in some kind of fancy dress. He wore checked baggy trousers, a black jacket that seemed too big for him, a scruffy-looking shirt, a spotty and rather ragged bow tie, and could that really be a half-eaten banana sticking out of his breast pocket? If Tam had been on a more populated planet he would have thought the man a vagrant of some kind but here, on Axista Four, he was just an impossibility.

‘Who are you and where do you come from?’ Tam began, hoping to get a few basics sorted at least.

‘I’ve already told you, I’m the Doctor. And I’m a traveller. Now please, tell me how Zoe is. And Jamie.’

‘There’s another of you?’ rumbled Freedom.

The Doctor nodded vigorously. 'Well, yes, of course there is. Jamie's a big lad, about Zoe's age, dark hair...' the Doctor floundered as he considered how best to describe his friend, 'Oh yes... and he's wearing a kilt. Like a skirt. Well, not really, but you know what I mean. We must have left him in that wreck of yours. I insist you organise a search for him at once.'

Tam shook his head. 'It's late. It'll have to wait until the morning.'

The Doctor didn't look too happy about this but decided not to argue. 'So tell me where we are, then?' he asked, changing the subject.

'How can you not know where you are?' asked Freedom, suspiciously.

'My, er, spacecraft suffered some damage in landing. My navigational instruments weren't working,' he lied, hoping they wouldn't see his fingers crossed behind his back. The Doctor didn't like to tell untruths but experience had taught him that, occasionally, a white lie could save a lot of trouble.

'This is the Independent Earth Colony Plymouth Hope on the planet Axista Four,' Tam told him. The Doctor smiled as if he'd suspected as much all along.

'And very nice it is too. Have you been here long?'

And to their great surprise Tam and Freedom found themselves telling the stranger all about the colony and its peculiar history late into the night. Finally, the Doctor had suggested that they should perhaps get some sleep and the two colonists went to their beds, leaving the Doctor to sleep in the cell.

Far above the settlement, on board the ECSV *Hannibal*, Jonn Cartor was looking over some papers when there was a knock at the door to his ready room. He barked 'Enter,' and the door slid open to admit Veena.

'Any response at all to our signals?' he asked.

Veena shook her head. 'Nothing at all,' she reported. 'Shall I prepare a landing party?'

Cartor considered for a moment. 'It is night-time, isn't it, where the colonists are?'

'They call it Plymouth Hope, sir.'

'Then we'll pay the good citizens of Plymouth Hope a visit first thing in the morning. See to the arrangements. Nothing too over the top but I will want to make an entrance. Armed escort of course.'

'Are you expecting trouble, sir?'

Cartor shook his head and grinned. 'Not unless I decide to make some.'

Veena shivered. She had a nasty suspicion that making trouble was exactly what they were there to do. A slight movement at the edge of her peripheral vision made her look over to the side of the room. A figure stood there in the shadows. With a start Veena realised that it was their mystery passenger, now revived from suspended animation. Cartor saw her expression.

'Administrator Greene,' he announced, 'this is my First Officer, Veena Myles.'

The stranger stepped forward, revealing himself to be a small, sallow-skinned man with cold, dark eyes. 'Delighted to meet you,' he said, offering his hand in greeting. Veena swallowed hard and shook his hand; his grip was weak and limp.

There was something about the administrator that made her blood run cold.

Chapter Five

Jamie woke and for a moment he had no idea where he was. A groan from the other side of the room soon reminded him. He and Billy Joe had been given temporary accommodation in what Hali had called an ‘emergency shelter’.

It had been late when Hali’s group of riders returned to the Realist Camp and too dark to get any real sense of what manner of a place it was. Hali had asked after someone called Max and was told that he was already asleep. Hali sighed audibly, muttered something under her breath and then turned to contemplate Jamie and Billy Joe. She’d sent someone to find the emergency shelter and told them they would talk in the morning. The man sent to fetch their shelter returned holding a small package apparently the size of a pound of sausages. Jamie had seen some tiny tents in his travels with the Doctor and, of course, the TARDIS itself was remarkably bigger on the inside than it was from outside; nevertheless Jamie couldn’t see how he and Billy Joe were going to spend a night inside something as small as that. Jamie said as much, but the man just laughed, pressed a small button on the package and dropped it to the floor.

To Jamie’s astonishment, the package began to unfold and change shape, expanding like a balloon and growing impossibly bigger. Before their eyes it grew into a small cabin complete with door and windows. Hali rapped her knuckles on the top of the structure; it sounded both hollow and rigid.

‘Memory-form plastic,’ she explained. ‘Just the sort of basic survival kit that the bone-headed *Back to Basics* doctrine forbids.’ Jamie and Billy Joe had clambered into their new home and found that two bed shapes had been formed inside from the same material as the rest of the structure. Hali threw two sleeping bags inside. ‘Sleep well.’ A couple of minutes later

the little cabin was filled with the sounds of two snoring lads, dead to the world.

Jamie stretched and was surprised to find how well he had slept. His muscles felt as though they had been rested in a long, hot bath rather than lying on a solid mattress.

The person who had fetched their accommodation last night, a pale, thin-looking man who told them his name was Tylon, led them to a communal bathroom where they were able to shower and generally clean up. After that Tylon took them to a larger prefab building that proved to be an eating area. A rough- and-ready breakfast was available, a porridge-like substance, some toast and some fresh fruit, all of which Jamie and Billy Joe fell on with enthusiasm.

It was a considerably brighter and happier pair of newcomers that was ushered into yet another of the plastic buildings some time later to find Hali, Saro and a man they had not seen before waiting for them. Hali made the introductions.

‘Max, this is Jamie and Billy Joe. Boys, this is Max Forde, my partner and co-leader of this breakaway group.’

Jamie took a good look at Forde and thought he saw something of the Doctor in the man; he had an air of curiosity about him that was very familiar. For his part, Forde was looking intently at Billy Joe.

‘Billy Joe? Can it be? When I left you were just a little lad.’

‘Doctor Forde?’ Now it was clear that Billy Joe recognised the man too. ‘You look older too!’

Hali and Saro tried and failed to suppress a giggle; Forde shot them a quick look.

‘Out of the mouths of babes...’ he commented. Billy Joe flushed. ‘I ain’t no babe, I’m sixteen. Nearly...’ he added a little less stridently.

‘Does your grandfather know you’re here?’ asked Forde, a sudden suspicion hitting him. ‘Or did he send you perhaps? Are you here to spy on us?’

‘No, sir.’ Billy Joe hurriedly tried to explain himself. ‘I want to join you. I agree with everything you stand for. I don’t want to live in the past any more...’

Forde looked at him, weighing him up.

‘Well, we can use all the help we can get. But I warn you: it’s a tough life. And it’s not getting any easier. If we don’t get some help from Earth Gov soon we won’t have much of a future,’ Max told them, looking serious.

Billy Joe shrugged.

‘Loyalists may have more people but they’re in the same boat, if you ask me. *Back to Basics* is going to kill off human life on this planet unless things change pretty soon.’

Billy Joe was pleased to see that the three Realists were nodding in agreement. He had been right - this was the right place for him.

‘You realise there’s no going back?’ Hali asked him. Billy Joe nodded. ‘You won’t see your grandfather again,’ added Forde. Billy Joe shrugged. ‘I said my goodbyes...’

The trio of Realists now turned their attention to Jamie, who had been standing quietly while Billy Joe had been interviewed.

‘What about you? You want to join up too?’ asked Hali.

‘Aye,’ replied Jamie.

Max Forde crossed the room to look him in the eye. ‘I know everyone in that town,’ he began quietly. ‘I delivered most of ‘em. But I don’t know your face.’

Jamie knew better than to try to lie in a situation like this. ‘I’m new here. I’m a traveller,’ he explained. Forde and Hali exchanged looks, puzzled. Forde turned back to him. ‘Bit off the beaten track for back-packing, isn’t it?’

Jamie wasn’t entirely sure what he meant by that, but he got the general impression that visitors were rather rare on the planet. ‘I’m no tourist if that’s what you mean. I’m just a traveller. With my friends the Doctor and Zoe.’

For the first time in the meeting Saro spoke. ‘You are from off-world. I thought so.’ Like all of the inhabitants of Axista Four, Saro had never met someone from another planet, although she had known since she was a child that there was

a whole galaxy of life out there. She was a little disappointed, however, that her first 'alien' had turned out to be a human male in a skirt.

'Aye,' said Jamie, 'I'm from Earth. Can ye no' tell from ma accent?'

Instantly Jamie realised that he had made a mistake. These may be humans, and they must have once originated from Earth, but it didn't necessarily follow that they held the home planet in any great affection, and judging by the looks on their faces, a lack of affection for Earth was an understatement of their true feeling.

'Earth!' Saro almost spat the word out.

'No, wait! We did signal for help,' Max reminded the women. 'Are you from Earth Gov, Jamie?'

Again Jamie hesitated. Should he say yes and try to talk his way into their confidence? If the Doctor were here Jamie knew he would. The Doctor had a knack for improvisation that could get him accepted in the most amazing places but Jamie had no confidence in his ability to do likewise.

'No, I'm nae from Earth Gov. Whatever that it.'

Forde and Hali exchanged looks again. Forde looked back in the direction of Billy Joe. 'Billy Joe, you go with Saro and Hali, they'll find you some work to do.' Hali nodded and she and Saro led the lad away. Jamie watched him go nervously. 'And what about me?' he demanded.

'You, boy, I'm going to have to think about.' Max headed for the exit. 'Until then I'm afraid I'm going to have to secure you in here. Please don't try to escape. There really is nowhere to go.' With that he left the room, securing the electronic lock behind him.

Max found Hali out with the horses, giving them their feed. Without speaking he began to help her clean out the stables and store the saddles and bridles. For five minutes they worked together in silence, putting their own needs aside to see to the comfort of their main means of transport. Max knew he had to say something eventually, but he was unsure what.

'I'm sorry,' he began, finally. 'About Gathan and Chamick.'

Hali shrugged, not meeting his eyes. 'Went out with four, came back with four,' she muttered bitterly.

'That's not the point...' Max heard his own voice trail off. What was the point? Another raid on the Loyalist base, and yet more casualties. The Realist group only numbered a hundred or so: not enough to be a viable colony. The ideological rift between the two parties had to be resolved or the request for external help had to be realised if any human colony was going to survive on Axista Four, and the sooner they all came to see that, the better. Max was tiring of seeing people he knew and cared about go off to forage on their behalf and come back hurt, or worse, not come back at all.

'Were they...?' he couldn't bring himself to finish the question but he didn't need to.

'Gathan was decorating the floor with his guts,' Hali said harshly. 'Not even a full medikit could have done much for him. I don't know about Chamick'

Max nodded, aware of the depth of Hali's feelings of anger and frustration over the botched mission.

'And what about the two you brought back?' he asked.

'The kid seemed genuine, and I figured he might be good leverage. If his granddad is still calling the shots up there.' Hali smiled cynically.

'And the other one. The stranger?'

Hali shrugged. 'You know as much as I do, love. He's an alien. How he got here is beyond me. He's not from your mysterious bunker is he?'

Max shook his head. 'No. Those aliens are a completely different species: some kind of canine humanoids. I don't think this lad Jamie is anything to do with them. As far as I can make out they're barely alive... I wouldn't expect to see one of them walking about.'

Hali looked over at him and he was surprised to see how tired she looked. Wordlessly she came to him for a hug. 'We're going to be okay,' he whispered, reassuringly. But even to his own ears the words sounded hollow.

The first thing Lorvalan was aware of was the smell. The Tyrenian's nose twitched, and sniffed the musty air curiously. Although he had barely begun to regain consciousness he immediately registered that something was wrong. The air wasn't being processed; the bunker was not functioning normally.

Lorvalan tried to open his eyes and immediately winced as the darkness of his long, deep sleep was shattered by the sharp intrusion of bright lights. As first it was just a mass of colour and then, as he blinked his eyes into more normal activity, they resolved themselves into the emergency lighting of the Deep Sleep chamber. That at least seemed to be working properly. And the Deep Sleep cot itself also appeared to be functioning normally.

The Alisorti, wet and slimy as ever, trembled on his chest, reacting to his increased heartbeat. He felt the little creature release a fresh wave of stimulant directly from the tips of its multiple limbs. He shuddered, as his own body absorbed the nutrients and the adrenalin.

Still in the safety of the cot he stretched, his unused muscles complaining as they expanded and contracted for the first time in years. The symbiotic Alisorti had kept his body alive and fed during their long journey together but it would take a while for his limbs to regain their full strength.

He reached up for the support bar and sat up. Looking around the chamber, he noted that everything seemed to be in order. A couple of servitor droids were moving around the room, activating the revival sequence programmed so long ago. Lorvalan could see that his second-in-command, Zenig, who lay in the next cot, was beginning to revive as well.

But he had not forgotten the initial alarm, the wrongness he had smelt. He sniffed the air again, more aware of his surroundings now. He had been right: the bunker's air processors were offline, and had been for some time. Lorvalan wondered what had happened. But there was something else wrong: another smell, an alien presence. Lorvalan closed his eyes and concentrated on the scent and

then realised what it was. Humans. Humans had been in the chamber. He sniffed again: yes, humans, and recently too.

Unable to wait any longer Lorvalan hauled himself out of the cot and got to his feet. He quickly checked that Zenig was responding to the revival process and, confident that his companion would join him shortly, crossed to the nearest access point for the ship's computer; he wanted some answers.

Finding a console in the next chamber, he sat and rubbed his wrist over the security panel. Although it had been offline for years, the computer instantly read and recognised Lorvalan's scent and his status. The screen flickered into life. Lorvalan began to find out what had happened since he had gone under.

If anyone had asked him, Tam would have been hard pressed to explain at which point he had begun to trust the stranger who called himself 'the Doctor'. Last night he had viewed him with suspicion, and maybe even a little fear, but in the clear light of day he had found himself re-evaluating the little man. He seemed so harmless and clearly posed no threat. During breakfast he had chatted on, asking more questions than he answered, apparently fascinated by the day-to-day life of the colony and complementing Tam on his bacon sandwiches. When it had been time to put the man back into the cell Tam had surprised himself and released him, after making him promise to keep Tam informed about his movements.

The Doctor had been grateful but his first concern was for his young companion, Zoe. He asked Tam how she was and Kartryte had to confess that he had yet to check up on her. The Doctor had asked if he could go and see for himself and Tam had directed him towards the medical centre.

Out on the dusty Main Street the Doctor paused, taking the time to have a good look at the layout of the place. It really was a classic Western town, although he suspected the style of the place was more down to the myth of the West and the classic Western movies rather than any desire to be historically accurate. Of course there was no railroad, and

after the initial pioneers had driven their wagon trains west it had been the railroad that became the main engine of development. That and gold, of course. But there was no railroad here (shame, thought the Doctor, who had a soft spot for steam trains) and no gold either.

On closer inspection, the Doctor could see that much of the paintwork was cracked and peeling, and that the many repairs to doors and window frames were very much patch-up jobs. There was a feeling of tiredness to the place. The Doctor had already heard enough about *Back to Basics* to know what was going on here and it was clear to him that this was a failing colony. And from what he had seen of the colony ship it seemed to be full of materials and resources that they could use, if only they could be persuaded to overcome their prejudices.

Carefully avoiding stepping on anything too smelly, the Doctor crossed the road and made his way into the building Tam had pointed out to him earlier. It was the sole exception to the Western theme that was so religiously adhered to elsewhere: a prefab building that, he guessed, had been one of the first shelters the colonists had constructed outside the broken colony ship. Inside, in stark contrast to the rest of the settlement, he found high-tech medical equipment, much of it looking forlorn and forgotten. The Doctor suspected that in the early days the *Back to Basics* rules had been a little bit more flexible, particularly when it came to matters of health. Moving past rooms dark with dust and disuse, he found Dee attending to Zoe in a large room that was evidently the main sick bay for the colony. The half-dozen beds were currently empty, save for the one in which Zoe was sleeping. Dee looked up as he entered and put a finger to her lips. Moving quietly, she stepped quickly across the room to join him.

‘How is your patient this morning?’ he asked.

‘Sleeping peacefully. Her temperature’s still a little high; she may have picked up some kind of virus in the ship,’ Dee reported. ‘The water gets trapped up there and breeds lord knows what. It isn’t just ideology keeps us out of that place. It’s dangerous in more ways than you could imagine.’

The Doctor looked grim. 'I wouldn't be so sure about that if I were you. I've quite an imagination.'

Dee took the opportunity to have a good look at the mysterious stranger. 'Tam tells me you're not a medical doctor,' she began, crossing to a table where a bowl and jug awaited. 'Shame.' She poured water from the jug into the bowl and began to wash her hands.

'I understood that you looked after people's medical needs round here,' said the Doctor, skipping quickly over to the bed and placing a hand on Zoe's forehead.

Dee turned, wiping her hands on a towel. 'I do my best.'

'I'm sure that's more than enough,' said the Doctor kindly.

Dee decided that she liked this Doctor, whatever he was actually a doctor of: he was strange and somehow indefinably alien, but he had the wonderful knack of making you feel that things were better than they were. She felt as if she could trust him, even though she had only just met him.

'Would you care for a cup of coffee?' she found herself asking him.

The man smiled and looked a little apologetic. 'I don't suppose you have tea?' he asked with a shy smile.

Lorvalan reached for another of the energy bars the robots had brought to him and tore the wrapper off with his teeth before devouring it in two quick bites. He would need to be fighting fit as soon as possible. The computer's account of their situation was far from satisfying.

Zenig appeared, still naked, his hairy body trembling with the shock of revival, his chest smeared with the slimy mucus that the Alisorti used to connect their bodies during Deep Sleep. Although Zenig was clearly disorientated Lorvalan was pleased to see that he didn't attempt to ask any foolish questions. Instead, like the good soldier he was, he stood to attention, waiting.

'There was an error in the revival timetable,' Lorvalan said, looking back at the screen. 'We've been asleep a hundred years.'

Zenig gasped, but managed to restrain himself from commenting. His commander hadn't finished. 'The humans have been here,' he continued.

This time Zenig couldn't stop himself. 'They survived?'

'Apparently.' Lorvalan began to fill his lieutenant in on what the computer had just told him. After the retreat (and the desperate decision to enter Deep Sleep to preserve the pack) a hundred years ago, the emergency overrides had cut in, preventing an immediate revival. They would still be in Deep Sleep now but for the Planetary Defence System reacting a few hours earlier to the arrival of a massive spacecraft in orbit.

'Reinforcements? Or new colonists...?' Zenig speculated wildly.

'Perhaps,' Lorvalan replied. 'Until we see what the humans have done with our planet, we won't know. It may be that they have tens of thousands living here now.'

'Squatters,' Zenig spat. 'Shall I revive a full complement of warriors?'

Lorvalan considered for a moment and then shook his head, his ears flapping.

'No, we're not ready for military action yet. We just need information. Reconnaissance. You and I can do this. Let's hope the humans haven't found the ship and the armoury. I feel naked without a weapon in my paw.' He looked over at Zenig and then down at his own unclothed body. 'Perhaps some clothes might be in order, too,' he joked, barking with laughter.

Leaving the computer console active, they left the room and padded back across the Deep Sleep chamber. Zenig noted that the two Alisorti were lying lifeless in the now empty cots. He glanced at his leader who shook his head. They'd done their job, kept them alive through the decades, but their usefulness was at an end; now they were awake he had no intention of returning to Deep Sleep again in a hurry.

At the far end of the chamber Lorvalan waved his wrist over a wall-mounted sensor and, in response, a previously almost invisible door slid open. He was pleased to see that the

humans clearly hadn't found their way to this door. In the passageway beyond, the stench of humans was almost completely absent. The two Tyrenian warriors stepped through the hatch and the door slid closed behind them.

In the now empty Deep Sleep chamber all was silent and still. Except for a tiny movement in the third Deep Sleep cot where another of the parasite creatures was just beginning to twitch. Unlike the Alisorti that had been attached to Lorvalan and Zenig this one was a pale green colour and its twitching was totally arrhythmic. Suddenly with a snarling growl of agony the Tyrenian underneath the parasite sat up, his eyes burning with madness.

The Doctor sat in the rocking chair on the back porch and sipped at his tea, watching as Dee tended to her herb garden. With the sun already climbing in the sky the temperature was beginning to rise. The Doctor shielded his eyes to get a better look at what Dee was doing. She was kneeling down, examining the roots of some of her herb bushes, which nestled in beds dug right up against the sloping plastic walls of the original prefab.

'A good crop?' he asked politely. The herbalist shook her head, a grim expression on her face. 'Not really,' she explained. 'The soil is too crumbly, the rain too infrequent and the local insects too hungry.' She sat back on her heels.

'You don't use pesticides?' he wondered.

Dee laughed. 'I wish,' she said with a sigh. '*Back to Basics*, Doctor. Nothing that would have been out of place on an original settler's homestead in the American West, that's the rule.'

The Doctor's eyes flicked towards the plastic wall she was leaning against. 'Rules are there to be broken.'

Dee saw what he was looking at and nodded. 'I have a sneaking suspicion Ransom was a good deal more flexible than we think these days. I don't think any of those Gen-One ladies fancied giving birth without every medical intervention known to man.'

'But these days?' the Doctor wondered.

‘These days we get by with good old-fashioned hot water, towels and a few herbal teas I know of. Not that we have many births to deal with, mind.’ Dee looked around, a little despondently. ‘This place is barren in more ways than one.’

Without pushing the issue, the Doctor continued his gentle questioning and Dee found herself explaining a little more about the history of the colony to her guest, who listened politely and attentively. It transpired that he had been right in his decoding of the *Back to Basics* mantra; it was an ideological position based on the idea that technology had harmed mankind rather than liberated it. And this colony had been set up to run entirely under those rules.

‘But why the American West?’ the Doctor had interrupted at one point.

Dee had laughed again. ‘Ransom had to choose a cut-off point somewhere. He didn’t want us to be cavemen, making fire with two sharp sticks. In fact, there was a long and, from all accounts, bitter argument about it before the colony ship launched. Even before they began recruitment.’

The Doctor had interrupted again there, curious as to how the history had been passed on without technology. Dee had explained that there were journals and some books prepared before and during the long flight that had been lovingly handed down the generations. And, of course, there was a verbal tradition; the Gen-Ones had told their tales to their offspring, who had passed them on to their own children. There were quite a few legends, and a few songs, about those first pioneers. ‘Some of them may even be true.’ Dee grinned at the Doctor before returning to the task of answering his questions.

‘When Ransom and his people began thinking about it, they realised that the real explosion in technology came in the twentieth century, so they decided that their cut-off point had to be before that. But at the same time they knew that they had to give us a level of technology that we could live with, knowing that we would have little or no contact with Earth once the colony was established.’

‘And that’s when Ransom had come up with the idea of the Old West. Westerns were having one of their periodic revivals in popular culture and Ransom became somewhat of a connoisseur of early Western films. Apparently he was very fond of one in particular, called *Back to the Future Three* for some reason.’ Dee added.

The Doctor smiled to himself. ‘The second of the trilogy is better,’ he muttered. Ransom had fallen in love with the mythical American frontier and became convinced that the new colony, on the far-flung frontier that was Axista Four, could operate at that level of technology.

‘And here we are,’ concluded Dee with a wave of her hands, ‘one hundred years later and still going strong. Well, still going, at least.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘All very well for the first volunteers: they knew what they were signing up for,’ he commented. ‘But those that came along later, the next generations, I can’t imagine they were always so happy.’

Dee explained that at first the original colonists - the Gen-Ones, as they were dubbed - had tried to keep details of the life they had left behind away from their own children, the Gen-Two kids. But kids being kids they had soon started to ask questions, and began to make more from the sum of the answers than they were intended to. And, of course, the wreck of the colony ship was a potent symbol of the past and where they had all come from. It hadn’t taken long for some of the Gen-Two kids to get into the ship and begin to find things out for themselves. That was when the ship had been made a forbidden zone but, at the same time, the colonists took it upon themselves to be a little more open with their offspring. Rather than conceal the past they began to teach it, demonstrating how and why they had made the lifestyle choices they had made. Most of the Gen-Two kids, when it was explained to them, had gone along with their parents’ choices and had thrown themselves into the routine of work on the farms with a new commitment. Some, however, resented the decisions and yearned for the secret technologies hidden on the ship. The seed had grown over

the years, from a few malcontents to whole families that became disenchanted with the experiment and disengaged from the programme. Eventually it had led to the group of rebels who adopted the title 'Realist' - a group that had challenged Tam's leadership for years before finally breaking away some four years earlier.

The Doctor had allowed Dee to pour him another cup of tea. 'One of the few things we can get to grow here,' she explained.

The Doctor looked at her carefully - she was clearly an intelligent woman. 'Do you think the Realists have a point?'

Dee looked away, not hurrying to answer. 'I don't know. If we could at least do some simple DNA work with our crops we might have more of a chance; Earth crops need a little help on alien soil, it's basic biology and chemistry...'

The Doctor nodded. 'But a principle is a principle.'

Dee smiled. 'It's the way I was brought up,' she confessed.

'I wonder what Ransom would do, if he were here?' pondered the Doctor.

'Not the first time I've heard that thought. Unfortunately he's dead, and his daughter, who'd be the next best thing, is as near as dead too.'

'His daughter?'

Dee explained that not all of the Gen-One colonists had survived the crash. Some had been killed outright but there were also a small number, Kirann Ransom amongst them, who were in cryogenic suspension and remained that way now.

'They've been asleep all this time?' the Doctor was amazed.

'We've lost the expertise to revive them.' Dee looked rather embarrassed. The automatic systems were damaged in the crash and no one has the technical knowledge to bring them out manually. At least no one has dared to try.'

'Perhaps it's not just a matter of technical and medical ignorance that prevented any attempt,' commented the Doctor astutely. 'Would your leaders really want another Ransom around suddenly?'

Dee grinned in agreement. ‘She was named by Ransom as his deputy; were she to be revived she would automatically become the colony leader,’ she confirmed, before adding, ‘although I’m not that sure Tam would mind...’

Suddenly there was a terrific sonic boom and some massive shape shot across the sky, blocking the sun. A moment or two later there was a rumble and the ground beneath their feet shuddered, knocking a frightened and confused Dee to the ground. ‘What the hell was that?’ she shouted at the Doctor who was on his feet and looking out over the plain.

‘A spaceship. Big one, I’d say,’ he told her. Dee was still wide-eyed with the shock. The Doctor realised that she would never have seen or heard anything like that in her entire life.

‘I rather think,’ he commented with a certain glee, ‘that the Cavalry has arrived...’

Chapter Six

Veena always thought it was a bit ostentatious to take the largest of the *Hannibal's* three scout ships on a mission like this, but such a modest thought was beyond Major Cartor. He liked to make an entrance and in nor he was guaranteed to do just that. It was a real in-your-face shuttlecraft, bristling with weaponry and sensors, designed with the intention of making a statement: the statement being: 'We're here, we're armed, we're in charge!'

The extra loop in their descent, which had taken *Thor* directly over the settlement, had been a completely unnecessary embellishment, guaranteed not only to make sure the colonists saw them coming but also to antagonise them as well. Veena knew full well that Cartor knew that too, but it was something else that he was not worried about. After six months on board the *Hannibal* without a planet fall, Cartor was getting a little stir crazy. He needed to get some earth beneath his feet. He was itching for a fight and quite happy to provoke one if necessary.

Having buzzed the town, such as it was, Cartor had his pilot bring the ship down a few kilometres away, thus ensuring that the locals, when they finally arrived, would be both hot and bothered. There were, of course, land vehicles stored in the hull of *Thor* that could have taken Cartor, Veena and a security team directly into the town but Cartor wanted them to come to him. It was as close to something as subtle as psychology that Cartor was able to come. As far as Veena was concerned this kind of mind game was nothing if not totally unsubtle but she knew it worked for Cartor, and that was what mattered. At least while she was under his command. When (*if*, she thought bitterly for a moment) she ever got the promotion due to her, and a command of her own, she would do things differently. But without Cartor's

backing that promotion would remain theoretical; so for now she was happy to go along with her Commanding Officer.

It was, therefore, only about an hour later that anything interesting happened. Veena busied herself making arrangements, and found the time to change into her dress uniform on Cartor's orders, first impressions being so very important, according to him. When she returned to the bridge, it was just in time to hear the officer in charge make his report. Veena saw that Major Cartor was already in his dress uniform and was not impressed that he was wearing a full set of medals. She knew Cartor had earned them in the heat of battle but didn't see the need to remind people at every opportunity. Especially these people, who wouldn't even know their significance. A swift glance around the bridge told her that Administrator Greene wasn't present. She wondered why he was keeping such a low profile and what role he expected to play in their mission.

Cartor gave the command to punch the image up on the main view screen. At first Veena thought it was just a dust cloud but then, as the computer optimised the image, she could see that it was a horse-drawn cart with three passengers. The driver being an old man wearing some kind of badge of office - could it really be a silver star? A second man, a little younger and bearded, was dressed in the same rough, practical clothes as the first, without any badges, but the third man was something else again; he appeared to be dressed like a scarecrow. Cartor looked over at Veena and caught her eye. 'Better get ready with the beads and the firewater!' he joked.

Lorvalan snapped the clasp of his uniform jacket at the neck and flexed his arms. It felt good to be back in uniform. The jacket, padded but flexible, was a sensible brown colour, the tight fighting trousers a dark mixture of camouflage greens. The boots, which incorporated pockets for a plasma pistol and a throwing knife, were of a sturdy leather amalgam. Round his waist he wore a belt of ammunition: energy rounds for both the pistol in his boot and the larger plasma

rifle slung over his shoulder. He looked across to see that Zenig was making final adjustments to his own uniform. Both Tyrenians had been bred for combat and were much happier beings now they were once again armed.

Lorvalan had been relieved to find that the ship had remained undiscovered by the humans. With it remaining both hidden and secret Lorvalan knew that it was an advantage that he might need in any future conflict to retake the planet from the humans. For now it was best to keep it concealed. He led Zenig back to the transmat chamber and activated the control to send them back to the bunker.

On arrival Lorvalan nodded at Zenig to secure the transmat chamber and follow him back into the area of the bunker that the humans had discovered and explored. The scent of the humans was strong here and unmistakable. Lorvalan found it disturbingly alien, it offended his nose and threatened to make him sneeze. Perhaps he was allergic to the strangely hairless creatures? The thought quickly left him, however, when he returned to the Deep Sleep room. There were signs of some kind of disturbance: furniture broken and thrown around and the computer console he had been using earlier had been smashed. Could the humans have done this? Lorvalan stopped and sniffed the air. No, no new human smell, but there was something new.

Tyrenians had very developed senses of smell, in fact they recognised each other by odour before even visual imagery or names and it didn't take Lorvalan long to realise whose scent he was picking up - Dyselt, the giant security officer who had insisted on being placed in one of the command cots, to enable him to be amongst the first revived so he could secure their position, whatever it was. The medics hadn't been keen; Dyselt had a poor record with Deep Sleep and a higher-than-average rejection level for utilising an Alisorti. Lorvalan, however, had overridden the medical objections, rating Dyselt's loyalty and determination above such matters. Now he wondered whether he had made a mistake.

He hurried over to the cot and was not surprised to see that it was empty. Dyselt must have revived in some kind of

state of confusion. Lorvalan heard movement behind him and whirled round, his plasma gun already in his hand.

‘It’s me, sir,’ said Zenig a little quickly, holding his hands up. Lorvalan slipped his gun back into the holster built into his boot.

‘Sorry, Lieutenant. Security Chief Dyselt has been revived, but I fear he may be ill,’ Lorvalan explained hastily. He looked back into Dyselt’s cot and saw the Alisorti, pale and quivering. ‘Medical scanner,’ he ordered and Zenig hurried over to an equipment locker, opened it with a swipe of his wrist and retrieved the device Lorvalan had requested. The senior Tyrenian took it in his hairy paw and, after flicking the thing on, he passed the sensor over the Alisorti. As he expected the scanner emitted a painful sequence of bleeps. A read-out began to fill with medical detail. Lorvalan was no medic but he knew enough about basic biology to understand the message. The Alisorti that had been keeping Dyselt alive had been suffering from a relatively rare condition that occasionally affected the species, a blood disorder that was always fatal but impossible to detect in the early stages. It was one of the risks of Alisorti-assisted Deep Sleep that every Tyrenian warrior knew all too well. The condition killed the Alisorti but it could also affect any Tyrenian that bonded with it for Deep Sleep.

‘Dyselt has IRV,’ he told Zenig grimly.

Zenig flinched and almost took a step back. IRV was not something that was talked about much and there was a wealth of rumours and myths about the condition. ‘You can’t catch it from the air, man,’ Lorvalan reminded him. Zenig didn’t seem too reassured.

‘It’s still IRV,’ he complained. Intelligence Reducing Virus: a polite way of saying that it turned a civilised, thinking Tyrenian into a wild and savage beast.

Lorvalan nodded. For all the fear and misunderstanding there was no doubt about the effects of the condition: animalistic rage, loss of IQ, wild strength. If Dyselt was running around suffering from IRV they had to find him, and quickly. In his condition he might reveal their existence to

the humans before they were ready. With their limited numbers, surprise was one of the greatest weapons in their arsenal. And they would need it if they were going to have their revenge on the humans for the unprovoked attack that had destroyed their fledgling settlement.

'We have to locate him and do what's necessary. He shouldn't have been able to get far on foot,' Lorvalan ordered. As they headed for the exit Zenig slipped a head-set over his ears and locked the eyepiece over one eye. He then activated the radio link and made contact with the Tyrenian computer.

'Sir,' he began as he assimilated the rush of information. Lorvalan, already a few metres further up the tunnel cut by the humans to reach their crashed ship, stopped and looked back at him.

'What is it now?' asked his commander. Zenig knew better than to try to hide bad news.

'I don't think we're going to find Dyselt nearby. There's a sled missing.'

Lorvalan cursed and bared his teeth.

To Kartryte's aged eyes it was impossibly big and bright. Of course the colony ship was once a craft that would have dwarfed this, but that he only knew as a blackened, rusting wreck, broken and useless. This ship, by contrast, was shiny, complete and fully functional. He could see the heat haze shimmering where its engines were still so much hotter than even the sun-burnished earth itself. As they had approached, the Doctor had suggested that the giant ship was just a shuttlecraft, intended for short trips between planets and near space; it was his conjecture that a far bigger ship would currently be in orbit. Tam couldn't really imagine what such a ship must look like against the inky blackness of space but he suspected that one of the kids like Billy Joe would love to see it.

The sudden thought of his grandson took Tam by surprise. In the excitement of the aborted raid he'd allowed himself to forget about the missing boy, half assuming that he would return in the dead of night. In the morning he had still been

missing and Tam felt a pang of guilt for not having followed it up before. And now here he was, riding across the plains to greet the first visitors the colony had received in a generation, in the company of another even more mysterious visitor. And all the while Billy Joe was missing. The Doctor was also missing a companion, though, a lad called Jamie, and although he was clearly worried he was not letting it get in the way of the job at hand. Tam thought he could take that as an example.

The Doctor had pulled from one of his capacious jacket pockets a small collapsible telescope which he was using to examine the ship as they approached it. He had noticed a symbol plastered at various points on the ship's hull. Tam recognised the Doctor's description: an interlocking series of circles superimposed over two stylised letters, E and F.

'Earth Federation,' Kartryte had muttered by way of explanation, almost spitting the words out. Kartryte had never had any direct experience of the Federation, of course, but he had received the briefing and knowledge passed down from Ransom himself and he had no doubt that they were bad news. His lather had told him of the first and only visit the colony had previously endured from an ESCV; his father had only been a child himself at the time but he had told Tam of the hostility and trouble that erupted. He glanced around at his other passenger. According to his father it had been a Freedom - Jak, Val's grandfather - who had been in the centre of the conflict. With the Freedom family's typical nose for trouble, Val had appeared on Tarn's doorstep before the aftershock of the shuttle ship's landing had dissipated. When he heard that Tam intended calling on their visitors he had invited himself to the party. Now he sat silent, watching the shuttle ship grow in size as they approached with ever-widening eyes. If it hadn't been Val Freedom, Tam would have sworn the man was actually scared.

At length, the cart became enveloped in the shadow of the ship where they found a couple of heavily armed Federation marines waiting for them. One of them had taken the reins of the horses, a little nervously, Tam had noted with a

mischievous smile, and the other had led them up a gangplank into the ship itself. The Doctor had led the way, confident and nonchalant, while Tam and Freedom had followed more slowly, looking around themselves the whole time.

It was everything that Freedom had expected and feared; shining corridors and burnished metal in all directions, the happy gurgle of electronic activity everywhere they went. They were led into some kind of meeting room where a table had been laid with a tempting selection of food and drink. They waited there for some time, reluctant early arrivals at a party they weren't expecting, and unsure whether to start eating or not - or at least, Tam and Freedom were; the Doctor was not so reticent. Grabbing a plastic plate he set about piling it high with cold meats and salads from the various bowls on offer. His plate full, he then poured himself a drink of what to his delight turned out to be freshly squeezed orange juice, and returned to Tam with his acquisitions held proudly in both hands. 'Tuck in,' he suggested with enthusiasm. 'It would be a shame to let it go to waste after they've made such an effort.'

Just then the door opened again and three members of the crew entered: two men and a woman. The first man, bull-shaped and powerful-looking, hair trimmed to within a millimetre of his scalp, was dressed in an over-decorated military uniform. The woman was dressed in similar style but slightly more restrained and the other wore a formal business one-piece. The Doctor recognised the type at once - military personnel in dress uniform. He felt an unbearable urge to tease them: their kind always brought it out in him. The non-uniformed man was a mystery, though; his perfect skin and rigid body language felt somehow alien but the Doctor couldn't put his finger on the reason why. He flashed him one of his most charming smiles but the icy expression on the man's face didn't flicker for a moment.

Major Cartor introduced himself and his First Officer Veena Myles and explained that the third individual was a Federation Official, Administrator Laken Greene. In response

Kartryte told them who he was and introduced Freedom as a member of the community before turning to the Doctor, who suddenly stepped forward, arm outstretched to shake hands before Kartryte could complete the introductions.

'I'm their legal representative. You can call me the Doctor, everyone does,' he burred happily, shaking hands vigorously with all three of the strangers, but leaving the Administrator until last. Greene regarded the Doctor with some suspicion. 'I'm surprised that a colony this size has developed a legal system that requires lawyers,' he commented, eyeing the Doctor's outlandish garb sniffily.

'Oh, I'm not local,' the Doctor explained happily, 'I'm a visitor, a consultant to the colony if you will.'

Cartor and Veena exchanged looks; this was an unexpected development.

'Have you practised long?' asked Cartor, unable to keep the doubt out of his voice.

'Oh yes. Years and years,' said the Doctor, a twinkle in his eye, 'And I'm getting better all the time...'

Freedom discovered a sudden cough to cover his not entirely smothered laughter. The Doctor winked at Kartryte and turned back to Cartor. 'Shall we get started, then?'

The skimmer sped across the plain on a bed of air, throwing up a dust trail that could be seen for kilometres. Dyselt didn't care; he wasn't even aware of the dust. All he was aware of was the smell that had greeted him when he awoke: the smell of the aliens, the scent of humans. And now he was on the hunt, filled with the urge to find the humans and damage them, to repay the violation of his bunker.

Although his brain was still fizzy from the revival he had enough of a grasp of his facilities to operate a scanner and had quickly located the bulky signal that could only be the humans' crashed ship. It had taken moments to find the skimmer, charged and ready to go. And now, in the distance, he could see the top of the human ship, sticking up at a peculiar angle. Soon the carnage could begin.

Zoe sighed and opened her eyes. The light was intense and it hurt. Her throat was dry. Wincing against the bright sunlight, she pulled herself up and took in her surroundings.

She was on a bed, one of half a dozen in the room, which, she realised, was actually part of some kind of prefabricated structure. She reached out for the walls and found that they were made of plastic. Carefully she got to her feet. She saw that she was wearing a long cotton nightdress and wondered who had undressed her. More to the point, where were her clothes? Looking around, she saw that the room was full of a strange mixture of medical equipment: some relatively high-tech, but the majority basic and crude. There were jars and vials of medicines that looked more like home-brew ale than anything else, a mortar and pestle, and some containers of dried herbs. There were also a number of pots of growing plants and herbs. Dotted around the room, however, were a few more modern pieces of equipment, some breathing apparatus, a defibrillator, a body scanner, but most of this looked as if it was rarely, if ever, used. The whole place was like a cross between a medieval apothecary's and a modern medical laboratory.

Finally, Zoe saw a pitcher of water and with relief she poured herself a glass. She drank swiftly and felt a little better. The room was still swaying but only gently now.

'Doctor?' she called, and a woman appeared in the doorway. She was pretty and smiled warmly, which made Zoe feel a little better.

'I'm sorry,' the woman said, still smiling her kindly smile, 'I'm afraid I'm just a healer, not a doctor as such.'

'I was calling for my friend, actually,' explained Zoe. 'The Doctor, untidy black hair, baggy check trousers...'

'Oh, him,' said the woman. 'I'm afraid he's not here right now. He went off with the sheriff to see our visitors. Our other visitors,' she added. Zoe was disappointed and fell back against the pillow. 'I'm Dee Willoughby,' the woman introduced herself and offered a hand for Zoe to shake. Weakly Zoe shook the proffered hand. 'Zoe Heriot,' she said by way of her own introduction.

‘Pleased to meet you,’ said Dee. ‘And how are you feeling this morning?’

‘Tired,’ said Zoe with simple honesty.

Dee felt her forehead and nodded. ‘No temperature now; I think the fever may have gone but you will be tired. If I were you, I’d get some sleep. Your friend the Doctor won’t be back for a few hours yet.’

Zoe nodded and yawned and began to say something in agreement, but before she could get the words out, she was asleep.

The meeting between the representatives of Earth Gov and the leadership of Plymouth Hope was not going well. As Cartor spoke, outlining the reasons for their arrival on the planet, the Doctor could see Kartryte beginning to lose his temper. Eventually he could contain himself no longer.

‘What do you mean - you had contact from the colony? No one from Plymouth Hope has had any contact with Earth Gov for decades,’ he exploded.

Cartor shrugged and looked over at Veena. ‘The message we received was from some group calling themselves “Realists”,’ she explained.

Kartryte was shocked. He looked at the Doctor, incomprehension written on his face.

‘I can’t believe he did that,’ he said looking at Freedom.

‘You know what Max is like. When he does something he does it for real,’ he replied evenly.

‘It was one thing to be a dissenter, and to take a group away from the colony, but to jeopardise us all like this? To call in Earth Gov as if we’re failures that need a helping hand from the home world. How could he do that?’ The Doctor could see that Kartryte was genuinely hurt by the news.

‘Max always said we needed help; that was always part of the issue for him,’ Freedom reminded him.

Cartor cleared his throat. ‘I’m sorry to interrupt but your internal disputes are really none of my business.’

‘You can say that again,’ said Kartryte bitterly.

‘Nevertheless,’ continued Cartor, ignoring the interruption, ‘I have a job to do here and I’m going to do it. I have to inform you that you are to receive some new arrivals.’

This time the Doctor thought that Kartryte was going to have a coronary; his face reddened and he started to splutter indignantly. ‘What?!!’ was the only word he could get out. Even Freedom was concerned. He put a hand on Kartryte’s arm to calm him down but he brushed it aside.

‘There’s a war on out there. A big one. An alien empire has been at war with us for the past seventy-five years.’

‘Daleks?’ murmured the Doctor, a serious look on his face for once.

Cartor nodded. ‘They’ve been making gains in the third quadrant; we’ve lost five outlying colonies in the last four years.’

‘But what has this got to do with us?’ asked Freedom.

‘There are a lot of people who have been displaced by those losses: refugees. More than the home system can handle. They need relocating, urgently. And Axista Four has been selected as one of their destinations.’

The Doctor could see that Kartryte and Freedom were in shock. One moment they had a struggling colony; now they were faced with the prospect of new blood, increased numbers that might make the colony viable, but at what cost?

Cartor looked at the colonists and their ‘legal’ advisor and tried to evaluate how they were taking the news. It didn’t seem to be going down very well. He decided to be a little economical with the details at this stage. Too many shocks at once might just kill the old guy.

‘A ship of refugees is already *en route*’, he told them, avoiding any mention of the size of the ship or the number of new colonists it would be carrying. ‘It will be here in three months. Plenty of time for you to prepare for the influx.’

Kartryte shook his head firmly. ‘This is impossible - the new colonists won’t be committed to the *Back to Basics* philosophy...’ He trailed off, seeing that this argument was not going to get him anywhere. ‘But what about the practical

issues? We've been finding it hard to adapt the planet to support small numbers - how can it suddenly cope with a whole lot of new mouths to feed?'

Cartor smiled. 'That's why we're here - to help the transition.'

Kartryte got to his feet and Freedom and the Doctor followed. 'You can't do this,' he said, heading for the door. 'This is an independent colony. You have no right to force new colonists on us - no right at all. As the Doctor will prove, won't you Doctor?'

The Doctor assumed a stern expression. 'Indeed we shall Leader Kartryte, indeed we shall.'

Cartor shrugged and glanced at Administrator Greene who then spoke in a quiet but commanding voice. 'Check the small print on the documentation,' he said with a cold smile. 'No Earth colony is fully independent.'

Dyselt abandoned the skimmer as he got close to the humans' settlement and continued on foot. The scent of the humans was everywhere now. As he ran, he felt a strange urge to fall on to all four of his limbs, to run like his primitive ancestors. Although the illness ravaging his body was inhibiting his normal brain functions he was not entirely mindless. In feet a raw animal cunning replaced his usual logic. He was aware that he was a lone warrior and that he couldn't hope to make a direct assault on the humans. He knew he needed to be subtle.

He crouched low to the ground and considered his options. The town in the valley below him was quiet; a few humans were going about their business but most of the colonists were at home on their farms. Dyselt had seen some during his journey and had avoided them all, save for one female who had been swimming in a lake. He licked his lips, savouring the remnants of his meal, enjoying the sweet taste of the human's flesh. His hunger had been sated by the encounter but his need for revenge had not.

Although most of the buildings in the town had been clearly constructed from local wood, at one end of the main

street Dyselt noted a structure that was very different. It was essentially circular at the rear and built on at the front but its original structure appeared to have been made of pre-formed segments. A red cross was painted across the roof of the building. It reminded Dyselt of the targeting sights on a Mark Three Nightstalker Missile and dredged up memories of long-forgotten battles from his time as an infantryman. He had found his target. Sticking close to the ground, he started to move towards the red-cross building.

Zoe dozed fitfully, despite the comfort of the bed. She stirred, suddenly aware of something wrong. What was it? She looked around but everything seemed exactly as it had been before; the strange mix of high- and low-tech medicine, the smell of the various herbs. But there was something else - something her unconscious mind had picked up on and decided she should wake to deal with.

'Dee?' she called, but there was no answer. Zoe strained her ears - perhaps the herbalist was working elsewhere in the building. It was no good - there was nothing to hear. And then she did hear something: a scratching sound from the other side of the room. She looked across and let out a gasp of surprise. A shadowy figure was standing just outside the room - she could see its silhouette, humanoid but somehow hairy against the fabric of the wall, and then before she could move or even scream the figure raised one of its arms and brought it down. With a terrible ripping sound a set of talons pierced the wall.

The creature's claw pulled down, shredding the plastic as if it were paper. Zoe looked around for a means of escape but the creature was between her bed and the door. The creature made a second insertion and ripped a ragged hole in the wall. It thrust its head through the gap. Zoe had a fleeting glimpse of a hairy face, savage, blood-stained teeth and wild eyes: the face of a rampaging werewolf or rabid dog. And then she screamed...

EPIISODE THREE

Chapter Seven

Kartryte and Freedom were inclined to leave without any further discussion but the Doctor had one more item he wished to raise with the newcomers: Zoe.

‘There is something else,’ he said, raising a hand as Cartor headed for the door. The Captain stopped and looked at the little man. ‘Another legal point, Doctor?’

‘No, more of a medical one, actually. I wondered if I could ask a favour?’

Cartor frowned. A moment ago the colonists had been treating him like Public Enemy Number One; now this man was asking for a favour. ‘Go on...’ he encouraged.

With a quick apologetic glance at Kartryte and Freedom the Doctor ploughed on. ‘I have a companion, a young woman. She’s fallen ill and I’m worried that the colonists’ medical facilities might not be... quite...’ the Doctor faltered, embarrassed, ‘well... up to scratch,’ he concluded, unable now to look at Kartryte.

Cartor considered for a moment and then nodded at his First Officer. ‘Go with them, Myles, take a medi-kit.’

Kartryte was not impressed. ‘We’ll ride back - perhaps your new friend will give you a lift,’ he suggested. Kartryte and Freedom swept out without giving the Doctor a second glance. The Doctor looked crestfallen. He hated letting people down but he was too worried about Zoe to be upset.

He rubbed his hands together and looked at Veena enthusiastically. ‘So - can you provide some transport?’ he asked her with a cheeky grin.

Veena found herself warming to the strange little man. She returned the smile. ‘I’ll see what I can do,’ she promised him.

* * *

Kartryte and Freedom said little on the journey back, both lost in their own thoughts. The certain knowledge that

nothing would ever be the same for them or the colony was just beginning to sink in. A whole new group of colonists was already on its way, new blood, with new thoughts. Kartryte knew one thing - if this was allowed to happen it would be the end of Ransom's dream. No more *Back to Basics*.

Freedom was equally in shock. He'd been a thorn in the side of Kartryte for years, always complaining, bitching about this and that, niggling away about the *Back to Basics* principles. But when the chance had come to do something about it, to join Doc Foide and his so-called Realists, Freedom had held back. Actually rebelling, making a stand against the accepted ideology, that was a step too far for Freedom. He was happy with the status quo; happy being unhappy, as it were. But now it was all going to end. A new influx of colonists would wash all the ideologies away, all the certainties. Everything was going to change.

And as they approached the town they became horribly aware that the process had already started. A trail of black smoke was rising above a building at the end of Main Street. The men realised simultaneously that it was from the medical centre. Kartryte cracked the whip and the horses sped up.

'Are you armed?' he asked Freedom. Freedom nodded and patted his hip. 'I've a rifle behind the seat, can you get it for me?' Kartryte asked and Freedom did as requested.

Kartryte pulled up and they jumped to the ground. There was an ugly tear in the fabric of the building and the smoke was coming from within. Slipping the safety catch on his rifle Kartryte led the way into the new access point.

Inside it was a scene of utter devastation. Vials and bottles of medicine lay smashed where they had been thrown at random. Furniture was broken and bedding scattered everywhere. Something had caught alight and a fire was blazing in one corner, sending into the sky the coarse black smoke that had first alerted them. From further inside the building came the sound of continuing destruction.

Tam and Freedom hurried forward, weapons at the ready. Tam went first. In the corridor it was worse; the smoke was

thicker here and it was dark. A figure lay on the floor. Tam realised with a surge of horror that it was Dee. He bent to check and was relieved to discover that she was still alive. 'Help her out of here,' he told Freedom, and before the man could argue, he hurried on into the smoke.

Freedom bent down and picked up Dee as gently as he could. Already beginning to cough as the acrid smoke found its way into his lungs, he staggered back towards the sick bay and the rip in the wall that led to the fresh air outside. There he put the woman down and tried to work out the extent of her injuries. There didn't seem to be any visible blood; she'd been lucky. He wondered if he should return to help Tam and then, hearing a terrible cry of pain, feared he might be too late. Leaving Dee coughing gently, he ran back inside.

Tam Kartryte was not a coward. Life on Arista Four might not have been as dangerous as many of the places that humans had colonised in the far reaches of deep space but it still threw up enough native threats - wild animals, poisonous plants, sickness-carrying insects - to have made the work of establishing the colony over the past hundred years full of perils. Over the years of his leadership Tam had led hunts and exploratory missions and faced pretty much every threat the place could throw at him. And in more recent times there had been the regular raids by the rebels to deal with, but this was something new. The Realists had only targeted outlying farms for food and the wreck of the colony ship for materials; never before had they actually come into the town. And never before had they left such destruction in their wake. They must be getting desperate indeed. Tam feared that the raiders would outnumber him and knew that the sensible thing would be to wait for more help, but the fire was spreading and more innocents might be at risk. And there was more to it than his duty. This attack was an outrage and he was mad as hell about it. No one came into his town and did something like this. No one. Armed with both his own rifle and Freedom's revolver, which he had dropped earlier,

Tam headed without hesitation into the smoke-filled corridors.

It was almost impossible to see anything, and not too easy to breathe either. Tarn's eyes watered and he began to cough. Suddenly there was a shape in front of him - a massive humanoid shape, impossibly hairy and fast. Before Tam could raise either of his weapons the shape slashed at him and Tam felt a sharp pain in his chest and screamed in agony, the sound dying as he fell to the ground.

It had taken time for a tech crew to unload and prep the ground car for action but now the Doctor and the First Officer of the *Hannibal*, accompanied by two grim-faced, well-armed marines, were racing across the plain at speeds that the good citizens of Plymouth Hope could only dream of. The journey that had taken Kartryte's horse and cart over an hour was taking them mere minutes. The Doctor had hardly finished adjusting his seat belt when the wreck of the colony ship came into view.

Veena found the sight uncomfortable. A ship of that size didn't look right, as far as she was concerned, in the incongruous setting of a planet surface. It was like a sea creature marooned on a beach; it just looked wrong. She could imagine what it must have been like when the ship had crashed, hurtling into the ground like a massive missile. It was a testament to the ship's builders that so much of it was still intact.

The Doctor was more concerned with something else they could see on the horizon: black smoke bellowing from the township. He tapped Veena on the arm and urged her to hurry. Veena increased the speed of the ground car even more, hurling the Doctor back against his seat. As they came closer, the Doctor could see that it was Dee's medical centre that was under attack.

Veena hit the brakes and the car skidded to a halt, throwing up a wave of sandy earth and startling the horses, which immediately bolted, dragging the cart with them. The Doctor hopped out of the car to deal with Dee, who was

leaning against a wall, coughing. Without hesitation Veena ordered her two-man security detail to secure their facemasks. Then she grabbed a fire extinguisher from the car, and darted into the smoke-filled opening; the two men, now fully shielded, followed her.

Inside, Veena began firing the chemical fire suppressant at the various small fires, quickly dousing the flames. The smoke was beginning to clear now; another door was open somewhere. Leaving the extinguisher, Veena pulled her energy weapon from its holster. She nodded at the marines to start searching some of the other rooms.

It was Veena who found the body. Ugly splashes of blood marked the wall above the crumpled figure of the old man. She checked for a pulse but couldn't find one. Of his attacker there was no sign.

She ordered the soldiers to secure the building, picked up the victim and carried him back outside. She found that the Doctor had managed to locate some water and had revived the woman.

Dee looked up and saw that the uniformed stranger was carrying Tarn's lifeless body. Helped by the Doctor, she got to her feet and hurried over.

'Put him down,' she requested.

Veena did as she was asked. 'I don't think there's anything that we can do for him,' she explained gently.

Dee ignored her, carefully examining Tam. She looked up sharply. 'There's a pulse. He's not dead yet.'

'Perhaps the medical facilities on your ship...?' suggested the Doctor.

Veena nodded and activated her communicator. 'Myles to *Thor*. Request immediate Medevac.'

Dee and the Doctor watched as Veena made her report as quickly and efficiently as she could. Finally she clicked shut the communicator. 'A flyer will be here in minutes, our surgeons are standing by,' she told them. Dee nodded gratefully. 'Thank you.'

The Doctor was edging towards the ragged hole in the building. Wisps of smoke were still floating out of it. 'Wait

right there, Doctor. A full security squad will be here shortly to secure the area; until then I'd rather you stayed put,' Veena requested.

The Doctor hopped from foot to foot impatiently. 'But my friend...Zoe. She's in there...' Veena pulled him away from the door as gently as she could. 'I'm sorry, Doctor. We've not found anyone else in there, dead or alive,' she explained. 'I'm really sorry.'

There was a sudden electronic bleep and Veena activated her communicator. It was the security detail reporting that they had found another survivor. Hope flared on the Doctor's face but died a moment later as Val Freedom was helped out of the building, supported by one of the troopers.

He took in the sight of Dee, tending to Tam, and glanced over at the Doctor.

'Is he...?' he began.

'Barely,' confessed the Doctor. 'They're going to do what they can.'

'We'll take him up to our main ship as soon as we've got him stabilised,' Veena explained.

'Will he be okay?' Freedom asked.

Veena shrugged. 'I'm not a medic. But I know we've got the best staff and equipment for a dozen light years. We're the best hope he's got.'

Freedom nodded, taking it in. A few hours ago the visitors from Earth Gov had been the worst thing he could imagine; now he was grateful for their presence.

Dee came over to him; she was carrying the silver badge Tam usually wore. She fixed it to his shirt.

'You wanted to be sheriff,' she told him. 'Now you are.'

'But we should have an election,' he began to complain, but Dee stopped him with a shake of her head.

'At a time like this? I don't think so, Val. If anyone asks, Tam nominated you before losing consciousness. Isn't that right?' she addressed the question to both the Doctor and the uniformed woman. They both nodded. Freedom swallowed hard. Dee was right: he'd always said he wanted to lead, and now he had his wish.

He glanced over at the prone figure of Tam, the savage red wounds on his chest all too visible, and shuddered. He wished it had happened a different way.

Just two hours later, Plymouth Hope was full of people again. Some were colonists, drawn in from the outlying farms by the activity, but they were outnumbered by far by newcomers from the Earth Gov ship. Marines in battle armour were patrolling the streets, and searching each building. A group of diverse vehicles: some ground cars, some flyers, were parked at the edge of the town, dwarfing the buildings. A couple of prefabricated buildings had been erected and a security fence was being constructed around the entire town. The strangers had moved in and taken over.

A town meeting had hurriedly been convened; Major Cartor and Acting Sheriff Freedom had wanted to address the concerned people of Plymouth Hope together. For now they kept the information about the new arrivals to themselves and concentrated on the attack and its aftermath. Cartor assured everyone that the attacker or attackers would be found and made to pay for their crimes. It was assumed by everyone that it must have been a Realist raid, although all agreed it seemed more desperate and more violent than any previous raid. Only one person raised any doubts about this theory, the only truly independent person on Axista Four: the Doctor.

‘Are you really certain that some of your fellow colonists did this?’ he asked the assembled townspeople. There was a general rumble of agreement before Freedom stood to put their thoughts into words. ‘Who else could it be, Doctor? There’s no one else on the planet capable of an act like that. There are bear like creatures in the mountains but we’ve never seen one down here. And there ain’t no one else on Axista Four.’

The Doctor didn’t look convinced. ‘Well, that’s as may be, but I am here, remember?’

Freedom frowned. ‘Are you claiming responsibility, Doctor? Your absent friend Jamie perhaps?’

‘Well, of course not,’ frowned the Doctor. ‘I merely meant that if *we* could come here then it’s not impossible that someone else did.’

The Doctor watched Major Cartor’s face carefully as he spoke. For all his agreement with Freedom about the likelihood of the attack being a Realist raid he didn’t seem nearly as dismissive of the Doctor’s counter-theory. ‘Don’t you agree, Major Cartor?’ the Doctor continued. ‘We shouldn’t dismiss the possibility of a third, unknown party at work here...’

Cartor shrugged, keeping his face impassive. ‘There’s no evidence of any other force here...’

The Doctor frowned, frustrated. There was something Cartor wasn’t telling them, he was sure of it. Not that he suspected Cartor and his men of being behind the attack - that just didn’t seem likely - but he was hiding something.

‘Would you mind if I took a look at the medical centre?’

‘Looking for clues, Doctor - evidence of the existence of your mysterious aliens?’ Freedom asked.

The Doctor smiled. ‘I just want to see what I can see, if that’s okay with you, Major?’ he added, turning back to Cartor.

‘Sure, Doctor, be my guest.’

The smoke was long gone but the smell lingered. Whoever had attacked the medical centre had possessed a savage strength. The Doctor noted metal fixtures that had been torn and twisted from the walls, heavy cabinets that had been lifted and tossed like cushions.

Cartor’s people had installed emergency lighting and the Doctor was able to examine in more detail some of the marks that the intruder had left. What had initially appeared to be scratches made by some kind of sword or knife now looked suspiciously less even and regular; they looked like claw marks. The Doctor moved on - the identity of the intruder was a mystery that could wait. The priority now was working out what had happened to Zoe. So far he had found no trace

of her. The Doctor was relieved; there were no more bloodstains, which he took to be a good sign.

He looked around the room that had been a ward. The destruction was at its worst in here - it was a real mess. In the corner of the room was a large free-standing cabinet with a heavy door. It looked a little like a massive fridge freezer. The Doctor hadn't really registered it before - it was half-hidden under a pile of debris - but now his eyes were drawn to it. More specifically to the small row of lights that were flashing in sequence on a control panel above the door handle on the cabinet. Flashing green and red lights, denoting that it was active. But Dee had told him that she never used the high technology, hadn't she?

The Doctor hurried over and began pulling the bits and pieces of debris away from the cabinet. At times like these the Doctor realised how much he was missing Jamie - the Scottish lad's strength would have soon had the obstruction cleared. The Doctor wondered where Jamie was but then shook his head to clear it. One missing companion at a time, he told himself, as he pulled part of one of the beds away from the cabinet. Now he could get closer he recognised what the device was. An emergency cryogenic cradle for use with patients in extreme crisis who couldn't be operated on or helped immediately; a way of putting critical cases on hold. Decoding the security locks took a matter of seconds and the Doctor punched in the command to open the door. Even as the heavy door began to lift, releasing a cool mist, the Doctor was fairly certain what he would find inside. A moment later his hunch was proved right - inside the cabinet, lying upright, was Zoe - in a state of deep cryogenic suspension.

The Doctor resealed the cryo-cabinet and hurried to find Veena or Cartor. He found them both in the Command Centre that the ECSV crew had set up in one of their prefab buildings at the edge of the town. He explained his discovery and asked for their aid.

'The facilities here are rather primitive,' he said, and the emergency cryo-unit isn't designed for revival. But you must have suitable facilities on your ship?'

Cartor nodded. 'My medical team is keeping pretty busy right now; Mr Kartryte has stabilised. Miss Willoughby is with him.'

'But can you help Zoe?' persisted the Doctor.

Veena glanced at Cartor for approval and then said, 'Of course. I'll take her up myself.' She smiled apologetically. 'No offence meant but I get a little twitchy if I'm on a planet for too long. Space-born.' she added as an explanation.

The Doctor turned his attention to Cartor.

'I've been examining the scene of the crime,' he began. 'Would you care to take a look at what I've discovered?'

Val Freedom looked closely at the marks and frowned. He stood up and shrugged. 'It's hard to say. I suppose it could be claw marks but then again...' He trailed off, clearly not convinced or, at least, not admitting that he was convinced. The Doctor turned to his other guest. 'And what about you, Major, what do you make of it?'

Major Cartor gave the marks a cursory inspection. 'Nothing conclusive either way.'

Disappointed, the Doctor urged them further into the medical centre. 'See here,' he said reaching up towards a rip in the wall where a light had once been fixed. 'How high would you say that was? What human could have reached up there to tear that light fitting down?' he demanded.

Val Freedom indicated the rest of the room. Whoever they were it looks like they were pretty mad. Anger can make a man do amazing things.'

'I think that we're dealing with something rather different from an angry man here,' commented the Doctor firmly.

'What are you suggesting - some kind of alien creature?' The disbelief was evident in Freedom's tone. As before, however, Cartor was far less dismissive.

'It is... possible,' he admitted.

The Doctor turned on him sharply. 'Oh really, do you think so?'

Cartor kept his poker expression in place, giving nothing away. 'It's not impossible. It's a big galaxy and there are a lot of alien races out there.'

The Doctor picked up on a note of bitterness in Cartor's voice.

'You have some experience with aliens?' he asked.

Cartor nodded curtly. 'More than a little. They're well named - aliens. They think different, act different. I don't like them.'

The Doctor was shaking his head.

'I've more than a little experience with aliens myself and I'm afraid I just can't agree with you there. In my experience most intelligent species want the same things: security, food, a place to call home. A place to raise a family...'

Cartor looked unimpressed.

'You ever come face to face with a Dalek?' he asked sarcastically.

'More than once,' admitted the Doctor, turning away. 'There's always the exception that proves the rule.' Not to mention the Cybermen, the Ice Warriors, the Sontarans, the list was endless, thought the Doctor, but decided his argument would get a better hearing if he kept quiet about them. Cartor brought him up short with his next statement.

'If there are aliens here they'll have to be dealt with.'

'How exactly?'

'Refugees from the Dalek Wars will be here before long; I don't want people fleeing a war zone to find a battlefield on their new home. If we find aliens here,' Cartor paused, considering his words, 'then they'll have to be eradicated.'

Chapter Eight

Jamie stumbled and had to be supported under the arms by his escort. The door to the prefab hut he had been assigned was opened and without much dignity he was shoved through the opening. The door was slammed shut behind him as he collapsed in a heap on the floor.

Billy Joe, who had been dozing, jumped to his feet and hurried across to him.

‘Jamie, what happened to you?’

Jamie managed to open his eyes. His vision was blurred but he could just about make out the face of his new young friend.

‘They wanted to ask me some more questions,’ he said, slurring his speech slightly. What was wrong with him? His head felt as if he had been drinking but surely he hadn’t?

‘Are you okay?’ inquired Billy Joe in a concerned tone. Jamie certainly felt ill. Suddenly he became aware of a hand on his leg.

‘Hey, what’re you doing?’ said Jamie, not so out of it that he could ignore the assault. Billy Joe pointed to something on his thigh - a tiny red mark.

‘Did they drug you?’ he asked, appalled.

Jamie managed a nod. ‘Aye, they said it would help me remember things. I think. I canna remember anything now... I need to sleep...’ Before Billy Joe could say or do anything else, Jamie keeled over and began snoring loudly.

‘You drugged him!’ Hali was clearly not impressed with the news. Forde looked away, avoiding her accusing eye. ‘I thought it was the right thing to do.’

Hali snorted contemptuously.

‘Just because we have the ability to do something like that doesn’t give us the right,’ she told him.

‘We need to know who he is and where he came from,’ Max reminded her.

‘He had already told us everything,’ she retorted.

‘I didn’t believe it,’ Max confessed.

Hali sighed and sat back down beside Max. ‘Okay then - what did you find out?’

Now it was Max’s turn to sigh. Reluctantly he told her everything that he had learnt from the young Scots lad under the influence of the truth drug. It was Max’s medical opinion that the boy was some kind of congenital idiot. With his tongue loosened by the drug he had babbled incoherently about travelling through time and space in a little blue box.

‘But where is he from?’ Hali asked.

‘Oh, you’ll like this,’ replied Max, beginning to laugh. ‘Apparently he’s from some place called Scotland - part of the EuroZone, isn’t it? But get this... he reckons he was born in the seventeenth century!’

‘What!’ Hali had never heard anything so ridiculous in her life.

It hadn’t been hard for the two Tyrenian warriors to locate the humans’ base; simple tracking skills that were second nature to the aliens had quickly led them to the Realist settlement. Lorvalan was not entirely surprised to see that it had been constructed over the ruins of the Tyrenians’ own base. He remembered how it had been at the beginning before the humans had arrived with their brutal battledroids. His people had finally found a place to call home and then it had been invaded. In his memory he could still hear the screams of the pups as the relentless killing machines had bulldozed every single building. Revenge would have to wait, however; first they had to locate Dyselt - which was proving to be a difficult task. The skimmer he had taken had been damaged and was refusing to send a transponder signal. Without that they couldn’t pinpoint its position. With Dyselt’s trail having gone cold, Lorvalan decided that they should concentrate on the human problem first. Finding a secure place of concealment, they had set about the task of

surveillance and intelligence gathering, evaluating their enemy's strengths and weaknesses in preparation for action.

After a few hours they had gathered a basic understanding of the settlement. It was small; there were no more than a hundred or so humans living here. There was evidence of some agricultural activity but a confusing array of technology was on display, some of it quite primitive but some more advanced. Despite first appearances, these humans were a space-travelling people. But there was something temporary about this place, something impermanent. Zenig voiced this observation and Lorvalan had laughed. 'That's not surprising,' he had commented. 'We'll be destroying this shortly!'

The pair of them had set up a long-range directional microphone to listen in to some of the conversations that the humans were having. The Tyrenian warriors were bred for aggression and strength but they were not a brutal race. They were cunning and intelligent and capable of great patience. It had been a hundred years since the humans' cowardly attack on their defenceless settlement, and that act of barbarism would be avenged, but it could wait a little longer. Lorvalan and Zenig were willing to be patient and to prepare carefully. The time for killing would come soon enough.

Jamie had recovered consciousness now and was telling Billy Joe about his ordeal. The boy was clearly shocked - he hadn't expected the Realists to be so brutal and he was beginning to have serious doubts about his decision to come here. Although he didn't want to admit it in as many words, he was missing his grandfather. He had an ache inside of him, a horrible feeling that he might never see Tam again, almost as if something terrible had happened to him. Billy Joe tried to ignore the thought but once it had formed it wouldn't go away. Try as he might to think about other things, the concern about his grandfather remained, lurking like an uninvited guest at a party.

Billy Joe decided to get some fresh air but when he went to the door he found that it was locked. He was as much of a prisoner as Jamie. He shook the door and screamed for some attention but no one came. Jamie tried to comfort him, telling him that he was always being locked up and not to worry about it. He was a strange man - this off-worlder with his patterned skirt and his peculiar accent - but Billy Joe trusted him. If Jamie said it would be all right he was sure it would be. If only he could put that thought about his grandfather out of his mind.

In orbit far above the surface of Axista Four the ECSV *Hannibal* floated serenely without a care in the world. Inside the spaceship in MediTheatre 3 things were a little less peaceful. The patient had already 'died' twice on the operating table and the team of surgeons were determined not to let it happen a third time. They were not superstitious by nature but were nevertheless convinced that third time might not be lucky. The man's wounds were severe and he had lost a lot of blood. The stress of the operation was putting a great demand on his heart, an organ that was not in the best of health anyway. From the look of his toughened skin, the man had led a hard life and it had taken its toll on his body. Without unnecessary chat, and to the background of now traditional classical music - in this case something by the ancient masters Orbital - the team of surgeons got on with the job in hand. For the moment Tam Kartryte's life hung in the balance.

Elsewhere in the *Hannibal* Zoe was also undergoing treatment. However, unlike Tam, Zoe was being dealt with exclusively by machines. The cryo-unit she'd found herself trapped in had been hooked up to the cryo-systems on board the *Hannibal* and a pair of robot servitors had been activated to oversee her revival. First they had to download the ancient software routines that applied to the system used by the colonists, now very much yesterday's technology. Nevertheless, the field of cryogenics was stable enough these days for the state-of-the-art equipment on board the *Hannibal* to be

back ward compatible with the more primitive set-up that had been considered just as up to date on board *The Big Bang*.

Slowly the droids reduced the temperature in Zoe's unit and began pumping nutrients and stimulants into her bloodstream. It was going to take some time, and there were no guarantees about the outcome, but for the moment Zoe's life was in their mechanical interface modules.

Down below, in Plymouth Hope, the Doctor, Val Freedom and Dee Willoughby were also thinking about cryogenics - but not only in relation to Zoe. It had been Val Freedom who had first raised the issue. Away from the public meeting he had admitted to both Dee and the Doctor that he had misgivings about continuing in his role as Acting Sheriff.

'Too much is happening right now, it's not right,' he explained to them.

'We need a leader at this time, Val, and you're the obvious choice. With luck Tam will be back with us before long but right now it has to be you,' Dee told him firmly but she could see that he had made up his mind and nothing she could say was going to change that.

'No, I can't do it,' he said sadly, and began to remove the silver badge. He looked at it for a moment and then reached out towards Dee with it. Horrified she raised her hands and backed off. 'Don't give it back to me,' she demanded.

Freedom grinned, a glimpse of his old self-confidence emerging. 'You were quick enough to pin it on me - but you're not so quick to take the same medicine,' he noted.

Both Freedom and Dee turned towards the Doctor, sharing the same thought.

'Oh no,' said the Doctor, seeing the expression on their faces. 'It never works out when you make the stranger who's just ridden into town the sheriff. It's a question of genre,' he insisted, pronouncing the final word with an exaggerated French accent.

The other two stared at him, incomprehension written all over their faces. 'It's just not the done thing,' the Doctor tried

to explain. ‘Surely there’s someone better qualified who can do the job?’

And that was when Freedom had the idea. ‘Kirann,’ he said simply. ‘Kirann Ransom, the daughter of our great founder. She’s up there in the wreck of the ship in the freezer.’

‘In a state of cryogenic suspended animation?’ the Doctor translated. Freedom nodded.

Dee could see the logic. ‘If they can deal with Zoe’s revival maybe they can help us revive Kirann,’ she speculated.

Freedom pulled a face. ‘I don’t want help from *Them*, though. They’re part of the problem.’

Dee shook her head angrily. ‘So why mention her name in the first place? If we haven’t had the wherewithal to revive her in the past one hundred years, why should we think we can do it now?’ she demanded.

‘Well,’ said a voice from behind them modestly, ‘you didn’t have me before.’

Freedom and Dee, their argument forgotten, turned as one to the Doctor.

‘You could do it?’ asked Freedom in a surprised tone.

‘But you said you weren’t a doctor of medicine!’ added Dee.

The Doctor brushed his lapels. ‘Well, that’s true, but that doesn’t make me ignorant of the subject. I’ve been around, you know. Picked up the odd skill here and there. I am considered quite a technical wizard,’ he added proudly, his eyes twinkling, ‘by my travelling companions.’ For the first time that day, the Doctor was relieved that neither Jamie nor Zoe was with him right now to qualify that statement.

‘Right, then,’ decided Freedom. ‘As my last act as Acting Leader I am formally asking you, Doctor, to supervise the revival of Kirann Ransom. Will you do this for us?’

‘I’ll certainly give it a try,’ promised the Doctor. Dee and Freedom exchanged concerned looks. They’d been hoping for a little bit more confidence.

‘Shall we get started, then?’ suggested the Doctor, ignoring the worried expressions on their faces. ‘I think that young lady is overdue for an alarm call, don’t you?’

Chapter Nine

The Doctor's second visit to the crashed colony ship was very different from his first. Then he had been stumbling through virgin territory, exploring and discovering new things at every turn; this time he was accompanied by two expert guides who knew the place like the backs of their hands. Freedom and Dee confessed that they had both spent a lot of their youth exploring the derelict ship. There had been three of them, Dee explained, Val, the eldest, herself and Max Forde, younger but just as keen. The Doctor noted the sadness in her voice as she mentioned Max and filed it away mentally for later.

Freedom had taken them to a part of the ship that the Doctor hadn't discovered before, a wing of the original structure that was all but intact. Here corridor after corridor, room after room was almost as it had been when the ship had been in flight. It was an astonishing contrast to the rest of the wreck. Freedom led them into a large circular room.

'Auxiliary bridge,' he announced proudly. The Doctor was unable to resist the large command chair and he sat right down, giving it an experimental spin. To his delight it moved as if an engineer had oiled it just that morning. While the Doctor was playing, Freedom adjusted some controls on a panel at the front of the room and the place was suddenly alive with power.

'Rechargeable solar power batteries,' he explained, 'enough to power a small city.' He grimaced, realising what he was saying. 'Of course that's the problem isn't it? If only we could use it.'

The Doctor stopped his chair swivelling and looked at Freedom. 'You're sympathetic to the rebels then - these so-called Realists?' he asked.

‘Not exactly sympathetic,’ he began, but Dee interrupted him.

‘What he means is that he didn’t have the guts to go when Max made his move. But he agrees with him. Most of us with half a brain cell do.’ Dee could see that the Doctor was shocked. She tried to explain herself.

‘Max wasn’t saying anything that no one else had ever thought of. He was speaking for most of us. We’re our own people: why should we be bound by an ideology chosen by our great-grandparents years before we were born?’

‘It’s not fair? Is that all?’ The Doctor made it sound like they were being childish.

‘No, it’s more than that,’ Dee continued. ‘Surely it’s a fundamental right to make your own decisions and mistakes, to live your life by rules you decide.’

The Doctor was smiling indulgently. ‘No need to shout, Dee, I agree with you. I’ve had one or two... ideological differences with my own people...’ he trailed off, not wanting to discuss his background any further.

‘Who are your people, Doctor?’ Freedom asked, his curiosity getting the better of him.

‘Oh, no one important,’ muttered the Doctor. Changing the subject, he threw a question back at Dee. ‘But if you agreed with Max Forde, why didn’t you join his Realists?’

Dee looked away, blushing.

Freedom filled in the silence. ‘Max took a new lover when he left; a firebrand called Hali.’

‘My neighbour’s daughter. She was like a little sister to me,’ explained Dee. ‘She stole my fiancé from me and then left the city - leaving me with no fiancé and us with no doctor. I may have had some sympathy for the ideas Max had but I’ve no time for the so-called Realists. The day they broke away was the worst day of my life.’

Lorvalan and Zenig were still continuing their evaluation of the humans. The small outcrop of buildings was quiet; it was hard to imagine that Dyselt could be in there somewhere. Lorvalan was eating when he saw Zenig’s ears suddenly prick

up. He hurried across to the observation point and lay down next to his lieutenant.

‘What is it?’ he asked.

Zenig slipped the headset from his ears. ‘They were just talking about a prisoner that they have, an alien they captured recently,’ he explained. ‘The microphone couldn’t pick up all of the words but the overall meaning was clear. They’ve got some creature they consider to be an off-worlder locked up. I think it must be Dyselt.’

Lorvalan nodded. ‘I wonder how they managed to bring him down?’ he mused. ‘Do you know where exactly he is being held?’

‘I think I do,’ replied Zenig with confidence.

Lorvalan reached for his weapons. ‘I think we should stage a rescue,’ he announced.

Zenig hesitated. ‘Just the two of us?’

Lorvalan grinned savagely, ‘The mood I’m in, I’ll do it alone if you want.’

After Dee’s emotional outburst, the group inside the wreck of the colony ship had continued in near silence. From the consoles on the auxiliary bridge Freedom located and released the locks on all the doors between them and the cryogenic chamber. Then he had led them off in a new direction. This time they did cross into the more badly damaged section of the wreck, through places where little was left, save for some bent metal, until they reached another area that was more solid. Dee nearly slipped and fell but the Doctor had been there to grab her hand and pull her to safety. Dee had muttered a thank you; the first words she had spoken since the outburst on the bridge. Nothing had changed but somehow hearing a voice cracked the ice and, as they neared the cryogenic areas, they began to converse again.

The Doctor was curious about the state of the ship, and asked Freedom what he knew about the actual crash. Freedom confessed that it was something he knew very little about. There were stories, of course, oral history, legends,

tales told to children about the heroic flight of *The Big Bang* and the brave and resourceful Stewart Ransom, but nothing very much in the way of detail. The Doctor shrugged. 'Pity,' he muttered. 'I'd really like to know why some sections of the ship are so completely wrecked whereas other parts are relatively unscathed. It's very odd.'

Dee and Freedom had never thought about it. 'It did hit the planet with a bit of an impact you know,' Dee told the stranger.

'Yes, yes, of course it did,' agreed the Doctor, 'but I've seen more crashed spaceships than you've had hot dinners and I've never seen anything quite like this before.'

The Doctor may have continued in this vein but for the fact that Freedom announced that they had reached their destination.

There was an airlock at the entrance to the cryogenic control centre and, once the three of them had passed through the second pair of automatic doors, they stepped into a sparse white room with a strangely sterile feel to it. There were a few computer consoles and about half a dozen raised beds'. Through a massive glass door they could see into the chill heart of the cryogenic chambers, row after row of what looked like quick-frozen coffins. The control room itself was not particularly cold but the Doctor felt a shiver nonetheless; perhaps it was the sense of *deja vu* he was feeling. But this wasn't Telos and the living creatures entombed here were much less dangerous than Cybermen. At least he hoped they were...

Watched by a fascinated Freedom and Dee, the Doctor set about examining the various controls, prodding buttons and flicking switches apparently at random. Each new bleep or blip seemed to delight him and it looked to Freedom as if he might be happy to spend days just playing with the equipment for his own amusement. Freedom, however, had less patience than that.

'So,' he asked after what seemed like an age, do you think you can do it?'

The Doctor stopped what he was doing and considered for a moment. 'Oh yes,' he answered after a moment's thought, 'I should think so... As far as I can make out, the system is pretty much fully automated. All you have to do is set it in motion and it should do the job for you.' He paused, as if hearing the words had given rise to another thought. 'Are you sure none of your people has ever tried this?' he asked, a trifle suspiciously.

Dee shook her head. 'Not in recent times. Not long after Planet Fall there was one attempt made but it went horribly wrong. About seventy years ago some wanted to try again but they couldn't persuade the computer that they had the authority. No one's been near it since. We think that the automatic safety systems have locked us out.'

'Really?' The Doctor raised his eyes and rubbed his hands together. 'We'll soon see about that.' The Doctor pushed up his sleeves and sat down at the master computer console. 'Now then, what input system do you use? Keyboard, mouse, pointer, voice... none of the above?' he asked, with increasing desperation.

'Voice when the system is online, keyboard for emergency work, but the main interface is through a BEM helmet.'

The Doctor frowned. 'I'm not sure I'm familiar with that technology.'

'Neither are we,' smiled Dee, 'but we know what it is. It's a brainwave-enhancing device that allows a direct mental link with the computer.' She nodded in the direction of Freedom, who had opened a storage cupboard and produced an odd-looking contraption not unlike something that might once have dried your hair. There was a helmet that fitted over the head from which a number of wires trailed. Some of these were connected to different parts of the surface of the helmet, while others were joined together to form a thick lead, which Freedom carefully plugged into a socket in the console. Freedom handed the helmet to the Doctor who took it a little gingerly.

'And this gives me access to the entire ship's computing system?' he asked, curious as ever.

Freedom shook his head. 'Just the local system that runs the cryogenics,' he explained.

'Right, then,' said the Doctor slipping the helmet onto his short black hair securely. Dee and Freedom couldn't help but smile; the funny-looking man appeared very uncomfortable. 'How do I switch this on?' he asked. 'You don't; replied Freedom, trying not to laugh. I do.' With that Freedom flicked a switch and the Doctor was suddenly somewhere else.

He blinked rapidly but this had no effect on what he was seeing; the image-generating software was interfacing with his optic nerves and replacing the real sensory input from his eyes with its own imagery. He appeared to be floating in a blue sky, which he shared with a few wispy clouds and some distant seagulls. He found himself approaching a massive column that reached up from somewhere way below him, lost in thicker clouds. On the top of the column was a small-gated garden where a figure in a pale suit was sitting at a plastic garden table. As the Doctor drifted slowly down he could see the Stranger was pouring two cups of tea from a rather fine china teapot. The Doctor felt his feet make contact with the surface of the garden, his feet sinking slightly into the springy turf.

'Tea?' the Stranger offered with a trace of an accent, Scottish perhaps? 'Three sugars, isn't it?' he continued, tipping it in and stirring the cup without waiting for a reply.'

The Doctor took the offered cup, had a quick sip of the remarkably good tea and sat down. He looked at the Stranger more closely; he was a little man, maybe even smaller than the Doctor, but he had eyes of infinite depth. Although the clothes and the face were very different from his own the Doctor had the instinctive feeling that he was looking into a kind of mirror.

'How many?' he asked simply.

The Stranger held up seven fingers. 'But no more questions. I'm breaking enough rules as it is just being here.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Are *They* still on our, sorry, your tail?'

The Stranger smiled. 'I said no questions.'

The Doctor felt annoyed. 'Well, there's no need to be all mysterious and snotty about it. Just tell me why you're here. And how, come to that. *They* don't like this sort of thing, you know.'

The Stranger sipped his own tea and then placed his teacup carefully back on the saucer.

'Which is a bit rich coming from *Them!*' he commented darkly. 'Now then, to business. I'm not here, of course. I'm just a memory you haven't had yet.'

'Surely you mean I'm the memory you haven't had yet, aren't you?' the Doctor asked, his brow furrowed with concentration.

The Stranger waved the interruption away with a hand movement. 'Never mind the details. The key thing is this. I was reading your Diary and it struck me that we may have made a mistake...'

Now it was the Doctor's turn to be insistent. He jumped up, putting his fingers in his ears.

'No, no, no,' he said, 'I don't want to know anything. If we start doing this where will it end? I could be revising my own history for eternity...'

But the Stranger was nodding in agreement. 'Oh, don't I know it. I tried for a while but...' He let his sentence trail off. The Doctor, his fingers still hovering close to his ears, frowned. 'So what are you here for?'

'I just wanted to remind you of something... We were more curious in your day, more prone to improvise and hope for the best. But sometimes you need a plan my friend, you really do. So when the time comes... make sure you use the data crystal.'

The figure of the Stranger, the tea-set, the garden and everything else were beginning to become insubstantial.

'Well, really,' the Doctor tutted. 'What's the point of crossing your timeline like that if you're just going to be cryptic? What data crystal? And use it where?'

But there was no one to listen; the Stranger had all but disappeared. The last thing the Doctor saw was him tipping his ridiculous straw hat, and then he was gone. 'And I was

rather hoping I was going to improve with age,' muttered the Doctor dismissively.

The blue sky had gone now to be replaced by a representation of the controlling computer system: a 3-D image of the processing intelligence that operated the cryogenic systems. It was totally shut down, security measures had been activated, and the Doctor found himself under attack by defensive bolts of pure energy being unleashed by the CPU. He grabbed a passing byte and hitched a ride. The defensive strikes bounced off the byte and the Doctor redirected it to a cache where he was able to use some stray data to construct an ID for himself. Now he was able to approach the CPU himself where he played a logic game with the firewall and, after a little processing time, defeated it.

In the real world, the Doctor yanked off the helmet and brushed the sweat from his brow. He really was very hot, he discovered. He found Tam and Freedom looking at him with concerned expressions.

'There, that should do it,' he said with a smile. 'Sorry about the delay. I just, er, confused myself a little. Took a little longer than I expected.'

'Longer!' echoed Dee. 'You've been in there three hours. We were beginning to get worried.'

The Doctor bounded up from the seat. 'Well, no harm done. All systems ship-shape. Let's get on, shall we?' he said, hurrying across to a console and flicking some switches with a new authority.

There was a mechanical noise and something began to move in the main cryogenic chamber. Through the glass panel, the three of them watched as a metal frame moved on a series of horizontal and vertical rails in search of a particular colonist. Soon it located the subject and the frame was projected forwards around the cryogenic coffin. Locks slid into place, and when the frame moved backwards it now contained the selected cabinet. Slowly the frame moved back towards the ground level and then twisted so that what had been an upright box was now a horizontal one. A robot droid

on tank-like tracks rolled up to carry the coffin on to the next stage in its journey. A panel in the glass door slid up, releasing a blast of ice-cold air into the control room, and the robot emerged with the cabinet, which it placed, with a considerable degree of care, on to one of the recovery beds.

The robot retreated into the storage area and the door slid shut behind it. Freedom, Dee and the Doctor gathered round the coffin. The glass lid was frosted and the Doctor wiped at it with the sleeve of his jacket. Inside the box they could just make out the still, pale outline of a human figure.

‘Now what?’ asked Freedom.

The Doctor found a chair and sat on it cross-legged, letting the chair swivel on its single leg. He looked like a pixie. ‘Now we wait,’ he explained.

Veena was getting a bit fed up with waiting. All her experience suggested that the exciting stuff tended to happen during visits to planets rather than during the tedium of deep space travel, so she was particularly frustrated by the slow pace of events on Axista Four.

Marines from the ECSV were searching an ever-increasing area, looking for the people responsible for the attack on the Plymouth Hope medical facility. Cartor was skulking about playing his cards close to his chest and she was stuck playing nursemaid to the strange girl who had appeared on the colony planet shortly before their own arrival.

Veena looked through the plastiglas observation window into the room where Zoe had been placed after her operation. According to the read-outs, she was sleeping unaided, her recovery expectation at a high ninety-three per cent and rising, the viral infection she’d picked up on the planet all but ejected from her system. But there was little danger of her recovering consciousness quite yet. Veena decided to seek out her commanding officer and get some answers to the many questions that were running around her head.

She found Cartor in his ready room, the compact office space that could be reached directly from the bridge. He was busy with something, concentrating on some readings on his

desk as the ship's sensors patiently scanned the planet below. Veena knocked and, when he finally grunted a command, entered.

After a moment's silence she decided to risk his anger and make an enquiry.

'Are you searching for something in particular, sir?' she asked casually, as if enquiring whether he'd lost a sock recently.

'Perhaps,' answered Cartor without looking up from the readout on his desk. He made a note of something on his datapad, the input pen issuing a small whine of complaint as he did. He really should get that checked out, thought Veena, but she knew better than to suggest it. The datapad and the captain went back a long way and he was superstitious about it; he was prepared to put up with its idiosyncrasies if it meant he could hang on to it. He wasn't prepared to let anyone else near it, not even to fix its faults. So Veena and anyone else in earshot had to put up with its annoying scratching sound. She imagined it must have been similar for the ancients having their words of wisdom scratched into stone.

Feeling bold, or perhaps just pissed off enough by the noise of his input pen not to care what mood he was in, Veena pressed on with more questions.

'Is there anything I don't know about this planet, sir?'

Cartor glanced at her, grinned and then looked back at the data.

'I don't know, Lieutenant,' he replied. 'That really depends on what you *do* know.'

Veena decided to be more direct. 'Are the colonists and our people the only life on the planet? Or is there something else down there?'

'What had you in mind, Myles?' Cartor retorted. 'Giant desert worms? A sentient sea? A hidden Dalek army?'

Veena bristled. 'Frontier myths? Of course not. But there is something going on here, something real, not imaginary, isn't there? Is that why the Federation Administrator is here?'

Cartor regarded her steadily. 'That is classified information,' he told her coolly. 'But since you ask, I'll tell you this much.'

'I agree with the Doctor. I don't think a human was responsible for that attack.'

'So what was?' demanded Veena, reasonably.

'That, of course, is the sixty-four-thousand-credit question...' Cartor was smiling again, but without warmth. 'What indeed?'

Dee couldn't put her finger on the exact point when everything changed; it was more gradual. The excitement of getting into the cryogenic chamber, and activating the ancient equipment, slowly evaporated to be replaced by an underlying tension, even fear. As she monitored the life signs, rising in strength on the read-out before her, she became more aware of what it was that they were doing.

If everything worked as it should, they were shortly to be joined by Kirann Ransom herself. A woman who had been there when this project had first been announced. A woman who had been intimately involved in selecting and preparing the original group of colonists. A woman who had once been a contemporary of Dee's own great-grandparents but who would now awake apparently the same age as Dee. She felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility and glanced over at the Doctor. What if the stranger was wrong about all this?

As the cryogenic system shut down the casket began to warm up. The exterior frosting had already melted away and it was now possible to see the features of the sleeping woman inside. She looked peaceful and at rest but strangely absent; the same way a dead body looked. Dee swallowed hard, worried that she might be brain damaged or something. She pulled her eyes back to the read-outs and was momentarily relieved - all seemed well. But then, right before her eyes, something began to go wrong. The levels of the various readings began to drop. A red light began to flash beneath the panel she was studying.

'Doctor,' she called urgently but Freedom and the Doctor (who had been looking around at some of the other equipment) had already heard the urgent bleeping of the alarm.

'She's losing vital signs,' Dee told them, directing them towards the read-outs.

The Doctor quickly took in all the details and then scurried across to the cabinet. He began searching for the release catch but it was eluding him.

'Help me get this open,' he cried to Freedom.

Freedom went to the other side of the casket and made a quick search with his hand, running it along the length of the lid. There was a click and the curved glass suddenly popped up. The Doctor pulled it right over, letting it dangle down the side of the casket and hurried round to look at the girl. He held her wrist and felt for a pulse.

'Oh my,' he exclaimed, 'we're losing her.'

The machines suddenly emitted a loud, flat tone. On the readout screens what had been erratic jagged lines were now flat and steady. Too steady.

'Her heart's stopped,' Dee translated. 'Do something!'

The Doctor scrambled on to the casket, straddling the woman, and began to give CPR, pressing his hands down on her ribcage and counting. Dee continued to look at the screens but they still showed the same flat lines.

'It's not working,' Freedom told the Doctor. 'She's dead!'

EPISODE FOUR

Chapter Ten

Dee looked on in horror; this was the one thing they had always feared. Again and again the colony had discussed trying to rouse the sleepers, always aware that for true viability the group needed to be larger, but each time cowardice had won out. The arguments were simple: while they were asleep they were still alive and the possibility of a revival, at some unspecified time in the future, was a reality; but if they made an attempt to wake the sleepers and it went wrong, they would be committing murder and there would be no way back, no get-out clause. No wonder, then, that year after year the suggestion had been quashed. Until today. Until us, thought Dee. And now we've gone and killed Kirann Ransom, the last, best hope we had.

The Doctor, however, had not given up hope; he was tearing around the room looking for something, anything that might still save the day.

'We have to restart her heart,' explained the Doctor. 'Can you find me a defibrillator?'

Dee and Freedom looked blank. The Doctor felt foolish - of course they wouldn't have anything like that, would they? *Back to Basics* and all that. Make do with what you've got, that was the Plymouth Hope way. But that wasn't going to help Kirann Ransom, though, was it? All he needed was a shock to get the heart going.

The Doctor let out a cry: 'Of course!' Freedom and Dee exchanged worried looks as the Doctor jumped off his patient and went in search of his jacket. He started going through his pockets, pulling out an impossible collection of objects: a half-eaten apple, a catapult, a bicycle bell, a couple of spotted handkerchiefs both with knots tied in the corner, a tennis ball, a pair of binoculars, a bundle of King William 10-Euro notes, a Betamax video cassette marked *Hancock's Half*

Hour and a handful of sweet wrappers, until finally he produced what he was looking for. Dee thought it was some kind of electronic toothbrush with a concealed head; Freedom guessed that it was a tool but it was like no other tool he had ever seen.

The Doctor was making adjustments to it, his tongue poking out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrated hard, as if trying to thread a needle. 'This is going to be very tricky. Too little charge and we'll have no effect at all, too much and we will definitely kill her...'

Dee glanced back at the telltale vital signs. 'Doctor, hurry,' she said, worried by the time that had passed since Kirann's last heartbeat.

Without any further words the Doctor hurried over to his patient, the bizarre tool held in his hand. He reached over the woman's chest, as close to the heart as he could judge.

'Clear,' he commanded, although neither Freedom nor Dee was anywhere near the cabinet. The Doctor activated the device and the body of Kirann Ransom twitched as if pulled by an invisible puppet-master. Dee checked the screens - still flat- lining. The Doctor pressed the tiny stud a second time. Again Kirann's body twitched.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' muttered the Doctor agitatedly.

Dee was still shaking her head. The Doctor thumbed the control - do or die time. This time the body nearly fell out of the cabinet but at the same moment the jagged line of the heartbeat monitor reactivated.

All eyes were on the monitor as the steady 'blip-blip' of a regular heartbeat re-established itself. The Doctor let out a huge sigh and Dee realised that she too had been holding her breath.

'Is she going to be okay?' she asked.

The Doctor was examining his patient. The girl in the cabinet was beginning to take on a more normal hue: her skin getting less grey by the second. And then her eyelids began to flutter.

The Doctor returned to the read-outs, checking that the system was intravenously feeding the correct blend of

stimulants into the waking woman. All seemed to be going right; nevertheless, the Doctor felt it necessary to cross his fingers behind his back before he answered Dee's question.

'Yes,' he said finally. 'I rather think she is...' Freedom and Dee exchanged excited looks.

'It's amazing,' said Dee. 'It's as if Kirann Ransom was a time traveller, stepping out of the last century into today.'

The Doctor smiled, amused by the thought. 'Yes, I suppose she is in a way. I do hope she likes it here...' he added.

Jamie and Billy Joe were examining every inch of the building they had been locked in. It had three rooms, all plainly furnished, but no other external doors. Billy Joe looked deeply unhappy. Used to the openness of life in Plymouth Hope, he was finding the experience of being locked up rather claustrophobic. Jamie, of course, was an old hand at being locked up in places, but this didn't diminish his eagerness to get out.

'I can't believe they're treating us like this,' complained Billy Joe, as they continued their search for some alternative exit.

'The Realists not quite what you were expecting, eh?' asked Jamie.

Billy Joe nodded sadly. 'I thought they were misunderstood. Despite what happened with my dad. But maybe it was me that was getting it all wrong. I should have listened to what people said...'

'What happened to your father?' Jamie asked.

Billy Joe sighed and sat down. 'He died,' he said simply. 'He had a row with my grandpa about something and went off to the wreck. It was just a few weeks after the Big Split. And that's when the Realists made their first big raid. My dad got caught up in the middle. I've always blamed Grandpa - you know? If he hadn't rowed with Dad he might never have been there... but now -' Billy Joe looked away, but not before Jamie had seen the tears on his face. 'I guess everyone was right. The Realists killed my father.'

Jamie wasn't sure what he should say.

‘We need to get you back to your grandfather,’ he said finally.

Billy Joe nodded and sniffed, wiping his face on his sleeve. ‘Come on, then,’ he said, getting to his feet. Suddenly he stopped and looked up. Jamie stopped too, wondering what he had seen. ‘If we can’t get out through the walls, maybe we can get out through the roof,’ Billy Joe speculated. ‘Let me get on your shoulders.’

Zoe opened her eyes cautiously and sniffed suspiciously at the air. It was clean, oxygen-rich but ever so slightly stale; a sure sign that it was a heavily recycled atmosphere in a closed system. A space station or a spaceship, she guessed. She felt better and flexed her leg muscles experimentally. The bruises she’d gained in her desperate rush to find a hiding place appeared to have healed. Impressive.

She sat up and looked around the room. It was, she suspected, a standard recovery suite in a fairly high-tech medical facility. Similar to, but slightly more advanced than, the level of technology she had seen in the crashed ship where they had landed. The thought of the TARDIS gave her a warm glow - funny how something so strange and alien could have become such a familiar home - but then she immediately thought about the Doctor and Jamie and the moment passed to be replaced by a general anxiety. Where were they? Where was she, come to that?

She swung her legs out of bed and stood, a little gingerly, not quite able to believe that she was back to full health. Her legs seemed to take her weight without any trouble, however, and she quickly crossed the room and found her clothes in a locker. Dressed in her silver-foil catsuit, she felt more herself. She waited for a moment to see if her activity had been noticed but when no one came looking she concluded that any surveillance equipment was faulty or inactive. She checked the door and was delighted that it opened when she pressed the control. Zoe stepped out into the corridor to explore.

The spaceship was huge, she soon discovered, but fairly sparsely populated. The few members of the crew that she did come across were wearing Earth Federation Military uniforms but there must have been non-military personnel on board because no one gave a second glance to Zoe's idiosyncratic garb.

Administrator Greene splashed some water on his face and stood up. He was in the cabin Cartor had assigned to him, having just enjoyed a short power-nap. The stress on his body of frequent bouts of suspended animation gave him a tendency to tire easily but, now refreshed, he was ready to return to the matter in hand. He wanted to see whether the mysterious young woman had recovered consciousness; he had some questions for her.

He had sent a report to his superiors about the unexpected complications that he had found on Axista Four, in particular the mysterious man who called himself 'The Doctor'. The result had been spectacular to say the least. On a direct video link, that had been so multi-rerouted that the image was barely discernible as a human face, Executive Officer Wilhems had given him a specific warning. The man codenamed 'The Doctor' was a known agent, an independent operator who had a massive file dating back centuries. There were many conflicting views as to his appearance, suggesting that the name was really some kind of rank or honorific title handed down the generations, an explanation that made the fact that there were records of him from as early as the twenty-first century a little bit more palatable. Whoever the individual behind the name was, however, Earth Gov considered him a Class A Interloper. And Greene had one of his travelling companions aboard this ship. Which struck him as an advantage that he should use.

When he reached the Medical Centre, however, he was disappointed. The girl, Zoe, was no longer there. Furious, Greene was about to hit an alarm signal and put the entire crew on alert but then he had a second thought. It would be much easier to locate and capture a fugitive who wasn't

aware that anyone was looking for her. Pulling his hand away from the intercom, he turned on his heels and set off to locate Major Cartor. Officially he was only here as an observer, after all; Cartor was meant to be the one getting his hands dirty. This way might take longer but it would be more efficient in the end. And he had the time, didn't he? Where was she likely to go?

Zoe was frustrated. The computer console that she had found was resolutely resisting her attempts to access it. She'd tried everything but it was clear that there was some kind of bio-security device locking it: a retina-scan or pheromone-recognition system. Despite her natural talent with computers and data systems Zoe just couldn't get in.

There had to be a way; some kind of back door, she thought. It was annoying because a quick ferret around the ship's computer systems might be really useful. For a start it might give her the edge she needed to locate the Doctor. Zoe pushed herself away from the console that she had been trying to hack into and slipped off the chair. She'd have to find something else.

The girl blinked and then coughed roughly.

'Here, take a sip,' suggested the Doctor, raising a plastic bottle of water to her lips.

Kirann opened her mouth and took a drink. First a little sip, and then a little more, then she took the bottle from the Doctor's hands and finished it all.

'Thank you,' she said, wiping her mouth with her sleeve. 'What time is it?'

Freedom and Dee looked at each other. Had she suffered brain damage in the Deep Sleep?

'I think you mean what year is it, don't you?' said the Doctor gently.

'You know what I meant,' snapped the woman, a little more iron in her voice. Freedom stepped forward. 'It's the year two thousand five hundred and thirty four. You're on the wreck of your father's colony ship on the surface of the planet Axista

Four. My name is Val Freedom, this is Dee Willoughby, and that is the Doctor who was responsible for reviving you today,' he told her quickly.

Kirann looked at them each in turn, the Doctor last. 'So you're the one I can blame this headache on?'

The Doctor looked a little concerned. 'Headache? Oh dear, that isn't good. You'd better lie down again.'

'Leave me alone. I think I've had quite enough sleep, thank you.' The woman looked at the two colonists again. 'Freedom,' she repeated, thinking about the name, 'Any relation to Jed Freedom?' she asked.

Freedom nodded. 'My great-grandfather.'

Dee could see that it was finally sinking in; Kirann was getting her head around what had happened to her.

'And my father...?' she asked, although she already suspected the worst.

Dee looked at Freedom, passing the buck.

Freedom cleared his throat. 'He died, not long after Planet Fall. I'm sorry.'

Kirann tried to look unaffected. 'Don't worry about it,' she said with a shrug, 'It's not like it happened yesterday.'

The Doctor shook his head sadly. He watched her carefully as she climbed out of the Suspended Animation Cabinet, her thoughts clearly elsewhere. He knew that, for Kirann, it *had* happened yesterday.

Kirann shook her head too, trying to get her brain around what she had just been told. A few hours ago, by her reckoning, she had stepped into the cryo-chamber to be put into Deep Sleep. Her father should have been there to say a final goodbye. Except, of course, he wasn't able to spare the time. He'd rushed in, given her a quick kiss, and promised her that he'd be there when she woke before promptly dashing off to deal with the latest in a long line of last-minute headaches. Typically he'd not given a second thought to the thousands of things that might go wrong, that might prevent him from being there when Kirann was revived. In the event, of course, he had pre-deceased her, by nearly a hundred years.

Turning away from the Doctor, and the two colonists, Kirann surreptitiously wiped a tear from her eyes and cleared her throat. 'Right, then,' she announced, 'I think it's time you brought me up to speed.'

The main bulk of the ECSV *Hannibal* was a series of gleaming corridors and bright lights but Zoe knew that there would be a dark side. Even a state-of-the-art spaceship like this had an 'under stairs' area, where heat, grease, oil and darkness were more the order of the day - places like the engineering deck, the engine rooms, the food preparation and storage areas and the hangars for the shuttlecraft and other vehicles. Zoe made her way through these areas and didn't come across a single living person. That's not to say she found no signs of activity; she found droids of all sizes busy everywhere she went. Little maintenance droids changing lightbulbs and making other small repairs, larger messenger droids carrying supplies and refreshments to different parts of the ship and larger heavy-duty robots moving bulky packages and machinery, much of which looked to be weaponry.

She found herself in a hangar, where alongside a pair of the large shuttlecrafts similar to the one she had travelled up from the surface in, there were also a dozen or so smaller fighter spacecraft. Zoe climbed into one for a closer look. The controls were unfamiliar to her but obvious: directional joystick, onboard computer, pilot's chair with built-in ejection system. To Zoe's delight there was also a flight uniform and, more importantly, a helmet. She checked it eagerly and saw that as well as a micro- screen that flipped down in front of the eyes to give a heads- up display, the helmet also offered computer access. Perhaps this would provide the back door that she was looking for.

Moments later Zoe was sinking into the mock leather of the pilot's seat, slightly dwarfed by it - it was clearly designed for someone far bigger than she was. She slipped the helmet on to her head and was delighted to see that it did indeed give direct access to the little assault ship's onboard computer,

which was linked, in turn, to the main computer of the mother ship itself. Zoe had found her way in.

Allowing herself a quick self-congratulatory smile, she began ordering up some mission files. She wanted to know everything about the current mission.

Administrator Greene watched silently and patiently as Cartor began to receive reports from his security teams. The locate-and-apprehend order had gone out half an hour ago but with a further order to operate at a very low visibility level. Now, although a few two-man search crews were methodically working through the more remote areas of the ship, the bulk of the search was being conducted with the computer and the many surveillance and security cameras dotted around. A graphic on his screen showed an outline of the ship, a large area of which was glowing green, meaning that it had been searched and eliminated as a possible location of the missing girl. The rest of the ship was marked red, still being searched. Slowly but surely the red area was diminishing by the second. Soon there would be nowhere left to hide.

His communicator bleeped and Cartor flicked it open. 'Report,' he barked into it.

'We think we've got her, sir. In the hangar,' came the slightly tinny voice.

Cartor frowned. 'What was she doing there?' He glanced over at the Administrator who just nodded.

'Wait there,' Cartor ordered. 'I'm coming down!'

The rush of information was too much even for Zoe and her capacious memory to deal with. She blinked, cleared her eyes and tried again, slowing the flood of data down. It was still an overwhelming experience as facts and figures rushed towards her at breathtaking speed, threatening to turn her mind into mush.

And then she saw it: a top-secret, for-your-eyes-only briefing document for Major Jonn Cartor. She got the screen to freeze and allowed herself the luxury of reading through it

twice. She read about the background, the war against the Daleks, evil creatures she had heard about from the Doctor and Jamie but had never met. At this point in her future they were a dominant force in the galaxy, their empire spreading like a cancer through space. An alliance had been formed to try to hold back their advance, an alliance in which the Earth Federation was playing a major part. But the price of this war, like any war, was high. Whole solar systems had to be abandoned and discarded like sacrificial pawns in a deadly game of real-life chess. The human cost was the greatest, not just the death toll (which was bad enough) but also the displacement of people, entire races made homeless, creating innumerable refugees. And that was the secret behind Cartor's mission to Axista Four. He wasn't there to respond to the cries for help from the Realists, or to make a routine check on the colony's development. He was there to prepare the ground for a massive influx of newcomers. Eighty thousand men, women and children were already *en route*; a tidal wave of humanity that would change the face of Axista Four overnight. Zoe realised that she needed to warn the colonists of the true scale of the refugee problem. She needed to get back to the Doctor and to find Jamie. There was only one possible result to a situation like this, and it would be both violent and bloody. She was certain that the TARDIS crew didn't want to be stuck in the middle of it.

Zoe was about to disengage herself from the pilot's chair when the computer flagged up something new for her attention. Hostile enemy action, it reported, telling Zoe that it had sensed armed humanoids approaching. Zoe asked the computer for a visual display and in the tiny screen in front of her right eye she was able to see a slight movement in a high observation gallery to one side of the hangar. She looked again and this time there was no mistaking what she was seeing: armed guards taking position. Panicking, she ordered the computer to show her a full 360-degree scan of the rest of the hangar, and now she knew what she was looking for, she could see activity on all sides. They'd found her and surrounded her. What could she do next?

She sat back in the pilot's chair and tried to calm her racing heart. There had to be another way out. Almost without realising what she was doing she reached for the controls of the fighter craft and flicked the power-up switch. Immediately she felt the throb of the powerful engines and the hydraulic lift as the vehicle orientated itself for prelaunch motion. Automatic systems kicked in as the machine began to roll forward. A fuelling robot detached itself and retracted into the sidewall of its cage as powerful lights flickered into life on the floor of the hanger, marking a runway.

And now the hidden troopers were no longer interested in remaining unseen. A few shots rang out and she felt the impact as projectiles bounced off her hull. At the far end of the hangar automatic space doors were slowly rolling open. Zoe realised that she had stumbled on a way out - but did she really want to take it? She knew plenty about the theory of flying but she was some way short of being a pilot. She rapidly flicked through the database and found what she was looking for: a vehicle manual file. She ordered the computer to display it at top speed. It was, as she had hoped, a fully illustrated guide to the craft she was in. Zoe began to read, thanking her training for her speed-reading and data-absorbing talents.

Her radio crackled into life.

'Please turn off the engine and come out of there voluntarily or we will stop you by force.'

It was Cartor. Zoe ignored him, concentrating on her studying. A quick glance up confirmed that the space doors were now open. As the fighter craft trundled on to the start of the runway they automatically locked into their open position. Zoe, one eye still on the computer file, put her hand on the control joystick and began to open up the throttle.

In the observation booth Cartor's jaw dropped. She was actually going to do it. This girl - whoever she was - was going to hijack his fighter. This could not be allowed. He'd be a laughing stock if word of this got back to Central... He

glanced over at the silent figure of the omnipresent Administrator Greene, observing his every move.

‘Override the space doors,’ he barked into his communicator.

‘But sir,’ someone began to complain before Cartor broke in on the channel again.

‘Just do it.’

Down on the floor of the hangar, the troops that had managed to find the emergency breathing gear hurried across to the side of the now open doors, holding on to safety lines to avoid being dragged out into space should the minimum-resistance force field fail. Two of them tied themselves in place and began winding a mechanical override control. As they wound the giant metal lever in a huge arc, the doors began to move again, but very slowly.

Zoe’s eyes widened in horror. Was that door moving again? She looked across at the other door and saw that it too was in motion. The doors were closing. Slowly, mechanically, powered by human arms rather than electricity, but moving nonetheless. The automatic launch systems of the fighter craft were locked; there was no way she could abort now. The fighter craft was gathering more speed with every second, heading for the gap in the wall, a space that was ever smaller. Zoe bit her lip and did some rapid mental calculations. She decided that she could just make it but the sight of the marines, straining to turn the gear, and the closing doors narrowing the gap made her question her own abilities. She closed her eyes.

* * *

Cartor watched with frustration as the fighter shot out of the hold into the darkness of space beyond, its passage marked by a brief multicoloured flash as it passed through the low-level force field. The fighter’s wings must have been within half a dozen centimetres of the metal doors on both sides: so near yet so far. He reached for his communicator again.

'Bridge,' he almost spat, his eyes narrowing, 'I want that ship stopped.'

Zoe opened her eyes and was both relieved and surprised to see that she was in space. She'd made it. Now all she had to do was use her new familiarity with the fighter to master its basic controls and fly down to the colony. All in a day's work, she thought with a wry smile. Using her incredible memory to flash up in her mind's eye each relevant section of the manual, she began to try each of the controls in turn. Before long she was satisfied that she had mastered basic orientation, acceleration and braking. Sophisticated matters like landing she could save for later. Right now she wanted to get clear of the ECSV before any of her craft's twins were launched in pursuit.

Looking around with a quick sensor sweep, Zoe was puzzled to see that no such pursuit seemed to have been initiated. The ECSV hung in space, slowly shrinking away as she put some distance between it and herself, but no other craft were visible at all. It was almost as though Cartor had given up.

As she moved away from the ESCV she noticed some odd-looking asteroids in orbit around the planet. There was something strange about the way they were spaced out, something artificial. Instinctively Zoe was certain that these were not the innocent asteroids they appeared to be. She decided to take a closer look but then suddenly everything went dead. The controls, the read-outs, monitors, everything. Including life support. Zoe realised that she was stuck in a dead vehicle floating in the vastness of space with perhaps minutes of oxygen left to her if she was lucky. A dead craft and a soon-to-be-dead Zoe Heriot.

Zoe thought for a moment and concluded that, all in all, this had not been the most successful escape attempt she had ever made.

Chapter Eleven

The Tyrenians were nothing if not a patient race. Although the necessity to rescue Dyselt from the clutches of the humans was urgent, Lorvalan hadn't rushed the preparations for their raid. He and Zenig had watched and waited and hatched their plan over many hours before they even began its implementation. Robot drones, unsuited to the rocky terrain but mobile, with a little help from Zenig, had been placed in key locations and provided with precise instructions. At the same time, Lorvalan had carefully circled the human base and placed explosive devices at key points. Some were timed, while others were primed to be set off by a radio signal.

Lorvalan returned to their initial observation point and found Zenig waiting patiently for him. He noted the eager expression on his lieutenant's face and smiled. 'Nearly time,' he promised. The sun had passed its apex; the long Axista afternoon had begun. Some of the humans who had returned to the base for a midday meal were now heading back out to the cultivated fields to adjust the settings on the various propagation systems and monitor the crop developments. Gradually a silence descended on the settlement as the few remaining humans returned to their own tasks.

Lorvalan checked his weapons and nodded to Zenig to do the same. Satisfied that they were ready, he glanced at his chronometer and smiled.

The first explosion was not the loudest but, in being first, it had the additional element of surprise. It was positioned in the lower parts of the nearby hills and set off a minor avalanche of rock and earth as part of a cliff collapsed. Almost exactly as planned the humans all emerged from the various buildings, some still clutching pens, notepads or bits of machinery that they had been working on. They looked in

horror towards the dust cloud sent up by the crumbling rock. Their expressions and cries suggested confusion. Had that been some natural event? If not, what the hell was it? Lorvalan was counting the seconds, fifty-eight, fifty-nine, sixty.

Right on cue the firing started. The droid was programmed to make a quick sweep with the projectile weapon, pause, then reverse the movement. It was a simple and mechanical act; any soldier worth his uniform would instantly recognise the precise movement as being the result of some artificial intelligence, rather than a living one, but these humans were clearly not soldiers. Even as the bullet marks picked out a semi-circle in the dust some of them stood still, mouths flapping open, unable to read the situation. Others were quicker to react, flinging themselves and their loved ones to the ground or under cover. The firing was only intended to be distraction rather than an offensive action but Lorvalan noted with satisfaction that at least three humans were hit and one didn't get up in a hurry.

Killing the humans, however pleasant given their history with that dishonourable race, was not the purpose of this attack; rescue was. As soon as the gunfire died away, the second and third blasts went off in quick succession. These were nearer to the camp, one on each side, and had the desired effect. The humans all took cover, sheltering from the attack, unsure where exactly it was coming from.

Lorvalan nodded to Zenig and the two powerful figures took advantage of the smoke that now hung densely between the prefabricated buildings of the base and, keeping their bodies low to the ground, headed towards the building they knew to hold the humans' 'alien captive'. As they moved in, the time-release explosives continued to go off; alternating between locations, giving the impression to the hapless humans that the attack was coming from all sides.

Lorvalan reached the entrance to the target building. With his back to the wall he provided cover, while Zenig took the door down with a well-aimed kick and headed inside. With one final glance around, Lorvalan followed him. Inside it was

now Zenig's turn to provide cover for him as he raced down a corridor, checking each room as he came to it.

The final door at the end of the corridor was the one they wanted, however. This was where Dyselt was being held. The two Tyrenians reached it without having encountered a single human. Zenig slammed into the wall and assumed a covering position. He nodded at his commander who walked up to the door, considered it a moment and then gave it a single kick with his foot. The door buckled and a second kick brought it clean off its hinges.

Lorvalan and Zenig entered the room, guns raised.

A young human in strange clothing, that left his legs bare, sat holding his hands up in the universally understood gesture of submission.

'Och,' said Jamie, bemused, 'who let the dogs out?'

For someone who had spent the last hundred or so years in deep cryogenic sleep, Kirann Ransom was showing remarkable powers of recovery, thought the Doctor. She had accepted the situation she had found herself in with an incredible calmness; with a willingness to embrace the unexpected that the Doctor would have welcomed in some of the humans who had travelled with him in the past.

They made their way back to Plymouth Hope, following Val Freedom as he picked a path through the decaying wreck of the colony ship. Kirann was clearly a little upset to see what had become of her father's ship but this was nothing to her reaction to what had happened to her father's dream.

As the Doctor had expected she was not impressed that the creed her father had chosen for his colony had become an ideological football, kicked around by opposing teams. '*Back to Basics* was a set of ideas, not a set of rules,' she explained angrily as they emerged from the bowels of the ship into the afternoon sun. 'It was a framework, an ideal, not something you were meant to follow like some quirky religion.'

Dee and Freedom, as representatives of the people who had done just that, felt embarrassed and tried to apologise but Kirann dismissed their 'sorrys' with a wave of her hand.

‘Don’t worry about it. It was your parents, and your parents’ parents...’ She stopped, shaking her head as she heard her own voice. ‘All of whom were born after me but are already dead,’ she said, a tone of wonderment in her voice. ‘How weird is that?’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Actually it was quite common in the early days of Earth’s expansion. People were forever setting off in various forms of suspended animation only to find, when they got to their destination, their descendants had beaten them to it with superior technology developed after they had left.’

Kirann stopped as a thought hit her. ‘Maybe something like that happened with us.’

She could see that the others were not following her. ‘You said you suspected that there might be some third party on this planet? Some alien force that attacked the medical centre?’

Freedom and Dee had lost no time in bringing Kirann up to speed on recent events, as well as the details of the political situation. The Doctor had felt sorry for the woman having to take on so much detailed information in one great info-dump but Kirann Ransom seemed totally up to the job.

‘The Doctor thinks it was an alien,’ Freedom said, shooting a sideways glance at the stranger. ‘Don’t you?’ he prompted.

‘Ah well, yes, I did wonder,’ the Doctor began beguilingly. ‘Some sort of creature with claws, I should say.’

‘So these clawed aliens,’ Kirann continued, ‘perhaps they appeared here between our surveys and our arrival. Perhaps this planet wasn’t as unpopulated as we thought.’

‘But why haven’t we seen or heard from them until now?’ asked Dee.

‘Perhaps it’s only now that you’ve given them a reason to show themselves,’ Kirann suggested.

Freedom led them to the point where they had left their horses. Gallantly he offered Kirann his mount but she declined. ‘I’ll walk,’ she insisted. ‘These muscles could do with the exercise. You go on ahead. I’ll walk down with the Doctor.’

Slightly reluctant to leave their new-found leader, Dee and Freedom did as they were asked. Kirann watched their horses take them off into the distance towards Plymouth Hope, which lay at the bottom of the valley a few kilometres away. She turned to the Doctor.

‘Well, Doctor, fancy meeting you again like this!’

The Doctor stared at her in amazement. He’d led a long life and met an awful number of people but his memory was generally pretty good, especially for humans; nevertheless, he was certain he’d never met this woman before in his lives.

Billy Joe had never been so frightened in all his life. All around him he could hear the sounds of battle - explosions, gunfire - but he could see nothing. He was lying at full stretch in the tiny roof space of the building. He and Jamie had located a moveable panel in what had turned out to be a false ceiling. The space above the ceiling was tiny and didn’t seem to offer too much hope of becoming an escape route, but Billy Joe had thought that he might be able to explore it. With a great effort Jamie had managed to push the boy high enough to get into the gap he had created by removing a panel. Then, with a further hefty shove to his feet, Jamie had propelled Billy Joe upwards. He’d quickly pulled the panel back into place, in case any of the Realists came looking for him, and had started to explore the dark roof space. He had quickly realised that there was, in fact, no other way out and had been about to return to Jamie when the fighting began. Now he didn’t know what to do. In the darkness, in the enclosed space, he actually felt safer now than anywhere else. He closed his eyes and waited for it to be over.

Hali hugged the ground as another explosion rocked the base. When the rumbling ceased, she popped her head up and looked around. Max was with her, and she was horrified to see how scared he looked. Things were out of control.

‘Who the hell is it?’ he called across to her, not really expecting an answer.

'Maybe Kartryte's mob finally figured out where we are,' she suggested, but in her heart she knew how unlikely this was. Even if the Loyalists had found their base they wouldn't launch an attack like this; for one thing it was too technically sophisticated.

'We need help,' Max said.

Hali considered for a moment. Where could they turn for help? They'd already made a radio plea but so far there was no sign of any answer from Earth Gov. However, there had been talk last night about something new in the sky: one of the Realists - Jobern, a man with an interest in the stars - had claimed that there was a new body orbiting the planet. There had been a lot of discussion about his claim, most of it good-natured but dismissive, and the general conclusion had been that it was all in Jobern's imagination. But what if there *was* something out there? Could it be a ship from Earth? Or was it perhaps the source of their current problem - the mother ship of the people attacking them? A radio plea for help couldn't hurt, could it?

'I'll get to the comms set-up,' she announced and, keeping her head low, she darted out of the building they were in. Max moved forward to watch with concern as Hali zigzagged across the gap between this prefab and the next. Suddenly there was an explosion - much closer this time, a grenade of some kind. A dust cloud filled the air, obliterating his view of Hali. When the dust cleared there was no sign of her. For a moment Max felt an aching hollow in the pit of his stomach, a sense of unbearable loss but then, joy, he saw a figure roll to its feet and dash into the building that housed their communications equipment. Hali was still alive. Max felt a warm glow of relief and noticed, with some embarrassment, that his cheeks were wet with tears. Feeling ashamed at having let Hali take the lead, he reached for a weapon.

'Forstat? Keneck?' he cried, and was relieved to hear answering cries from not too far away. 'Check your weapons; I think it's time we took some offensive action of our own.' He headed out of the building and was quickly joined by the other two men. Forstat, a nervous young man with a mop of

wild, black hair, pointed in the direction of the far end of the camp, to the complex of interconnected pods in which they had secured the stranger Jamie. 'I think I saw something head in there. There were two of them,' he reported.

'Just two?' asked Max.

Forstat nodded.

'Three against two, that's more like it,' muttered Max, grinning now. 'Follow me...'

He set off in the direction Forstat had indicated.

For the Tyrenians, surprise had given way to frustration. The human in the skirt didn't seem to know anything about Dyselt, or anything much else come to that. He claimed to be a visitor himself, and a prisoner of the humans. Zenig guarded the entrance while Lorvalan continued his questioning.

'Where is our comrade?' he demanded again, underlying his unspoken threat by forcing the point of his gun under the human's chin.

'I've already told you. I've never seen any one else like you two. Do ye think I could forget seeing a doggie walking on two legs?'

There was a sudden movement from the corridor and Zenig came bolting in.

'They've got us surrounded,' he said, a note of alarm in his voice.

'What!' Lorvalan was shocked; how could they have lost the initiative like that? He turned back to the human. 'You will be our hostage.'

Jamie shrugged. 'I don't think that'll get you anywhere. They had me as a prisoner here myself.'

'Is there another way out of here?' demanded Lorvalan, dismissing the notion of using the boy as a hostage.

'Do you not think I'd have gone if I'd have seen one? Looks like we're in the same boat. Maybe we can help each other'

The Tyrenian looked at the human for a long moment. The species was notoriously untrustworthy - everyone knew that humans had no concept of honour - but the man was clearly

telling the truth: he was a prisoner. Lorvalan came to a decision, raised his gun, aimed and fired.

Hali had reached the communications equipment and was making a general call for help. She spoke into the microphone in her best English, aware that the signal might have to travel a long way before it was received. But surely someone, somewhere, would hear her. She just hoped it would be in time.

“This is Hali Devine of the Earth Colony on Axista Four. We are under attack by hostile unknown forces. Repeat, we are under attack...’ She recorded a loop of the Mayday message, attached location markers and sent her signal out on a rotating spectrum of radio frequencies.

Now all she could do was wait. From outside she heard fresh firing, the unmistakable sound of energy weapons. But this time there was return fire, gunfire from revolvers. Some of her fellow Realists were fighting back. Checking that her own weapon was fully loaded, Hali hurried out to join her friends.

The bridge of the ECSV *Hannibal* was as calm and ordered as ever. All the crew members went about their assigned tasks with their normal, quiet efficiency. In the command chair Veena sat and watched as the tractor beam slowly pulled the lifeless fighter craft back into the ship. Readings showed that life support was now at minimal - Veena had decided to override Carter’s orders and had reactivated the oxygen supply. The girl Zoe might have been foolish but she didn’t think she deserved to die, and neither would Cartor when he calmed down. She hoped.

She looked over at the closed door of the ready room where Cartor and Administrator Green had disappeared moments ago. Raised voices could be heard but she couldn’t make out the words. She wondered what they were arguing about.

The Comms officer swivelled in his chair and caught her eye. She acknowledged him with a nod. ‘Receiving a signal from the planet,’ he reported.

‘Let’s hear it,’ she ordered and, through a mess of static and crackles, Hali’s voice filled the room.

Cartor strode on to the bridge just in time to hear the message as it played for the second time. ‘Okay, I think we’ve heard enough.’

‘Under alien attack, sir?’ questioned Veena.

‘Apparently. Take a fighter down there. Lend a hand...’

Veena was already heading towards the lift doors.

Less than ninety seconds later, Veena was running on to the flight deck, zipping up her flight suit as she ran. The recently hijacked fighter had just been re-admitted through the force field and a ground crew was beginning to pull it back to its cradle with a tug.

‘Abort that,’ Veena shouted at them. ‘I’ll take that one out. She’s warmed up, isn’t she?’

It was also blocking the launch route for any of the other fighters; if she was to get down there quickly it had to be this one. The section leader of the ground crew nodded in acknowledgment of her order and signalled the tug driver to pull the ship around.

‘What about the hostile?’ asked the man as Veena joined him. She glanced at his overalls, which bore the name ‘Rachird’.

‘Have you been inside, Rachird?’

‘No sir!’

Veena pulled her helmet on to her head. ‘I’ll deal with the hostile,’ she said and began to climb into the fighter craft.

Inside she found Zoe unconscious in the pilot’s seat. She picked the girl up and placed her on one of the three passenger couches. She didn’t know what to do with her but was sure that leaving her exposed to Cartor’s anger would be a bad thing. And furthermore she didn’t trust the mysterious Greene to treat her with any respect either. In time, Veena was sure that she could calm Cartor down and point out that the girl was merely scared, rather than some malicious agent, but for now she’d be safer where Veena could keep a personal

eye on her. She sat down in the pilot's chair, hooked herself up to the controls and activated the launch sequence.

The Doctor was worried: Kirann's explanation for recognising him had created more questions than it had answered. She had explained that the last person to see her before she'd gone under had been a stranger, a VIP visitor doing a tour of the ship before it left on its long voyage. A small man in an old-fashioned pale suit. A man who'd given her some bizarre last-minute instructions and something else.

'It was you. Sort of. And you told me to expect you,' she continued. 'Of course you looked a little different back then...'

'I did? Let me guess... same sort of build, white linen suit, straw hat?'

'Umbrella with a red question-mark handle. Yeah, that's the guy. Quite stylish in an understated sort of way,' Kirann added with a smile.

The Doctor bristled. 'I've never been too concerned with matters of appearance,' he muttered.

Kirann gave him an appraising look. 'No, I can see that,' she said.

The Doctor, however, was more concerned about greater issues. 'But what was he - I - thinking of? It's a flagrant breach of the Laws of Time!'

'All he said,' Kirann explained, 'was that he needed to make sure that I knew who you were when the time came. He said there wouldn't be time for you to earn my trust.'

The Doctor nearly exploded, a rare fury on his features.

'He told you?! About what was going to happen? About us reviving you. About what was going on here on Axista Four?'

'No, not in any detail. In fact he was extremely vague. Said too much foreknowledge was a dangerous thing.'

'I should coco,' the Doctor commented bitterly. 'What manner of man am I to become? Playing hop, skip and jump with the Laws of Time. They won't stand for it, will they, he must know they won't!'

'They?' Kirann asked, curiosity getting the better of her.

The Doctor, his anger waning, moved away so that the shadows of the trees covered his face. He had lowered his voice. ‘My people. I’m something of a runaway, you see...’

‘He asked me to give you this,’ Kirann added, reaching into a pocket and pulling out a small crystal. ‘He said you’d know what to do with it.’

‘Oh, did he?’ replied the Doctor in a rather unimpressed tone, as he took the crystal carefully. He gave it a quick appraisal, then slipped it into his top pocket. ‘Well, no doubt I will when the time comes...’

After that they walked on in silence for a while. Eventually they reached the edge of the forest and began the slow descent into Plymouth Hope. Finally the Doctor broke the silence. ‘I don’t suppose my future self said anything more useful about what’s going on here. Like the identity of the alien creature that attacked the medical centre?’

Kirann shook her head. ‘I’m afraid not. But we’ll soon find out when we study the security footage of the raid.’

‘What security footage?’ asked the Doctor.

Kirann smiled. ‘The medical centre is the original building?’ The Doctor nodded. ‘Then there’ll be no problem. There are hidden cameras in all the rooms, basic security measures. No doubt our *Back to Basics* friends have forgotten all about them but I haven’t.’

Dee Willoughby was not impressed when she heard the news. ‘Security cameras?! Recording everything that I’ve been doing?’

‘The AI on the security system is pretty sophisticated. It automatically wipes routine matters after a time delay. Don’t worry - your life isn’t all on file!’ Kirann assured her.

Dee didn’t look too mollified. The idea that her home had been spying on her was deeply unpleasant.

The Doctor and Kirann had asked Dee and Freedom to meet them in the medical centre as soon as they had arrived in town. Some effort had been made to clean up the mess from earlier but it still looked like a bombsite. Kirann confidently walked over to a wall-length cabinet of equipment

that Dee had never even touched. There was a screen, and some kind of computer, but under *Back to Basics* rules it had never been something she'd thought about using. Now Kirann was flicking switches on it and powering up the system as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

'Does none of you know how this works?' she asked, a little incredulously.

Dee and Freedom exchanged embarrassed looks. 'Tam, the Sheriff, knows a little, I think, but he was injured in the attack,' explained Freedom.

'Let's see what it was that attacked him, shall we?'

Kirann activated a control and a small device unfolded itself from the wall and extended towards her. Dee felt herself tense; there was something threatening about the small black box with a glass lens at the front that reminded her of a weapon. The device stopped just in front of Kirann's face. Kirann stepped forward, pressing her eye into the lens which, Dee now noted, had a shaped rubber cover to accommodate just such a move.

'Iris-recognition,' murmured the Doctor in what might have been a helpful manner if either Dee or Freedom had known what he was talking about. Dee watched in wonder as the device scanned Kirann's eyeball and then beeped in approval. The screen that was part of the equipment flickered into life. Dee was astounded; it showed an image of the room they were standing in, but as it had been before the attack. She found herself looking from the wreckage of the room to the image on the screen and back again.

'Let's see if we can find the relevant footage,' muttered Kirann, sitting at the console and beginning to adjust various controls. The image on the screen blurred and when it stopped again the view was markedly different; now smoke filled the room and a massive creature was striding through the smoke.

Dee gasped. It was every bit as horrific as the fleeting glimpse she had had before. A large, powerfully built humanoid creature but with savage canine features, pointed ears high on the head, a pronounced jaw and clawed paws.

'A Tyrenian,' whispered the Doctor.

Kirann whirled round.

'You know these creatures, Doctor?'

The Doctor looked grim.

'Only by reputation. And it's not a particularly nice reputation I'm afraid.'

Chapter Twelve

The sound of the energy weapon was all too familiar to Jamie. Once he had known nothing more dangerous than an English musket, but in his travels with the Doctor he had discovered far greater horrors: machine-guns, laser weapons, disintegrators. It seemed to Jamie that, as he travelled further into the future, weapons became more brutal, more destructive and more deadly. At the same time, however, some things remained as true in the far reaches of space and time as they had been in the Highlands of his youth; a weapon fired at you was only dangerous if the aim was true.

Lorvalan's shot passed clean over Jamie; partly this was due to Jamie hurling himself towards the floor but mostly it had to do with the small but critical weight of Billy Joe Kartryte dropping directly on to the alien from a hole in the ceiling. As he jumped Billy Joe reached out and pulled the energy weapon out of the hands of the dog monster. Lorvalan reacted with a snarl and threw the human boy off like a rag doll. Jamie, rolling for cover on the floor, had a fleeting glimpse of the startled expression on the boy's face as he flew through the air and then there was a sickening thud as he hit the wall at speed. Jamie stretched for the weapon that Billy Joe had managed to separate from its owner. His hands grasped it by the barrel and pulled it towards him just as Lorvalan leapt for the spot where it had been lying. Jamie pulled the weapon to him and felt for the trigger. The second alien was aiming his own weapon at him. Next to him the crumpled figure of Billy Joe stirred. A hand reached out and yanked at the canine's leg, jerking his aim high just as Jamie located the firing mechanism on the weapon he held. The second creature took the impact in the shoulder. Vivid red blood splashed the wall as the impact of the bullet tore a hole

in the creature's body. With a howl of pain he fell to the floor, right on top of Billy Joe.

Jamie felt sick - he hadn't realised how powerful the gun was. He hadn't wanted to cause so much damage. All he had wanted was to escape in peace. He looked at the crumpled figure of the alien. Had he killed it? And how was Billy Joe? The local boy had just saved his life twice. Before Jamie could check on him, however, the first creature had recovered and dealt him a sharp blow to the back. Jamie stumbled forward, dropping his weapon. And then the creature was on his back; he could feel his hot breath on his neck. Jamie pushed back, using the floor for leverage, but the creature kept hold of him. Together they rolled backwards and their fight continued.

Inside the Medical Centre, the freeze-frame image of the mysterious Tyrenian was still in place on the screen. Kirann, Val Freedom and Dee Willoughby stood around looking at the savage beast, while the Doctor sat cross-legged on a table and told them everything that he knew about the Tyrenians. It didn't amount to very much. A few rumours here and there, tall tales told in spaceport bars by traders and soldiers-for-hire, the occasional reported confrontation, rarely verified.

'The Tyrenians are said to be a fiercely proud warrior race,' the Doctor concluded. 'Humanoid but, as we saw, distinctly canine in appearance.'

'But where do they come from?' asked Freedom.

The Doctor threw up his hands in defeat. 'No one knows, I'm afraid,' he said. 'They appeared as if by magic towards the end of the last century. But no one has any idea where from.'

'Perhaps it was here that they originated,' speculated Kirann in a quiet voice.

The others looked at her, aghast.

'You think they might be natives of Axista Four?' asked Dee.

'Why not? They had to originate from somewhere,' replied Kirann evenly.

‘But the colony... It’s not possible...’ Freedom was finding it hard to put his thoughts into words.

Dee came to his rescue. ‘We wouldn’t have been allowed to colonise this planet if it was already inhabited by intelligent life. It’s against all the rules.’

The Doctor and Kirann exchanged a fleeting but knowing look.

‘Rules can sometimes be broken,’ suggested the Doctor sadly.

The mood in the room was tense. If these dog creatures really did have a prior claim to the planet then Stewart Ransom’s dream was over; the colony had been built on a lie. When the Federation heard of this their tenure would be revoked.

Freedom broke the silence. ‘For all we know this Tyrenian is alone, there may be no others...’

‘Or there may be thousands of them out there somewhere...’ Dee speculated.

Freedom considered. ‘We have to know the truth. We need to know what our people really found here when they landed.’

‘But it’s a hundred years since it all happened - what do you propose we do? Build a machine capable of travelling in time?’ retorted Dee.

The Doctor allowed himself a small smile. If only the TARDIS wasn’t so difficult to control. But then again, he thought to himself, if it weren’t for the erratic passage of his little craft throughout the highways and byways of all time and space *They* would have managed to locate him years ago, and he didn’t want that, did he?

‘That won’t be necessary; there must be plenty of evidence in the colony ship about the state of the planet when we first arrived. Automatic scans will have been recorded, everything that went on when *The Big Bang* arrived in orbit around Axista Four will have been logged,’ said Kirann.

‘Do you think so?’ asked the Doctor.

Kirann raised an eyebrow. ‘My father didn’t bring five thousand colonists halfway across known space on a whim. Everything was worked out in advance. Every possibility was

allowed for. We worked for years to make sure this colony was founded well.'

The Doctor nodded, acknowledging the point. Nevertheless,' he began, his eyes twinkling dangerously, 'the ship did manage to crash. I wonder how that came about...'

He looked up and caught Kirann's steely eyes. Although he liked the woman, instinctively he was still suspicious of her, or, to be more precise, of the advance information his future self had given her. What had he (would he) been (be) thinking?

'There's only one way to find out,' she declared. 'Come with me back to the wreck and we'll examine the records together.'

She looked over at Freedom and Dee. 'If that's okay with you?' she added.

Freedom waved a hand. 'Sure, go ahead.' He began fumbling inside a pocket and produced the sheriff's badge. He reached out to pin it on Kirann's blouse. 'Only room for one sheriff in any town,' he muttered. 'Reckon that's you now...'

Kirann glanced down at the shiny star and smiled, accepting the rank. 'In that case, Mr Freedom, if you can arrange us some transport, the Doctor and I had better get started.'

Freedom hurried out to fetch fresh horses for them, leaving Dee with the Doctor and Kirann. She frowned and voiced her concern. 'What shall we tell Major Cartor when he next appears?' she asked.

'The soldier from the support ship?'

'I think they consider themselves to be a little bit more than a support ship.' Dee couldn't help correcting the younger (or should that be older?) woman.

'If he asks tell him nothing. Leave my return as a surprise we can spring on him later,' she grinned. 'Nothing irritates the military mind quite so much as the totally unexpected. Don't you agree, Doctor?'

'Quite so,' answered the Doctor, still wondering just how much this woman knew about him.

* * *

Veena was lost for a moment in the sheer pleasure of flight. As First Officer aboard the *Hannibal* she rarely got the chance to pilot anything, one of the so-called privileges of rank being that other people did those menial tasks for you. But Veena was a space kid: born in space, grew up in space and she'd been flying spacecraft of one sort or another since she was eight years old. And this was what she was born to do. A small fighter craft like this was like an extension of her body as she swooped towards the planet. As she skimmed the atmosphere, heat flares danced up and down her wing. She soared like an eagle, relishing the freedom of flight.

A groan from behind her brought her back to reality. She adjusted her angle of descent to minimise the heat build-up, and flicked the autopilot on. Then she swung her chair around to check on her guest. As she had expected, Zoe was stirring. Veena fetched the girl a drink from a stowaway cabinet. Zoe accepted the pouch with a grateful smile and took a swig. The energy drink did its job, sending a shock of adrenalin through Zoe's system and blowing away the cobwebs with a bit of a kick.

'What was that - pure caffeine?' she managed to ask.

Veena smiled. 'Something not too dissimilar,' she confessed.

Zoe looked around. 'I'm still on board that small fighter-craft?' It was more a statement of confusion than a direct question.

'You warmed it up for me and I was in a hurry,' Veena explained glibly. 'Your friends are in trouble.'

Zoe frowned, confused at the turn of events. 'I rather thought I was too,' she commented.

'You are, believe me, but first things first, eh?' said Veena, swinging her seat back to face the controls. 'I'm Veena Myles, First Officer of the Earth Colony Support Vessel *Hannibal*. And you...?'

'Zoe,' added Zoe helpfully. 'Zoe Heriot.'

'You, Zoe Heriot,' concluded Veena, 'are my prisoner. Try not to forget that. I'm hoping to get promoted to my own command one of these days...'

Despite her harsh words, Zoe was sure she could discern some underlying warmth to Veena Myles. Perhaps her escape effort hadn't been such a disaster after all.

This time, the journey to the colony ship seemed a much quicker affair. The Doctor had often noticed this as a phenomenon of conventional methods of travel; the more you did the same journey, the more quickly it seemed to pass. Of course journeys in the TARDIS were something else again, which was another reason he tried not to go back to the same place and time too often. Except for Earth, naturally. He and the TARDIS had a strange affinity for Earth. One day he really ought to look into why. He would bet one thing, though: that smart-alecky future self with the silly hat would probably have all the answers; so sad that one day he was fated to regenerate into such a smug know-it-all.

Once they had reached the wreck, Kirann had taken the lead with complete authority. Unlike Freedom or Dee, Kirann's knowledge of the ship was total and organic. She had watched its development from the first designs, as her father had worked with his team to plan his great expedition. She could remember watching it being built, the first time she had seen it in the space dock - a wire-frame model made from girders thicker than her waist. Week by week it had grown, almost like a living thing: taking on more form, more bulk, more presence. And then, when the shell had been completed, she had been there while it was fitted out, helping her father design the living spaces and working, with his department heads, to iron out exactly what would and wouldn't be included on the manifest.

Val Freedom and Dee Willoughby had only ever known *The Big Bang* as a wreck, a shadow of its former self, intact in places but elsewhere completely destroyed. Kirann, by contrast, knew it intimately, every nook and cranny, as familiar to her as her own body.

The Doctor watched her carefully as she picked her way through one of the debris-filled corridors in what was now the 'ground level' of the ship. 'This used to be crew quarters,'

she told him, as they passed room after room crushed out of shape. Odd bits and pieces lined the corridor - personal effects, framed photos of parents and children, books, knick-knacks and souvenirs from lives long over.

‘Where are we heading?’ he asked.

‘The bridge is long gone,’ Kirann answered, ‘and with it the main computer interface, but the computer core - the memory as it were - was distributed to various hubs around the ship.’ She glanced back ruefully. ‘In case of any systems failure, or meteorite impact, something like that...’

‘Each hub a duplicate of the main memory?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Exactly,’ replied the new sheriff. ‘All we have to do is locate one intact.’

She reached a service duct and waved the Doctor forward. ‘And there should be one about four storeys up there. Would you care to go first?’

The Doctor looked up into the darkness. A drop of water fell onto his upturned face. ‘If you insist,’ he said doubtfully and began to climb.

Cartor walked purposefully down the corridor. The medics had just told him that the other patient from the colony had regained consciousness. A wave of his wrist at the entrance to the recovery room opened the doors and he entered to find that the man Kartryte was already on his feet and looking for his clothes. Despite being dressed in only a flimsy standard-issue gown, the man was an impressive sight. Old, but hardened with age like an ancient oak tree. He was arguing with the medical attendant, demanding that he return his clothes immediately.

‘Mr Kartryte, isn’t it?’ Cartor said, nodding at the medical attendant to leave them. Kartryte fixed him with a glare, his eyes still bright in his leathery face.

‘Major Cartor! Am I to take it I’m on board your shuttlecraft again?’ he asked.

‘No, this is the Earth Colony Support Vessel *Hannibal*. Welcome.’

‘Colony Support?’ Kartryte was instantly suspicious. ‘Come to tell us how we should be living?’

Cartor spread his arms wide in a gesture of innocence. ‘Why would you think a thing like that?’

Kartryte scoffed and looked around. ‘I guess you patched me up?’

‘Our medical teams did save your life, yes.’

‘And now you’re going to give me the bill, right?’

Cartor had to work hard to stop himself from laughing. He’d met some difficult characters in his time but Kartryte was something else. Offloading 80,000 new colonists was not going to be something this man would take lightly.

‘You don’t owe us anything,’ he said genially. ‘But a thank you wouldn’t come amiss.’

Kartryte just glared at him, balefully.

The Doctor watched, fascinated, as Kirann cannibalised a couple of damaged consoles to make a new means of accessing the computer memory, which she had declared to be free from injury. ‘You trained as an engineer?’ he asked.

‘I trained as everything. Dad might have wanted us to live a simpler life on Axista Four, but he wanted us all to be capable of turning our hands to anything we might need to do to survive.’

‘So have the colonists got it wrong? Did your father really intend them to live life no differently from that of the settlers of the American West?’

Kirann stopped what she was doing for a moment and looked at the Doctor. ‘My father came to believe that we, mankind, had taken a blind alley. We were becoming slaves to our technology. We’d stopped evolving to suit our environment and instead we were changing environments to suit us. Or changing ourselves artificially, fiddling with our own DNA, to make us fit into alien environments. That’s what *Back to Basics* was against. Over-reliance on technology. He yearned for a simpler life and that’s why he set up this colony to run the way it did. But he expected it to grow and develop, not stagnate. It’s been a hundred years since this colony ship

crashed. I think he'd have expected a bit more progress in that time. Not just a hick town stuck in a time warp.'

While Kirann had been speaking the Doctor had taken out of his pocket the crystal she had given him earlier and was examining it again.

'Is there anything here that would read this?' he wondered.

Kirann shook her head. 'There would have been readers all over the ship before the crash but I haven't come across any intact so far.'

The Doctor shrugged and returned the crystal to his pocket. 'I'll just have to be patient, then,' he muttered.

Kirann turned back to her task and slotted a memory board into place. 'There,' she announced. 'That should do it.' And with that she started accessing the records from the time when *The Big Bang* had still been an intact spacecraft, from the time when it had first entered the solar system that housed Axista Four.

Kirann and the Doctor spent the next three hours working through the logs and records, piecing together the tale of what had happened from half a dozen different sources. And at the end of it they had a pretty coherent picture of what had transpired a hundred years ago.

Kirann had been right in what she had said to Freedom and Dee: the first thing *The Big Bang* had done on reaching the planet was to scan for life signs or other indications of habitation. There had been none. Well, no active sign of habitation. In some of the southern landmasses there were a few cities and towns, or the ruins of the same that suggested that there had once been some kind of intelligent life here, but geophysical scans had confirmed that these had not been inhabited for millennia. As it seemed clear that there was indeed no intelligent life on the planet, the decision was made to go for colonisation.

Now the order was given to revive the planet-fall crew, a hundred or so men and women who had been specially trained to be part of the initial landing party. They joined the two hundred regular crew in active service while the majority

of the colonists, like Kirann herself, had remained in cryogenic suspended animation.

The Doctor was curious. 'Why didn't you take that training? I can't imagine that someone as keen as you would want to miss out on those early hours of the planet-fall experience.'

'I did have that training,' Kirann sounded a bit upset. 'I guess Dad decided to keep me safe in case something unexpected happened.'

And according to the records something unexpected had happened. A meteor storm or something similar; some of the reports of this were a bit garbled. But the upshot of the storm was not in doubt: the colony ship had been damaged. Fatally damaged. Instead of the planet-fell team being dispatched in a shuttlecraft, the decision was made to take the entire colony ship down. Ransom had hesitated - the ship wasn't really designed for atmospheric flight - but the consensus was that it would break up in orbit if they didn't make landfall immediately.

The pilot had done her best. She got the ship down but large parts of it were destroyed in the effort. Many of the colonists in suspended animation had died. The colony got off to a poor start.

The Doctor and Kirann considered what they had learnt. A disaster had struck and the colonists had been lucky to survive at all. But there had been no mention of the aliens. No sign of the Tyrenians at all.

'Perhaps they came along later,' suggested the Doctor.

Kirann shook her head. 'Did you see the damage to this ship?' The Doctor nodded. 'Did that look like meteorite damage to you?'

The Doctor had to admit that it didn't.

A determined look came into Kirann's eyes. 'This isn't the full story,' she declared. 'There's more to this, I know there is. And I'm going to get to the bottom of it, whatever it takes.'

Hali raised her Colt, steadied herself and then moved. She turned the corner, aimed, fired, dropped and rolled into cover

behind the next building all in one smooth continuous action. Her target, a combat droid, was knocked from its tracks by the impact of her shot but it was self-righting and quickly reoriented itself.

'Nice shot,' commented Max, as he helped her to her feet. Hali shrugged off the compliment. 'Not that it got us anywhere.'

The droids had appeared suddenly in the past half hour, whether summoned to provide back-up or in response to some pre-programmed plan they had no idea. There had been four of them; squat metallic killing machines on caterpillar all-terrain tracks, loaded with offensive weapons. They'd managed to disable one of them but it had come at a price: Forstat had lost his life in the attempt. The battledroids were not the most sophisticated pieces of AI Hali had ever read about but they were perfectly adequate for the job in hand: preventing the Realists from getting near the building where the aliens were trapped.

Hali looked over at the entrance to the building. There were sounds of fighting coming from within, crashes and bangs rather than the unmistakable sound of weapon-fire. She wondered who was getting the upper hand - the aliens or the stranger called Jamie and the young Kartryte boy.

Billy Joe opened his eyes cautiously, a little surprised to find that he was still alive. His side ached from where he had impacted the wall but there were no sharp pains to suggest that he had actually broken anything. He felt something liquid and realised that he was lying in a pool of thick, red blood. A shudder of alarm passed through him - was he bleeding to death? But then he realised that the blood was oozing from the body of the dog alien that was pinning him to the floor. Billy Joe braced himself against the floor and the wall, and tried to push the creature off. It was a dead weight - he couldn't be sure whether that was a literal feet or whether the creature was merely unconscious - but Billy Joe was young, determined and strong. Nevertheless it required a desperate effort to shift the alien.

Panting, Billy Joe got to his feet. Where were Jamie and the other creature? A loud crash nearby answered that one. Jamie and the alien had clearly taken their fight into one of the other rooms. A moment later that was confirmed when Jamie came crashing through the wall, which splintered and shattered under the weight of his impact.

Billy Joe could see that the fight had been going on for some time. Jamie was covered with blood and scratches. The stranger caught Billy Joe's eye. The youth was pleased to see a fleeting look of relief cross Jamie's face as he took in the fact that Billy Joe was still alive.

'The gun?' Jamie demanded, his voice sounding as rough as his face looked.

Billy Joe pointed over to where the energy weapon lay. Jamie started towards it but before he had made any real progress the alien thrust a powerful arm through the hole in the wall and pulled Jamie to the floor.

Billy Joe could only look on in horror as his friend was dragged back through the rubble.

EPISODE FIVE

Chapter Thirteen

Zoe could tell the location of the Realist base long before she could actually make out any of the buildings; clouds of black smoke hung over it like marker buoys. As Veena brought their fighter lower, Zoe could see more signs of fighting: explosions, some battle droids and gunfire.

They 're under attack,' she said, slightly unnecessarily.

'Guess we arrived just in time,' replied Veena. 'Do you think you can operate this weapons station?' She nodded towards a seat next to the pilot's chair sited in front of the complicated weapons control mechanism. Zoe looked at it and the relevant pages from the manual she had scanned earlier flashed up in her mind. Set distance, firepower, aim and launch... all fairly logical for a girl like Zoe. 'Yes,' she said, after a moment's thought. 'Yes, I think I can.'

She quickly changed positions and adjusted the seat; apparently she was a good deal smaller than the average Weapons Officer on one of these fighters.

'I don't want to kill anything, though,' she warned as she began to grapple with the controls.

Veena shot her a sideward glance. 'They're your friends down there, aren't they? We'll do whatever it takes to save them from this attack.'

With that, Veena returned her attention to flying the ship. 'Get ready, we're going in,' she announced, and Zoe felt the nose of their craft dip lower.

The fighter craft flew low over the camp, too fast for any weapon to get a lock on it but not so fast that Veena and Zoe couldn't get a glimpse of the terrain. Monitors in the cockpit displayed still shots of the base, clearly showing the main site of the fighting and the three remaining Tyrenian battledroids.

'I'll swing round again,' said Veena. 'See if you can take out one of those droids!'

Before Zoe had quite taken in what was happening Veena had sent her ship in a tight 360-degree loop. Zoe felt her insides churn and her face pull tight as the tiny fighter defied gravity. And then suddenly everything was the right way up again and they were heading straight for the settlement, this time flying even closer to the ground, close enough to throw up clouds of dust. Zoe peered through the haze, looking for the distinctive shape of the battledroids. She caught one in her sights and hit the trigger. A missile shot out of the launch tube on the underside of the fighter and roared towards the droid. Veena pulled hard on her joystick and the fighter shot up and away from the surface. It was still climbing when a massive explosion rocked it from below. Zoe had clearly hit her target. Veena looked over at her.

‘Good shooting,’

‘Thank you,’ said Zoe, a little stunned.

‘I think you may have overdone the firepower setting,’ suggested Veena with a laugh.

Zoe tried to see the extent of the damage she had caused, but there was a fresh plume of dense black smoke rising from the site now and it was all but invisible. Zoe crossed her fingers and hoped she hadn’t made things any worse down there.

Hali had heard it first; a buzzing noise a long way away. She’d looked up and seen something in the sky, a black dot. At first she had thought it was a bird but it quickly increased in size and she could see that it was nothing natural. As it came closer the sound became louder. Hali had grabbed Max and pointed excitedly into the sky.

‘Look,’ she had cried, ‘they’ve come. They’ve come to help us.’

Seconds later they had both dived for the floor as the fighter roared over the settlement. Hali had got to her feet as quickly as she could, just in time to see the craft begin a steep climb. Max had worked it out first.

‘They’re coming around for a second look. We’d better get clear - we don’t know what sort of firepower they might have.’

Ignoring the sporadic fire from the battledroids, Max, Hali and Keneck ran for their lives, heading away from the battle site. They had not gone far when the fighter craft began its second approach. There was a flash as a missile fired, roared into the heart of the settlement and then, a split second later, there was a massive explosion that threw them all to the ground.

Billy Joe had also heard the sound of the fighter-craft and guessed that it was some kind of space or air vehicle, but who was in it? More of the intruders sending reinforcements? He wasn't sure but he knew he had to get away - except he couldn't leave Jamie. Alien weapon in hand, he hurried down the corridor to the room where the thing had dragged Jamie. When he got to the door he could see the creature raising its fist above Jamie's head, savage claws protruding from the back of his hand. Billy Joe brought up his weapon but knew already that he wouldn't be able to get a shot off in time.

There was a deafening roar and his entire world rocked. The far wall of the building was torn away, the force of the blast sending both Jamie and the alien flying.

Lorvalan was the first to recover. He looked at the gaping hole where a wall had been and saw more than a pile of smoking rubble; he saw a means of escape. The humans had secured the entrance to the building but now there was a new exit. And one they couldn't have covered. Not yet. Lorvalan instantly forgot the human he had been about to kill. The important thing was to get back to his people, to revive more of them to continue the fight on a larger scale. Seizing his opportunity, he ran.

Billy Joe hurried over to where Jamie was lying. 'Jamie are you...' he trailed off. He could hardly ask Jamie if he was okay when he looked as bloody and beaten up as he did. Jamie, however, was made of sterner stuff. 'It looks worse than it is,' he said stoically and got to his feet. Billy Joe might have been impressed but for the fact that Jamie had then staggered and clutched his head. 'Where's yon doggie thing?' he asked, trying not to wince with the pain. Billy Joe waved

in the direction of the gaping hole. Jamie reached out, relieving Billy of the gun, jogged over to the hole and disappeared.

As the sound of the explosion died away Hali, Max and Keneck got to their feet again and looked back at the point of impact. The droid that had been targeted was completely destroyed; only bits of its caterpillar track remained. But behind the droid a large part of the building had also been destroyed. Suddenly Hali saw some movement through the hazy smoke that was rising from the site of the missile strike; it was one of the aliens, emerging from the wreckage of the building they had trapped them in. He began to run towards the mountains and, without stopping to think about her actions, Hali began to follow. She ran down the main street towards the point at which the alien had emerged.

‘Be careful,’ cried Max from behind her. ‘There might be more explosives...’ but the warning fell on deaf ears. All Hali could concentrate on was the escaping alien. Max’s cry, however, did reach the alien’s sensitive ears. He pulled up in his run and looked behind him. Hali, running after him, was totally exposed. He raised his gun and fired.

But his target was no longer there. A figure moving in a blur had appeared from the wreck of the building and knocked her to the ground and safety. Not wanting to jeopardise his escape, Lorvalan decided against a second shot and turned back to run. As he reached the edge of the settlement, he pulled out a communicator and sent a final radio signal to the droids and devices he and Zenig had set all those hours earlier. Simultaneously the remaining battledroids and a sequence of explosive devices round the mountainside perimeter of the town exploded, creating a virtual earthquake.

In the ensuing confusion, Lorvalan made good his escape.

* * *

Hali Devine rolled over and found herself sitting astride the chest of the man who had just attacked her. She pulled back a fist to pulverise his face but he reached up and caught her

wrist. 'Do you nae think a "thank you" might be in order?' suggested Jamie with a smile. 'I did just save your life.'

The roar of an engine announced the return of the fighter craft but this time it didn't unleash any further missiles - instead it hovered over the settlement and then slowly descended, landing just beyond the smoking ruins of the building in which Jamie had been kept prisoner.

Max, Hali and Keneck looked on suspiciously as two figures emerged from the fighter craft; they appeared human but were both wearing flight helmets that hid their faces. Jamie, however, thought he recognised the petite figure of one of the new arrivals, a thought that was confirmed a moment later when she removed her helmet and shook her hair free. 'Zoe!' exclaimed Jamie, delighted. He rushed to greet her and enveloped her in a huge bear hug that plucked her off her feet. Max and Hali exchanged looks. Apparently the occupants of the fighter were on their side after all.

The next hour was a confusion of introductions, explanations and clearing up. More of the Realists appeared and began to help with the task of repairing the damage that had been caused. The injured Tyrenian was found, patched up by Max and held in a secure storage space. If and when he regained consciousness he was to be questioned. Jamie and Zoe caught up on where they had been and speculated about the whereabouts of the Doctor. Veena, overhearing them, was able to tell them that someone of that name had been with the Loyalist party who had met with herself, Cartor and Administrator Greene when their shuttlecraft had first landed.

They were in the Realists' Medical Centre. Like the majority of the buildings in the settlement it was a standard prefab construct, designed to be infinitely adaptable to various purposes. It was a plain, sparsely furnished room with a half dozen treatment couches and beds. Although under-resourced compared to Max's original medical centre back in Plymouth Hope, the few bits and pieces of high technology that the Realists' raids had managed to liberate were all fully

utilised. Max was currently attending to Billy Joe's wounds. Like Jamie's injuries, most of these were flesh wounds and Max was using a hand-held skin grafter to seal and clean the smaller ones. Jamie, whom Max had dealt with first, was lying on a recovery table. He had been told to lie still and relax but was defying those orders, sitting up and talking animatedly to Zoe and Veena.

'The question we need answering now,' Veena interrupted, 'is where did those aliens come from? Any ideas?' She looked around the room. Before anyone could answer there was a rumble of noise from outside. 'No need to look alarmed. I signalled for some back-up,' Veena explained and left the room.

As soon as she had gone Max turned to Hali. 'I should tell them about the bunker...'

'What bunker?' asked Zoe.

Hali and Max explained to Zoe about the alien bunker he had discovered. 'I don't understand why they've suddenly woken up,' Max told them. 'I've been monitoring them since I first found them and there's been no change in their status. Why have they appeared now?'

It was a rhetorical question but Zoe offered an answer nevertheless.

'Perhaps they got some kind of alarm call. Do you suppose it's a coincidence that they appeared at the same time as the Federation representatives?'

'You think there's some connection between the Federation and these aliens?' asked Hali, frowning.

'I don't know,' Zoe admitted. 'But I do know they're not to be trusted.'

Zoe explained about the refugee crisis and the huge number of new colonists that would shortly be arriving on Axista Four. The colonists were shocked.

'Kartryte needs to know about this,' was Max's pronouncement when she had finished. 'Our differences don't really matter now, do they?'

Hali nodded. 'We must get Zoe to speak to them.'

‘It’s a long ride to that town, though,’ Jamie reminded them. ‘Isn’t there a quicker way?’

Max had just finished dressing the last of Billy Joe’s wounds. ‘There you go, son, take it easy and you’ll be back to normal in no time.’

‘Back to normal? What’s that?’ he asked bitterly. ‘Dog aliens running all over, soldiers from Earth flying everywhere, refugees flooding our lands... I don’t know what normal is any more. I just want to go home. I want to see Grandpa.’

Jamie could see that Zoe was confused and explained that Billy Joe’s Grandpa was the sheriff, the Tam Kartryte that Max wanted her to meet.

Zoe had an idea. ‘I might not trust these people from Earth but that doesn’t mean we can’t use them...’ She walked over to speak directly to Billy Joe. ‘You want to see your Grandpa and so do I; we’ll ask our new friends to give us a lift...’

Major Cartor was feeling distinctly uncomfortable. Uncomfortable and more than a little angry. He had been summoned from the bridge to an urgent meeting with Administrator Greene but that had been only the beginning of his ordeal. When he had reached the Administrator’s cabin he found himself being talked to like some kind of junior officer.

‘May I remind you, “Administrator”, that I am the captain of this ship,’ he spat at the bureaucrat. The Federation official was sitting at the computer console, carrying out other business whilst simultaneously briefing Cartor. Greene looked up from his screen briefly, a dangerous glint flashing in his dark eyes.

‘And may I remind you, Captain,’ replied Greene, somehow managing to make the word ‘Captain’ sound like an insult, ‘that I represent Earth Gov and the entire Federation.’ He flicked a switch and turned off the screen. ‘I do think you should try and get a sense of perspective about this matter. You might be captain of this ship but you are in reality merely a tool of the Federation. A tool that I have full authority to wield as I see fit.’

Somehow Cartor managed to stop himself from reaching across and attempting to separate the Administrator's head from his body. 'Perhaps you should go down to the planet and handle the interrogation of this alien yourself?' he suggested, trying and failing to keep any hint of sarcasm out of his voice.

'Oh, I'm sure you can handle it, Major. One can always rely on you military types in matters where naked aggression is required. Do try not to kill it, though; that would rather ruin my plan.' Greene paused for a moment. 'You understand what I'm asking you to do?'

Cartor hesitated, and then nodded.

'Please close the door on the way out, Major,' said Greene, turning away and re-activating his screen.

Cartor, choking back his anger, left the room, not trusting himself to speak again. In the reflection on his screen Greene watched the Captain go and smiled a secret smile to himself. He liked dealing with the military mind: so straightforward, so black-and-white and so gloriously malleable.

The Doctor and Kirann had been over the same material countless times now but were no nearer to discovering anything new. The Doctor started running through auxiliary systems, seeing whether there was any alternative contemporary information recorded elsewhere in the system - weapons logs, damage reports, anything.

'That's very odd,' he announced presently. Kirann, who was moodily examining a crew manifest, looked up. 'What is it?' The Doctor waved in the direction of the console he was working on. 'There's been some deliberate damage done here. Files have been wiped. Irretrievably.'

'Damage incurred during the crash?' asked Kirann, joining him.

The Doctor shook his head. 'No, no, I don't think so. Look: these sectors have been completely removed. That's not accidental damage; this memory core has been intentionally amended.'

'Is there nothing left at all? Not even a fragment?'

The Doctor worked at the console for a moment or two, calling up disparate files and trying to amalgamate the fragmented data. 'That's the best I can do,' he announced finally, as a five-second, partially reconstructed video sequence appeared on the screen. It was a video feed from a gun camera towards the rear of the colony ship and displayed a shot of a starscape. There didn't appear to be anything else in the sequence save for a flash at the end.

'Can you freeze the frame?' Kirann asked. The Doctor did as she had asked and Kirann jabbed a finger at part of the screen. 'What's that?' she demanded.

The Doctor fiddled with the controls and managed to magnify the relevant sector of the screen. The image was blurry, pixelated, but not impossible to read.

'A satellite of some kind,' muttered the Doctor.

'It's not one of ours,' said Kirann. 'Can you magnify that flash near the end in the same way?'

The Doctor cleared the image of the mysterious satellite and refocused on the flash.

'It's weapons fire!' exclaimed Kirann, shocked. 'Look: just before the flash there's a fleeting glimpse of part of some other ship.'

'The Tyrenians?' speculated the Doctor. 'They had to get to this planet somehow...'

'But what happened. Who was here first? The aliens or us?'

The Doctor stood up. 'I don't think anything here is going to tell us,' he declared. 'But if the Tyrenians had spaceships here at the time of your planet fall, maybe they can tell us what happened.'

'You want to talk to them?!'

'They are an intelligent species. I know they have a reputation for trouble but they're not total monsters like the Daleks. In fact, now I come to think about it, I seem to recall that they have a strict code of behaviour; a sense of honour. I'm sure we can deal with them without further violence.' Kirann found herself believing the stranger; his simple honesty encouraged such thinking.

'But how are you going to find them?'

‘I don’t know, yet. Let’s put our thinking caps on, eh, see what we can come up with.’

The shuttlecraft that had arrived in the past few minutes more than dwarfed the tiny fighter that Veena and Zoe had arrived in. Max looked on impassively as a seemingly endless stream of battle-suited marines poured out of the machine, and began taking up defensive positions around the settlement. A few moments later Major Cartor stepped out on to the soil of Axista Four.

‘Max Forde?’ he asked. Max nodded and extended a hand, which Cartor ignored completely.

‘We got your Mayday,’ he continued.

‘Thanks for coming,’ said Max evenly, eyeing the major with a good deal of suspicion, ‘but we’ve changed our minds. We don’t need outside help to resolve our problems here.’

‘That’s as maybe but the situation has changed now. Where’s the alien?’

‘Secured. He’s sleeping.’

‘Wake him up. I want to question him,’ ordered Cartor firmly.

‘Now.’

Jamie, Zoe, Max and Hali had insisted on being with the Federation officials during the questioning. Jamie wanted to see for himself what the dog creature had to say, Zoe was worried about what Cartor might do to the prisoner and Max and Hali just wanted to be kept inside the loop. They held hands quietly, aware that things were slipping away from them.

Later Zoe was glad that they had all been in attendance; she was sure that had Cartor acted alone the interview would have been more of an interrogation. She didn’t trust Cartor to treat any alien with humanity or respect; she’d met his type before and xenophobia didn’t even begin to cover it.

The first shock was that the alien spoke Standard - the language that had evolved over the centuries from English. Neither Zoe nor Jamie was surprised but the colonists had

been very shocked. Zoe was interested, however, to note that Cartor seemed to have expected the alien to speak his language. He had barged right in and started speaking to it directly without bothering with any preliminary niceties.

‘Who are you? Where have you come from?’ he demanded brusquely. ‘Come on, I know you can understand me.’

The alien had just looked at him and snarled.

‘Answer me when I speak to you.’

‘Lieutenant F’rakl Zenig, of the Tyrenian space cruiser *The Great Hunt*’, replied the alien eventually. ‘Would you like my service number? Not that it would mean anything to you.’

‘You have a ship?’ asked Cartor ignoring the sarcasm.

‘I just told you. *The Great Hunt*.’

‘Where is it?’

Zenig smiled. ‘Ah well, that would be telling, wouldn’t it?’

Zoe realised that the Federation major had extracted all the information that he was going to, but the interrogation continued for a further half hour. In the end, Zenig’s answers were nothing more than grunts and Cartor’s patience eventually gave out. ‘Lock him up,’ he ordered. ‘No food or drink for 24 hours - we’ll see what he feels like saying after that.’

Veena hesitated. ‘But Sir, the Convention...’

Cartor shrugged, cold steel in his eyes. ‘I don’t think there were any “Tyrenians” at New Geneva, were there?’ He swept out.

The Doctor and Kirann may have had their metaphorical thinking caps on but they weren’t getting very far. It was the Doctor who finally came up with the answer. ‘Is there any transport on this planet?’ he asked.

‘Nothing that isn’t horse-powered,’ Kirann replied. ‘Why?’

‘What about the Realists?’

Kirann shook her head. ‘According to what Val told me, for all the raids that the Realists have made since the split they’ve only really taken emergency shelter kits, survival

rations, medical technology, that kind of thing. Nothing with wheels or wings.'

'And these Tyrenians, they can't have appeared from very near to here; the Loyalists would have seen them before now...' mused the Doctor.

'So?'

'So what if the Tyrenians have some kind of transport? Something with an engine, something that gave off emissions.

'Emissions we could track!' exclaimed Kirann, following his reasoning. 'Yes, yes, that's a possibility. There are scanners in the ship that still work. We can do a general sweep, see if we pick up anything.'

'And I'm sure I can knock up something similar that will be portable,' offered the Doctor. Re-energized, the Doctor and Kirann set about their tasks.

An hour later, the Doctor was hanging on for his life as Kirann steered an explorer buggy, slightly erratically, along one of the dusty trails leading out of Plymouth Hope. The buggy was a four-wheel, open-topped affair. The Doctor had been amazed when Kirann had taken him directly to a section of the hold that housed three of these buggies, all powered up and ready to go. 'I can't believe these people had resources like this at their fingertips for so long and preferred to go on horseback,' Kirann had commented.

'They thought they were living according to your father's rules,' the Doctor suggested.

Kirann laughed bitterly. 'That's so ironic. My father hated rules all his life.' She had then jumped into the driving seat and remotely opened the cargo bay door. The Doctor had joined her and immediately regretted it; there was a ten-foot drop from the edge of the cargo bay to the ground below, but Kirann had such total faith in the buggy's suspension that she hadn't even slowed down. Or perhaps she just hadn't looked. Either way they'd hit the ground with a horrible thump and the Doctor had nearly trampolined right out of the vehicle. Kirann had shot out an arm, caught hold of him

and hauled him back before any damage was done. They'd headed straight for an area five miles south of the town where the ship's scanners had picked up the emission trace of a small ionic engine, possibly a one-man skimmer.

The Doctor held his jury-rigged portable scanner - a Heath Robinson-style contraption that looked like a science experiment mounted on a table-tennis bat (which, in many ways, it was). It was bleeping steadily as they moved, increasing in volume as they got nearer to their search site. There were on the right track.

Dyselt was asleep, lying on a rough outcrop of rock, not that he cared for comfort. The brain disease was still eating away at his mind, destroying his brain's higher functions and reducing him to an animalistic state. He awoke, jerking his head around wildly, not sure where he was. Outside. Outside in the open. He knew he should be somewhere else: somewhere inside. From the wreckage of his memory he managed to salvage a single image; a notion of safety that he couldn't put a name to. It was a metal cave, a construct and it was where he belonged. He couldn't remember what the bunker was but he knew what home was. And he needed to get back to it.

The creature got to his feet and climbed on board his skimmer. Operating the controls by instinct rather than knowledge, he started the engine. The skimmer shot off, hovering inches above the ground, leaving an invisible trail of pollutants as it went.

Lorvalan entered the bunker with caution, sniffing the air experimentally. Had any of the humans returned? There were no fresh odours, just the traces of the earlier visits. Relaxing slightly, Lorvalan hurried through the corridors.

The humans had discovered this bunker, into which he and his command crew and other survivors of the humans' attack on their settlement had retreated, but they hadn't found the main ship. Lorvalan knew that he would be safer there; in the mothership he had access to supplies, weapons,

droids, everything he might need to remove the humans from the planet, everything except the most important element: manpower.

Battledroids were all very well for containment, diversionary assaults and simple manoeuvres, but for a real battle he knew he would need experienced Tyrenian warriors. Although the humans had discovered the bunker, he had run the risk of returning, as this was where his remaining warriors still slept.

If there had been more time, he would have begun a program to check each of the Alistori; the infection of Dyselt was disturbing and, under normal circumstances, further revivals without rigorous checks would have been unthinkable. But these were far from normal circumstances, in Lorvalan's opinion. He began sending out the signals to the Alisorti, ordering the parasitical creatures to wake their hosts.

Almost immediately he began to hear the subtle sounds that announced revival: the sticky, ripping sounds of the Alisorti flexing their many limbs. And then, further away, Lorvalan heard something else. Movement. A voice. Humans!

Lorvalan took one last look around the revival room, assured himself that everything had begun correctly and then exited. His warriors would have the time to wake properly and join the fight - he would make sure of that.

Chapter Fourteen

Zenig lay still, gathering his strength. The humans thought that they had him beaten, that his wounds made him weak; he was happy to play along with their mistake. The truth was that the Tyrenian constitution was a remarkably robust creation, with self-healing abilities many races would be jealous of. Although his wounds had been severe the lacerations were already sealing themselves, his torn muscle was being regrown. Injuries that might take a lesser creature, like these pathetically frail humans for example, days to recover from would incapacitate a healthy adult male Tyrenian for just a matter of hours.

So Zenig lay still and let out the occasional groan, as if in pain. His captors were watching him, he knew - he'd spotted the hidden camera in the corner of the room instantly - so he showed them what they expected to see. A creature beaten into submission, no longer a threat.

He waited and eventually his opportunity came. He heard raised voices outside the room in which he was being held. A female voice, to his sensitive ears shrill and high-pitched, spoke first, then the deeper, more acceptable tones of one of the males answered.

'I don't care what the major said. There are rules about this sort of thing and a prisoner must be treated in accordance with them.'

'But sir, the major said these dog things are not covered by the Convention -'

The female voice cut in. 'All intelligent life forms are covered. It's not open to debate, Jones, just take this food in to him. Now.'

Zenig listened keenly with his sensitive ears as one pair of footsteps echoed away down the corridor. A second footstep, a heavier tread, approached the door. Zenig tensed. He timed

his move perfectly. As the door slid open the hapless human soldier took a step into the room. He was holding a tray in one hand on which there was a pitcher and a glass of water and a bowl of some nutrient. As he stepped over the threshold, the human glanced back to secure the door with the wrist sensor on his free hand. That was the moment Zenig had been waiting for. He leapt. It was, even by Tyrenian standards, a prodigious jump. Zenig knocked the man to the floor, jumped over him and into the corridor moments before the door closed. Before the man could even move, Zenig smashed the operating control; as he had hoped, this appeared to fuse the door. Knowing he had scant seconds before his escape was noticed, Zenig hurried out.

The humans' arrogance and overconfidence was evident as soon as Zenig left the building. No one was to be seen - the possibility of his escape had clearly not registered with them. He hurried towards the mountains and to freedom. Just as he reached the outskirts of the settlement he was spotted. It was the youth they had encountered before, the one who wore the strange clothes that left his legs bare.

'Hey you,' shouted the human, running at him. Zenig considered a moment; killing the human would be satisfying but without a weapon it might take a moment or two, time in which other humans might appear and outnumber him. His duty was clear: to return to base as quickly as possible. The human's death would have to wait. Instead Zenig turned and let the human shoulder barge him. The Tyrenian used the youth's momentum, and threw him expertly. The human sailed through the air and fell to the ground with a satisfying thud. Zenig did not wait around to see how badly damaged he was.

As the alien disappeared into the undergrowth at the foot of the mountains, Cartor, Veena, Zoe and Max emerged from one of the buildings. Max hurried over to check on Jamie but the young Scot was already rolling to his feet and removing his shirt, revealing the slimline body armour he had been issued with. He patted the lightweight chest piece, marvelling

at its strength. 'Didn't even scratch me,' he announced as Max reached him. The others joined them.

'That was very stupid,' Zoe scolded him, 'very brave but very stupid. You could have been killed!'

'We wouldn't have let that happen,' Cartor snapped. 'Anyway, he volunteered for the job.'

'Aye, it couldnae been one of yon marines - the wee doggie would have been too suspicious - but I don't look like a soldier, do I?' said Jamie proudly. Zoe just shook her head sadly; trust Jamie to put his hand up for a stupid stunt like this.

'Right, then.' Cartor turned to Veena. 'I think we'll need some reinforcements. Bring down a full squad from *Hannibal*. I want an L and D team ready to move out in two hours.' He smiled. 'The alien should have led us to his base by then.' Veena nodded and she and Cartor moved away to discuss the details of the proposed attack.

Max watched them go and then turned to Zoe.

'I could have saved them some time; told them where I found the aliens sleeping.'

'I don't think that would have been a good idea,' Zoe said firmly. 'I don't entirely trust them. Not all monsters have talons and claws, you know,' she added.

'That's as maybe, but lots do. Like those Yeti things, and the terrible Zodin,' added Jamie unhelpfully.

'That's enough, Jamie, please. There are always exceptions. My point is that right now I think the marines from the ECSV *Hannibal* are just as much a danger to everyone as Zenig and his compatriots. I need to talk to the Doctor.'

Zoe looked over at Veena and Cartor; their planning session appeared to be over. Cartor set off towards his shuttlecraft, leaving Veena talking on her communicator to the *Hannibal*.

'I'll get Veena to take Billy Joe back to his grandfather. She told me that he's back home now. Maybe I can go with them and brief him on what's happening,' Zoe announced.

'What should we do? I dinnae want to sit on my backside,' complained Jamie.

Zoe paused, thinking for a moment. 'We need to know more about these aliens - their numbers, what they're doing here...'

'There's a way through the caves to their bunker,' Max told her. 'I could take you.'

Jamie nodded enthusiastically. 'Maybe I can catch up with that Zenig.'

'Just be careful, Jamie. We need information not martyrs,' Zoe instructed him.

Jamie looked confused.

'Don't go looking for a fight, Jamie. Okay?' clarified Zoe.

'Oh right, if you say so.' Jamie turned to Max. 'Come on, then. What are we waiting for?'

It wasn't too difficult a journey. The caves were dark and wet and Jamie lost his footing more than once, but it made a nice change from sleek metallic corridors on space stations and the like. Jamie could take or leave the technological marvels of the futures he visited, but nothing fired him up quite so much as a physical challenge. He followed Max carefully through the caves.

'This is the first route I discovered,' Max explained as they moved. 'I was just exploring, I've always been curious, and when we got here I found traces of EMR, which I didn't think were natural. I had Hali look for a more powerful sensor on her next raid on the colony ship and she came up with the goods. Then there was no doubt - there was something artificial down here, some kind of machine. Well, we'd seen the wreckage of the Tyrenian camp; I'd assumed it was some sort of base for a training exercise or something. It was hardly a suitable site for a colony of any kind but it looked abandoned, forgotten. I didn't expect to find some artefact of theirs still throbbing with power. Careful here, the wall falls away rather.'

Max reached out a hand to help Jamie past a section of the path, which circled a large, deep cavern. Jamie's boot dislodged a rock, which fell, bouncing off the walls, and

broke into smaller pieces. It was a long time before they heard it stop.

‘Long way down,’ commented Max. ‘That’s why I went looking for an easier path. But if we’re to get to the base before the Tyrenian we need this short cut. Step carefully there.’

Jamie did as he was told and crept along the path, which had become little more than a narrow ledge. He was quite relieved to reach the fir side of the cavern and return to a slightly more stable pathway.

‘What I found was this bunker. I think the aliens - the Tyrenian’s - must have established this as their initial base when they first landed. When whatever disaster devastated their settlement, the survivors retreated here. Unfortunately. The whole mountain is a little unstable now; still, if it shifts we won’t know much about it, eh?’ Max laughed. Jamie didn’t rate his sense of humour much.

‘Here we are, then,’ announced Max, as they came to a slightly open area. Jamie realised with a start that part of the floor of this cavern was grey metal not rock.

‘We’re on to the roof of the bunker here. The other entrance I use comes in lower and I’ve managed to extend a tunnel to one of the complex’s airlocks, but up here we need to go in through a service hatch that I found...’

Max began to walk across the flat roof of the bunker, his footsteps echoing on the metallic surface and reverberating around the cavern.

‘Shouldn’t we be a bit quieter?’ asked Jamie, worried.

‘That creature won’t have reached here yet,’ Max told him confidently. ‘Who’s to hear us?’

Twenty feet below them Lorvalan stood in a corridor listening to the echoing footsteps above. He reached for his gun and began to follow the sounds.

Federation spacecraft now surrounded the Realists’ tiny settlement. Two more giant shuttles had landed and disgorged streams of marines in full battle-armour. It looked like the preparations for a war. Hali didn’t like it one bit. With

Max and Jamie gone on their secret mission, and Zoe having disappeared with Veena and Billy Joe in the small fighter craft, Hali was feeling very alone and isolated. The rest of the Realists were milling around the settlement, all normal activities having been suspended. Everything seemed to be in limbo; everyone was waiting to see what would happen next. Hali decided to find out from the horse's mouth. She sought out Major Cartor.

She found him sitting in his makeshift office in a duplicate field command base, the twin of the one that had been established fifty miles north at Plymouth Hope. Here he was orchestrating the forthcoming military action. 'What exactly are you planning to do?' Hali demanded. Cartor looked up from his plans, unimpressed at her attitude.

'That's classified, ma'am,' he told her.

'I need to know. We need to know. Our people are confused. We asked for help to secure the future of the colony; now it looks like you're here to start a war.'

'We are securing your future, believe me. And the first step is to remove the alien menace.'

'Remove?' Hali wanted that term explained.

'My troops will go in, find the aliens' base and deal with it. L and D. Locate and Destroy.'

'But...,' Hali stopped herself. She was thinking of Max and Jamie but couldn't say anything to Cartor.

'But what?'

'Nothing,' she said lamely. She headed for the door.

'Oh, Ms Devine?' Cartor called, without looking up from the map he was now studying again. 'Have you seen Mr Forde or the boy Jamie recently?'

'No,' Hali lied smoothly, 'no, I haven't. Why?'

'Just wondering. I wouldn't want anyone to get in our way. They might get hurt.'

It was no good; Hali could see that he knew or at least suspected the truth. She sighed and turned back to face him.

'Actually, they are already at your prime target.'

Now she had Cartor's attention.

'What?'

‘The aliens have a base, a kind of bunker, in the cave systems. You can get to it through the mountain. But it’s not suitable for your troops.’

‘I’ll be the judge of that. Why didn’t he tell us? Is he in league with these aliens?’

‘Of course not.’ Hali was affronted at the suggestion.

Cartor didn’t look convinced. ‘This changes everything.’ He shouted for an orderly. ‘We’re moving out. Now,’ he ordered, before shooting another furious look at Hali. ‘Before the locals screw things up,’ he concluded.

The Doctor and Kirann jumped down from the buggy. They had reached the shores of a large lake. The mountains stretched up from the far side of the water.

‘I thought you said the trail was heading towards those mountains?’ she said, confused as to why he had recently changed the direction in which they were heading.

‘The trail we were following is going that way but I started to get another signal - a much stronger signal.’

Kirann looked around - all she could see was the blue water of the lake and the wild countryside around it. Nothing that looked like it might be sending out any energy signal.

‘Where’s it coming from, then?’ she asked, finally having scanned the horizon thoroughly.

The Doctor answered her question with one of his own. ‘Does anything strike you as odd about this lake?’

Kirann cast her eyes over the lake. Its deep blue colour suggested that it was deep but the water was calm. The air above the lake shimmered slightly in the heat of the sun but that wasn’t particularly odd. She shrugged, unable to answer the Doctor’s question.

‘What about the birds?’ he prompted. Kirann looked again but no, she hadn’t missed anything. ‘There aren’t any birds,’ she remarked impatiently. The Doctor smiled. ‘Exactly, but look over there, or there...’ He pointed out towards the mountains and then back the way they had come across the plain, which was dotted with the occasional tree. In both areas birds could be seen going about their business:

feeding, nesting. Kirann had not really had a chance to notice the local wildlife yet and hadn't registered them.

'So - there are birds on this planet but not over the lake. What does that prove?'

The Doctor crouched down and started scraping in the earth. Eventually he found what he was looking for: a small flat-bottomed stone. He pulled his arm back and sent the stone skimming across the water. It bounced three times and then sank. The Doctor pouted, disappointed. He found a second stone and repeated the action. This time the stone bounced four times and then it fell abruptly with a loud clanging sound.

The Doctor got to his feet, smiling in triumph

'There's something in there. Something big. We just can't see it,' he announced.

'How do we get on board something we can't see?' asked Kirann, practical as ever.

The Doctor chewed his lip, thinking. 'I wonder...' he mused. He reached into his pocket and pulled out what looked to Kirann like a small pen. He fiddled with the controls and then pointed it at the invisible ship.

'All I need to do,' he muttered, almost to himself, 'is cycle through the frequencies until I hit at the right one. Then I should be able to activate the air lock and...' Suddenly a rectangular hatch appeared in thin air and a walkway lowered, stretching from the doorway of the invisible object down to the edge of the lake.

'We don't need to see the whole ship... just the way in, eh?' he smiled, waving an arm in front of him. 'Would you care to walk this way?'

Kirann, shaking her head in disbelief, started to walk up the gangway.

* * *

Jamie dropped down into the gloomy interior of the alien bunker. Max was already ahead of him, looking to find a way to more familiar parts of the complex. Max beckoned him on to a lift shaft where he pointed out handholds that they could use to climb down. It was a bit of a stretch - the Tyrenians

were, on average, a little taller than humans - but Max and Jamie managed to use the ladder without too many problems.

At the bottom of the shaft they prised open a pair of doors and found themselves close to the area that Max knew best: the Tyrenian equivalent of a cryogenic chamber.

‘This is where I first saw one of the creatures,’ he told Jamie as they entered the outer room. ‘They use some other animal to help them achieve what we achieve with extreme cold: a complete slowing down of all life processes. It’s quite remarkable.’

‘Aye, I’m sure it is...’ Jamie was looking around the chamber. The three primary cabinets were all empty. A tank at the side of the room was filled with the parasitic creatures, swimming octopus style in the murky water. Beyond the first three cabinets were three rows of five similar cabinets. Jamie moved over to look at these but they were still sealed with heavy lids. It was impossible to see what might be inside. Jamie fiddled with the catch of one - trying to force the locked lid.

‘Can you give me a hand with this?’ he called across to Max, who was happily looking into the empty cabinets. Max looked up and saw what Jamie was trying to do. He hurried across to help. Together they managed to shift the catch and began to force up the heavy lid. As it opened they were able to peer inside and were shocked to see that it was empty.

Jamie felt the hairs on the back of his neck bristle and it was just enough warning to save his life. He heard an angry, throaty roar and felt the air move as something hurled itself at him. He dived to the side just in time to avoid the blow; Max was less lucky. Rolling to his feet, Jamie could see a red splash of blood fly through the air and Max falling backwards. Over him stood the figure of one of the aliens. But there was something different about this one, Jamie realised. His uniform was ripped and torn, his eyes wild, his mouth drooling. There was no intelligence in this face, just raw, animalistic rage.

Dyselt stood over the human and raised his arm to strike a second time.

Getting into the Tyrenian mother ship had been relatively easy, staying alive once inside had proved to be a good deal more difficult. The Doctor and Kirann had been attacked the moment they had reached the inner airlock door. The ship's AI, not recognising them as authorised visitors, had attempted to trap them in the airlock and deprive them of oxygen.

'Don't panic,' the Doctor suggested but it was too late: Kirann was already fainting from the lack of oxygen. The Doctor hurriedly pulled a panel from the wall and tried to reprogramme the sensors. His eyes flickered as the oxygen level fell away, his fingers unable to maintain their grip on the sonic screwdriver. But his intervention had done the trick - air began to flood back into the chamber, as the AI now registered both of them as Tyrenian.

Recovering, the Doctor carried Kirann through the inner door into the corridor beyond and looked for somewhere to put her down. She began to stir and he laid her gently on the ground, supporting her head. Her eyelids flickered. 'Gently does it now, Kirann. Nice easy breaths,' he suggested.

Once again he was impressed at the physical resilience of the recently revived human. Within minutes she was sitting up and talking.

'What happened?' she asked.

The Doctor tried not to look too smug but failed miserably. 'I persuaded the ship's computer that I was the captain.'

'Aren't you lacking a little bit of height and an awful lot of hair to pass as one of those things?' Kirann grinned.

'Luckily the AI doesn't have any "eyes" as such...'

The Doctor helped Kirann to her feet and led the way down the corridor.

Kirann looked around her with amazement. It was clearly a large ship but there was no sign of occupation.

'So do you think this has been here since *The Big Bang* landed?' she asked the Doctor.

‘Perhaps. Maybe even longer.’

‘So where are the crew?’

The Doctor operated a door and they walked into a large room that was clearly the ship’s bridge. ‘Good question,’ he said, ‘Let’s ask the computer.’ The Doctor sat down in one of the chairs, and started to fiddle experimentally with the controls. Like everything in this ship the console was designed for the tall Tyrenians and the Doctor looked somehow childlike as he sat up in the giant chair and stretched to reach the keypads. Kirann watched, fascinated, as the Doctor worked his magic, patiently trying out various modes of attack until, as last, he sat back with a satisfied grin on his face.

‘That should do it,’ he announced and then, in a slightly raised voice, he spoke again. ‘Computer?’

A voice, electronic but clearly based on the Tyrenian voice, filled the room. ‘Yes, Captain.’

Kirann was impressed. She nodded encouragingly at the Doctor.

‘Confirm mission status,’ the Doctor demanded.

And the computer told them everything they wanted to know.

A little over one hundred years ago the Tyrenian ship had landed on the planet with the intention of establishing a colony. The Tyrenians were homeless, the ship they had was stolen, and they had been searching for somewhere to call home for years. Axista Four seemed to be the answer to their quest.

They had deployed a series of satellites to ring the planet, establishing a planetary defence system to protect their fledgling colony. They had then landed their ship, cloaked, for extra security. The settlement itself had been built into the shadow of the mountains, using the natural caves. Deep inside the cave systems they had built a secure shelter, the bunker, a retreat in case of emergency.

The arrival of the humans had been that emergency. The automatic planetary defence system had done its job; it had

reacted to the arrival of the humans' colony ship and fired on it, wounding the giant spacecraft and causing it to crash into the planet's surface.

The Tyrenians had reacted with caution. They were still weak after their years of homelessness and the majority of their numbers were still in Alisorti-assisted Deep Sleep. Thousands of sleeping Tyrenians had already been transferred into the deepest parts of the bunker, to secure their safety. Now the arrival of the humans presented the Tyrenians with a dilemma: should they revive their full force in case of an attack, or wait and see what the humans would do if they survived?

The Doctor looked over at Kirann.

'Now we know what happened to the colony ship and why it was damaged in certain places; it was shot down,' he commented.

Kirann nodded, looking pale. 'Shot down by satellites placed by prior colonists. Which means that the Tyrenians were here first. We should never have landed here. We had no right.' She looked shaken to the core. 'The whole colony was built on a lie!'

Chapter Fifteen

Zenig circled the lake. He had seen something catching the light on the far side of the water and had decided it warranted investigation. What he found was the buggy that the Doctor and Kirann had been using. Zenig sniffed the air and caught their scent. They had stood here next to the buggy for some time and then moved off, on foot, towards the water.

Zenig realised that they must have found the ship. He activated a control on his belt and the airlock appeared. He made his way up the walkway.

As Veena brought her little fighter-craft in to land at the edge of Plymouth Hope, Zoe could see that things had changed in the main colony settlement. One of the giant shuttlecrafts was still parked at one end of the town and a whole host of prefabs had now been erected in the same area. This new development stood in stark contrast to the original; prefab buildings, decorated with antennae and solar panels without any consideration for *Back to Basics* principles, or even sympathetic aesthetics, it was purely functional.

Veena let her vehicle taxi into the shadow of the shuttlecraft before she applied the brakes, switched off the engine and brought it to a halt. Billy Joe, who had been silent throughout the flight, overawed by the technology no doubt, leapt from his seat.

'I want to see Grandpa,' he demanded. Zoe nodded and together they went off in search of Kartryte. 'Thanks for the lift, miss,' Billy Joe said as they climbed down from the wing of the aircraft. Veena smiled. 'Any time,' she said and watched the pair of them walk away. She looked over towards the area where her people were establishing their own base and then back towards the original Plymouth Hope. She

couldn't put a finger on the reason for her strange mood but she felt rather disconnected. It was almost as if she no longer felt comfortable around her own people. She knew that they had a job to do and that the job was important but she also felt something for the people of the colony - both factions - and their lives here on Axista Four, which were about to change forever.

With a heavy sigh she began to make her way towards the cluster of prefabs. A junior officer, seeing her approach, saluted smartly; Veena responded automatically and asked for a status report.

The meeting that Zoe was witnessing was a far less formal affair. She and Billy Joe had found Kartryte in what had been his office, sitting staring into space. When they'd walked through the door he'd stood, mouth open, unable to find any words. Billy Joe had clearly felt the same way. Zoe had to wipe away a tear as the two men embraced in a bear hug of such ferocity she feared that the old man might break in two. Finally, the two had broken apart, their faces glistening with tears.

'Don't you ever run off like that again, boy, you hear?'

'I won't, I promise,' Billy Joe insisted.

Kartryte turned to Zoe. 'Do I have you to thank for the boy's return?'

'Me and the crew of the *Hannibal*,' Zoe explained.

Kartryte's face contorted with a dark scowl. 'I don't like to owe them anything,' he said bitterly.

'I can understand your feeling like that,' said Zoe kindly, 'but they are just trying to do their job. And they did save your life, I understand.'

'I know they did, and don't think I'm not grateful, but they're changing everything...' complained the old man. 'Being sheriff doesn't count for much when you've an army on your doorstep.'

Zoe glanced at Billy Joe. 'Actually I wanted a word with you, if I may, about the... situation.'

Noting her look, in the direction of his grandson, Kartryte caught her meaning - she wanted to talk to him alone.

'Billy Joe, why don't you get home and get cleaned up? Take my horse - he's tied up outside.'

'Are you sure? I can do that later.'

'Son, I don't want to offend you but you need a good wash. Now get yourself home this minute and do as you're told.'

For a moment, Zoe thought that the boy was going to argue as instinct took over, but Billy Joe merely nodded and went on his way. Kartryte sat back at his desk and indicated a chair that Zoe could sit in.

'So, what do you want to tell me?' he asked.

The Doctor and Kirann had watched more of the Tyrenians' story and it did not make for pleasant viewing. The Tyrenians had retreated into their bunker and the humans had established their settlement ignorant of the existence of either the bunker or the massive but now empty Tyrenian ship. And so it had been for nearly a hundred years.

That is, until the breakaway group of humans had split from the main settlement and had headed directly into the area south of the original landing site, which had been declared a no-go area by the survivors of the crash. There the so-called Realists had discovered the wreckage of the Tyrenian colony, such as it was, and had decided to set up their own base in the same locale, cuckoo-style. Then, quite recently, Max, exploring the cave systems, had come across the bunker. Even then the aliens had slept on and would have continued to do so but for the appearance in the system of a spacecraft. This had been registered by one of the satellites that had been deployed by the Tyrenians 100 years earlier and a signal had been sent. The Tyrenians had begun to wake...

It was almost too much for Kirann to take in. It was more than just a shock; it was a slap in the face. Her father's dream was shattered. The colonisation of this planet should never have gone ahead.

The Doctor waited while Kirann struggled with the new information. He had suspected something like this – he'd been sure the damage to the colony ship had been as a result of some kind of space battle - but he hadn't guessed that the Tyrenians had been here first. He couldn't help but feel sorry for the aliens - they weren't monsters; they were just like the humans, travellers looking for a place to call home. Militaristic they might be but they weren't evil, not like most of the monsters he'd encountered recently. In some ways the Tyrenians reminded him of his friend Lethbridge-Stewart and his new UNIT organisation. The Doctor was laughing to himself at the thought when he felt a sudden pressure in his lower back and hot breath on his neck.

'Hands in the air, human,' ordered Zenig.

'Well actually, as a matter of fact,' began the Doctor, strictly speaking I'm not human...'

'Just put your hands up.' By now Kirann had realised what was happening and had turned to look in their direction, her weapon in her hand. The Doctor raised his hands slowly. 'Drop your weapon,' Zenig spat at her. Kirann hesitated.

'Do as he says,' suggested the Doctor gently and, after a moment's hesitation, Kirann let the gun slip from her hand and she kicked it over to Zenig's feet.

'Consider yourselves prisoners,' Zenig announced. 'One false move and I'll kill you both. Understand?'

Both the Doctor and Kirann nodded to show that they did.

'Come with me,' ordered Zenig. 'I want to take you to Commander Lorvalan.'

As they left the room the Doctor noticed something that he'd missed when they had first arrived: a rack of data crystals exactly like the one Kirann had given him was fixed to the wall. Obviously the Tyrenian ship used a compatible data storage system and would have a machine capable of reading his crystal; unfortunately he had only realised this *after* Zenig had captured them. The Doctor bit his lip in frustration; he would have to be patient a little longer.

The Tyrenian took them out into a corridor and then into a much smaller room. He positioned the Doctor and Kirann on

a raised platform, set some controls on a console and then stepped on to the platform itself while keeping his weapon trained on them the whole time. Moments later, to Kirann's astonishment, she felt briefly faint and the room went blurry.

Kartryte listened carefully as Zoe told him the full extent of the refugee crisis that Axista Four was about to confront. With her remarkable memory skills Zoe was able to reel off a long list of planets, colonies and space stations and the precise number of refugees from each. The scale of the problem was overwhelming; Zoe could see the old man struggling to take it all in. The information that Cartor had given to Freedom and Dee had been economical with the truth to say the least. A few thousand was a long way short of the actual eighty thousand that Zoe had discovered, but even the few thousand that Cartor had mentioned would have been impossible for the colony to accommodate as it was. This was more than a new wave of colonists; it was a flood, a deluge that would change the face of Axista Four forever.

When Zoe had finished her account, Kartryte looked saddened but also resigned. 'Perhaps this colony was doomed from the start. By Ransom himself.'

'Because he insisted on this *Back to Basics* philosophy?' asked Zoe, puzzled.

'No, no, although that didn't help of course.' Kartryte looked her in the eyes. 'I think you should know the truth,' he stated.

Zoe said nothing and let the old man speak.

'I'm not the sheriff any more and frankly I don't want to be. But I'm still the custodian of the colony's secrets, one of the duties of the office. We take an oath you know, to uphold the principles of *Back to Basics*; I don't know who came up with it. Not Ransom I reckon but probably one of the Gen-One guys, the survivors of the crash. As sheriff you swear to uphold the rules of the colony but it's a hypocritical role because you have to be guardian of this...'

Kartryte opened up what appeared to be a cupboard to reveal a secret room, a room that looked totally out of place in the wooden-framed building that housed the sheriff's office. To Zoe's eyes it looked as if a room from the colony ship had been transposed into this building wholesale: it was a sterile-looking, technological Aladdin's Cave.

'The main AI of the colony ship, the living memory of what occurred at Planet Fall. And our colony's greatest shame,' Kartryte announced. 'Would you like to know more?'

Jamie was too far away from Max to help him in any way; he could only look on in horror as the alien delivered his blow. But the maddened Dyselt never connected; instead he himself was thrown backwards. Jamie twisted to see who or what had intervened and found himself looking directly at another of the aliens, this one dressed in a smart uniform, an energy weapon in his hand. Jamie recognised the alien's features - it was one of the pair that had tried to 'rescue' him.

Jamie assumed the gun must have been on some kind of stun setting as the mad creature quickly got to its feet and launched itself across the room.

Lorvalan realised his mistake instantly; stunning Dyselt wasn't really an option, not in this state. And there was no cure for the condition once it had progressed this far. He slipped the setting on his weapon to something more deadly but before he could get another shot off Dyselt was on him, sinking his teeth into his commander's neck like a rabid animal. Lorvalan felt a sharp pain and the warmth of his own blood splattering his face. Without immediate medical attention the wound could be fatal and Dyselt was attacking him again. Lorvalan fell heavily, losing blood rapidly now. Dyselt stood over him, blood dripping from his fangs, and a blood lust in his eyes. With fading strength Lorvalan pushed his gun deep into the chest of his killer and pulled the trigger. Dyselt flew into the air, a dead weight and then came down hard and didn't move again. But Lorvalan wasn't aware of the moment; he was already dead.

Jamie hurried over to Max. 'Are you okay?' he asked. Max managed to open his eyes. 'He got me across here,' he muttered, lifting his arm and displaying a savage red tear in his side.

'Can you walk?'

'Not without help.'

Jamie looked around for something to use as a makeshift bandage but there was nothing useful to hand. He ripped off his shirt and tore it into strips, bundling some up, he placed them over the wound and then used the rest to tie his attempt at a dressing in place. Then he helped Max to his feet and they moved towards the exit, circling round the two dead aliens.

Zoe winced as the tiny needles pierced her skin. She was getting 'hooked up', to use Kartryte's rather apt description, to the memory systems of the salvaged AI. She had sat in the console chair and allowed Tam to strap her wrists into place. A further band of connectors went around her head. Tiny needles protruded from the wrist and the forehead band and suddenly Zoe no longer was aware of her location at all. Nor even of her identity. She had become one with the computer log, one with the colony ship itself.

Zoe had never felt anything quite like it. Her sense of self was gone but in its place was something glorious, something wonderful. She *was* the colony ship and it felt great. She was in the depths of space, flying at incredible speeds past the outer planets of the system. On the planet surface, as a wreck, the ship had looked clumsy, heavy, a lumpy, ugly creature, but that was all in the future. Here, in its natural environment, the ship was as graceful as a bird, slipping through space with ease. And Zoe was that ship, she could feel the countless tiny impacts of small meteorites and other space debris on her hull. At some level, deep inside herself, she knew these were recorded sensations from over a hundred years ago but for now Zoe was lost in the moment and the exhilaration.

* * *

Kirann staggered a little and reached out to the Doctor for support. 'Matter transport?'

The Doctor, who didn't look at all phased by the transfer smiled. 'Technology you've abandoned at this moment in time, isn't it?'

'I think I know why - I feel like my stomach has been turned inside out!'

Zenig gestured with his gun. 'Less talking. Move this way.' The Doctor gave Kirann a quick wink of encouragement and moved in the direction indicated.

'Doctor!' Jamie couldn't believe his eyes. Of all the people he would have wished to see right now, the Doctor was top of his list. He propped Max up against a console and hurried forward. The Doctor looked a little troubled, however, and Jamie stopped short. 'I'm not alone,' explained the Doctor, and Jamie could see movement behind his friend. A human woman appeared, quite a good-looking one, Jamie thought, if she would only try to smile a little, but then he saw the reason for her expression; behind her, carrying one of the energy weapons they favoured, was one of the aliens.

With a rough shove, the Tyrenian pushed Kirann and the Doctor over to join Jamie and Max.

'You're trespassing,' he announced. 'Where's the Commander?'

'If you mean that wee hairy fellow you were with earlier he's back there,' Jamie nodded in the direction of the ante-room where the bodies of the dead creatures were lying in a pool of blood, 'but he's not very alive.'

Zenig's eyes narrowed. 'You'll pay for that.'

Jamie was looking around and doing some simple calculations. Max might be out of it but as far as he could see they were three against one. Not great odds but not impossible.

'Hey, doggie,' he called.

'The name's Zenig, human.'

Take a look around, Zenig. Aren't you a feeling a bit lonely? Your pals are both dead. How long are you going to last?'

Zenig smiled broadly, with a sudden confidence.

‘Quite a while human, quite a while.’

Jamie suddenly became aware that the Doctor and the woman were looking around the room with anxious expressions. And then he saw why. From the shadows at the edge of the room figures were emerging. Tyrenian warriors. Lots of them.

Jamie gulped. Suddenly the odds didn’t look quite so good.

EPISODE SIX

Chapter Sixteen

The air shimmered in the midday sun, making the details of the landscape blurred and indistinct. In the distance, Cartor could see the mountains, which appeared to be floating in the air. To his left he could see a large lake. Somewhere out there in unknown territory was the enemy; an alien menace that stood in the way of the successful conclusion of his mission. His orders were to secure the planet for the arrival of the refugees, no matter what it might take.

He had expected some resistance to the new colonists but had not expected to be fighting a war. Especially not one at the beck and call of Administrator Greene. But he couldn't even do that until he located the enemy.

'Do you have the signal or not?' Cartor demanded of his marine commander, Hogarth, who looked a little embarrassed at the direct question.

'There was some interference,' he confessed. 'The mountains contain some peculiar mineral deposits, and the signal from the tracking device did jump about a little. We have it now.'

'Where is he?'

'In a cave system the colonists told us about. Three clicks from here.'

Cartor considered the intelligence for a moment. The fact that some of the colonists were suspected of being inside the aliens' base complicated matters. Greene wanted him to order a full attack but instead he would have to settle for a search and rescue mission.

'Commander, we'll go in,' he decided. 'Find the colonists, get them out of there, get as much data on the aliens' base as we can, and then get out. In and out as quick as possible.'

Hogarth nodded and relayed the order. Moments later, shapes that had been indistinct on the dusty ground revealed

themselves to be marine soldiers dressed in battle armour. With precision and efficiency the squadron of marines moved off in the direction of the mountains.

Zoe was beginning to forget that she had ever had a human existence; all she was aware of was her hull, her engines, and her decks full of humans as she sailed through space. Ahead of her was a series of meteorites and other objects in planetary orbit around Axista Four. Her sensors - the ship's sensors, Zoe corrected herself - were of the opinion that these were all natural. Zoe, the real Zoe with two arms and two legs, suspected otherwise. She had seen these satellites close up when she had flown her stolen fighter craft and something about them suggested that they might have been artificial. Now, in this replay of events a hundred years ago, Zoe saw that she had been correct to be suspicious of them.

As she entered her own orbit - the ship, she reminded herself firmly, not me - the nearest satellite had reacted. Hidden weapons bunkers opened and locked on their targets. Before anyone on board *The Big Bang* could react, they were hit by multiple missile strikes.

The Big Bang was a colony ship not a battle cruiser. It had no offensive capability and precious little in the way of defensive capability either. The missiles exploded with savage brutality all over the hull. Zoe felt each impact as if her own body was being pummelled. Unable to cope with the pain she screamed but somehow managed to stay conscious.

What had been a pleasure, a dreamlike joy, now turned into a total nightmare. Zoe could only watch helplessly as the alien satellite-based weapon arrays fired again and again. Zoe groaned in pain; the damage to *The Big Bang* was more than it could endure. Her crew had fought bravely to control the fatally wounded spaceship but there was little else they could do. Zoe watched in horror as the surface of the planet rushed towards her. Incredibly, as the ground got nearer, the pilot seemed to gain a measure of control over the descent. The nose of *The Big Bang* came up just enough to avert a full disaster. Zoe screamed as she felt *The Big Bang* make its

painful landing, bouncing in an ungainly fashion, tearing itself up against the unforgiving planetary surface. For Zoe, still linked to the AI, the sensory feedback was agony. She felt every blow, every injury. It was too much for her human mind to take. She screamed again.

Billy Joe had just returned to his grandfather's office and was shocked to see the open door leading to a room whose existence he had never suspected. 'Grandpa?' he called, and without waiting for a reply he had walked through the door. The sight that greeted his eyes was scarcely credible. A room full of high technology - in his grandfather's office! How could that be? Everyone knew Tam Kartryte was totally committed to *Back to Basics*. How was it possible for his grandpa to have a secret like this? And then a terrible thought hit him. Was this what had driven his father to argue with Grandpa on the day that he died? Had his father discovered this room too?

A woman's scream tore through his thoughts and Billy Joe took in more details of the room. Jamie's friend Zoe was sitting in a chair, connected by wires and a kind of electronic helmet to some kind of machine. And she was in pain.

'What are you doing to her?' he cried, rushing forward to try and rip the wires from her head.

'Get back,' his grandpa ordered. 'You could kill her.'

Billy Joe dropped his hands but still looked concerned as Zoe jumped and twitched in her seat.

'She looks like she's dying. We've got to do something...'

Billy Joe saw something on his grandpa's face that he had never seen there before, blind panic. 'I just don't know what to do,' confessed Tam Kartryte to his grandson.

* * *

Kirann took a step back and felt herself come up against something solid. 'Ohh,' muttered the Doctor. 'Sorry,' she whispered. Jamie had also retreated, leaving the three of them trapped with nowhere to go, completely encircled by the approaching Tyrenians.

Suddenly there was a crackle of gunfire and two of the nearest fell to the floor. The others turned to see where the attack had come from.

‘Get down,’ ordered the Doctor to his fellow prisoners. Kirann had caught a glimpse of one of the attackers. ‘It’s Federation marines,’ she said, as the Doctor pulled her into the nearest cover. They ducked behind one of the Deep Sleep cabinets.

Within moments the room was full of smoke and confusion. Beams of energy lit up the smoke through which shadowy figures could be seen moving. A stray shot cracked the glass of the Alisorti tank, showering the ground with a mixture of liquid. The Alisorti, unable to survive out of water unless attached to a Tyrenian, began to die, flapping around and screeching in a painful tone.

Jamie couldn’t even see the exit any more. It was a battleground, more deadly for being in a contained space. He could see bodies on the ground but it was impossible to see whether they were Tyrenians or humans.

The Doctor tapped him on the shoulder. ‘Follow me...’ Keeping low, the Doctor led them through the smoke, his uncanny sense of direction taking him round the area of most intensive conflict towards the door. They had to steer carefully around the dead Alisorti, which were already beginning to stink in a quite disgusting manner. Kirann followed him, and Jamie brought up the rear, carrying the now unconscious body of Max. The sound of energy weapons and grenades continued to fill the room.

The Doctor came to a door and they hurried out, into a corridor. A battle-suited figure trained his weapon on them but didn’t fire. The visor on the helmet slid open to reveal that the figure was Cartor.

‘Get out of here!’ he ordered, gesturing them to go past him. The Doctor waved Kirann and Jamie on in the direction Cartor had indicated but paused to speak further with Cartor. ‘How did you find this place?’ he asked.

‘We bugged our captive and let him escape...’

Another explosion erupted close to them and Cartor shielded the Doctor with his body. 'Have you ever considered; suggested the Doctor, 'that you might have been led into a trap?' Cartor, however, wasn't listening; he was busy weighing up his options. The terrain here inside the alien bunker was not the best place to stand and fight; it was, after all, alien territory. Experienced though they were, his marines were at a distinct disadvantage.

Cartor activated his communicator. 'This is Cartor. Pull out, now,' he ordered. He looked down at the little figure of the Doctor. 'Let's go then, Doctor. You can brief me on this place when we get out of here...'

Inside the Deep Sleep chamber, the Tyrenians were beginning to regain the initiative. The initial shock of the attack had surprised them but now they were recovering rapidly. Four of the humans had fallen and the rest appeared to be retreating. The revived warriors were slightly disorientated and bemused, but they had been well trained. Accepting Zenig as their new commander without question, they had begun to react instinctively, quickly throwing off any residual confusion.

Zenig observed that the humans seemed to be retreating. He sent a group of his warriors to follow the humans while holding a dozen back to secure the room. Within minutes, Zenig was receiving reports that the last of the humans had left the bunker. Zenig placed guards at the access points and recalled the rest of his troops to the Deep Sleep chamber.

The debriefing was short and to the point. The humans had killed Commander Lorvalan. The humans had destroyed their settlement. The humans had invaded the bunker. That battle was now over. But the war, he promised them, was yet to come.

* * *

The Federation debriefing was more than thorough; it was interminable. The Doctor, Kirann and Jamie were questioned, separately and together, for hours, on everything they knew about the aliens and their base. The one person

who knew more about the aliens than anyone else was, of course, Max. But he was in intensive care aboard the *Hannibal*, somewhere between life and death.

Finally the Doctor had had enough. 'I don't know any more about the Tyrenians,' he repeated angrily, getting to his feet in the middle of yet another round of questions, this time led by Cartor himself. 'I don't know how many of them there are, I don't know what they want and I don't care. I just want to get back to my friends at Plymouth Hope. If you can just let Kirann have her transport back, we'll be on our way.'

Jamie had rarely seen the Doctor so angry. He felt sure this display would just antagonise the Federation major, but to his surprise Cartor merely smiled and nodded.

'I can do better than that,' he announced. 'I'll have a shuttle take you back there directly.'

'Thank you,' the Doctor replied, his anger ebbing away. 'That would be most kind.' Jamie and Kirann got to their feet, ready to go with the Doctor.

'So what will you do about the Tyrenians?' asked the Doctor, as Cartor ushered them out of the interview room. Cartor continued to walk them towards the transport as he answered, 'For the moment, nothing.'

'Good, good,' said the Doctor, 'because I think there's been a lot of misunderstanding here. I don't think the Tyrenians are a threat.'

'Really?' Cartor didn't sound at all convinced. 'They've attacked both the settlements on this planet once already. What makes you think they won't again?'

'They haven't heard what I have to say to them yet,' said the Doctor firmly. 'As soon as I've checked on Zoe, and spoken to both the Loyalist and Realist leaders, I intend to open peace negotiations,' he announced.

Cartor stopped in front of a shuttlecraft and indicated a waiting Federation pilot. 'Hosyin here will get you back to Plymouth Hope, Doctor.' The Doctor looked him in the eye. 'You won't be taking any action before I can get back, will you Major?' Major Cartor returned his look impassively. 'Of course not, Doctor. Have a good flight.'

Zoe had collapsed and, apart from occasional twitching, there was no sign of life in her at all. Billy Joe had run to fetch Dee but she was as much in the dark as to what to do as the rest of them. She took Zoe's pulse and looked at Kartryte and his grandson with a concerned expression. 'She's alive,' she announced, 'but only just...'

'I still think we should get her disconnected from that thing,' Billy Joe insisted.

Kartryte shook his head. 'It's too dangerous,' he insisted.

'I don't know - it sounds like a very sensible idea to me,' announced a new voice. Billy Joe turned and saw three new figures arriving: an attractive woman he hadn't seen before, his friend Jamie still wearing his bizarre skirt and Jamie's mysterious friend, the Doctor.

'Oh my goodness!' exclaimed the Doctor as he came far enough into the room to see what was going on. 'What have you done to her?'

'She's online to the ship's AI recording of the crash,' Tam explained.

'Well, get her offline. The positive feedback could kill her!' the Doctor cried.

Dee told the Doctor the extent of their ignorance. The Doctor looked desperately at the equipment - surely there was an emergency cut-off? He pulled a panel off the front of the unit containing the AI, revealing a mass of wires, diodes and tubes containing a slow-moving liquid that the Doctor supposed was the organic element of the system. 'Jamie, may I borrow your knife, please,' he asked, his eyes scanning the view in front of him.

'Aye,' said Jamie reaching into his sock and pulling out his skein dhu. The Doctor reached back and took the blade before giving his next move some careful consideration. Beside him, Zoe groaned again. Time, as usual, was not on his side, thought the Doctor. For Zoe's sake, he had to act. Crossing the fingers on his left hand (out of sight of the others), he sliced through a wire. Nothing happened. The read-outs still showed Zoe to be deep in the AI-induced coma.

The Doctor tried cutting a second wire, this one of a different colour. He glanced up at Zoe - still no change.

'This is no good,' he muttered.

He took a deep breath, grabbed a handful of wires and sliced. This time there was a result. The wires sparked in his hand, causing him to leap back, wagging his burnt fingers. At the same time the read-outs went dead and the sensors that had been buried in Zoe's skin fell away.

Ignoring his sore fingers, the Doctor jumped to his feet and hurried to Zoe's side. Jamie looked over at him, his face a mask of concern. The Doctor gave him one of his shy smiles, 'Don't worry, Jamie, I think Zoe is going to be just fine,' he told him.

He turned to Kirann, Dee and Tam. 'Now, then. Let's see if we can sort out your mess too, eh?'

Billy Joe sat on the porch outside his grandpa's office and contemplated the changes that he had experienced over the last few days. Everything was different now, everything. It wasn't just the physical things although they were, of course, the most obvious. The Federation shuttlecraft looking over the corral at the end of Main Street, the cluster of shiny white prefab buildings that the Earthers were calling the Colony Expansion Administration Centre, the big-wheeled, solar-powered buggy parked in the road; these were hard to miss. However, it was the subtle changes that Billy Joe was sensing: the change in the people, the change in the mood. It was like the sharpness in the air after a heavy thunderstorm, alive with possibilities.

Billy Joe watched as the settlers responded to Kartryte's request and came into town. Some came in carts, some on horseback, and those working the farms closest to the town just walked. But they all came with a new look on their faces, a response to the overwhelming changes that had been unleashed. Billy Joe saw suspicion and fear on some, as they passed the shuttlecraft, while others looked at it with eager fascination. Despite the rules, there had always been discussion and gossip about the wider universe, about space

travel, about where their forebears had come from and, although in many this fascination with the unknown died out as they grew older, worn away by the relentless cycle of the seasons and the fight for survival, in others it was merely dormant, waiting for an event like this to spark its resurgence.

The colonists, mostly the eldest men of each family but also some women and a couple of Plymouth Hope's few children, filed into the Meeting Hall, filling the room with nervous chatter. As Billy Joe followed them in, the room fell silent when his grandpa, Freedom, Dee and the woman they called Kirann, climbed on to the stage at the front of the room. Jamie and the Doctor were sitting on the front bench. As Billy Joe found himself a seat in the back row, he noticed that the red-haired Federation officer - Veena was it? - had slipped into the hall too. She leant against the back wall and got comfortable.

'Thanks for coming, folks,' Tam began. 'I know there have been rumours circulating, wild rumours I suspect, and it's about time you all knew the facts. These have been an extraordinary few days here on Axista Four, days that we and our children will remember for a long time. We've known in our hearts that we were at a crossroads, a turning point. We've been in crisis for years, long before our friends, the so-called Realists, broke away. But all that has changed now; our dispute has been dwarfed by new concerns, new challenges.' He paused, looking out over the faces of his audience, looking into their eyes, and trying to gauge their reaction to his words. He saw fear and despair, confusion and incomprehension, but he also saw some nods of agreement and expressions of hope, even confidence.

'We've lived for a hundred years by principles laid down by our founding father, a man who died in the process of establishing this colony before he could enjoy his new world. But he left a legacy that was more than just a set of rules to live by; he left us his own daughter, to carry on his leadership. For years she has been kept alive by technology we can barely comprehend, frozen between life and death in

machines deep inside the wreck of the colony ship. But with the help of our “other” visitors,’ he nodded in the direction of the Doctor who tried to shrink down in his seat, while Jamie waved to the audience in acknowledgement, ‘we have finally brought her back to life. I give you Kirann Ransom.’ He gestured expansively with his hand and introduced the founding father’s daughter.

Kirann was not sure what kind of response she would receive; she knew that rumours of her revival had been in circulation - but for the majority of the audience it was clear that her existence was a total shock. For a long moment there was silence and then a trickle of applause that soon became a flood. In moments people were stamping their feet, clapping their hands, screaming with delight. It took nearly ten minutes before order had been re-established sufficiently for her to make her address.

She kept it simple. She told them her father would have been proud of the colony’s survival during the first hundred years, and touched at the devotion with which they had adhered to the principles he had laid down. She could see that this played well with them; if nothing else they needed that affirmation right now.

‘But,’ she continued after another wave of applause had washed over her, ‘there are things he would be disappointed by.’ There was a general tensing amongst the townspeople. ‘My father intended this to be a living colony. An organic, growing thing. But there’s been a limit to your growth, an artificial barrier to the development of the colony I’m talking about *Back to Basics*.’

There, she’d said it now. Some of the more fundamentalist of her audience were now looking at her with open hostility but, she noted with relief, they seemed to be in a minority.

‘I was part of the movement when it started back on Earth. It was always about ideas and about choices. It was a reaction to our total dependence on technology that few of us could actually understand. It was about taking time to think about and change our behaviour over ecological matters. But it was never meant to be a creed. Not some kind of

prescription for how you lived every detail of your life. It was a set of ideas, principles to guide you. *Guide* not *rule*. You weren't meant to avoid technology at all costs, merely to look for simpler alternatives where possible. My father would never have lived as long as he did without technological assistance; he wasn't a modern-day Luddite and he didn't expect you to live theme-park lives replicating the Wild West. All he wanted was to start life here afresh, with a simpler lifestyle but not a stagnant one.'

Kirann stopped, letting her words sink in.

'He wanted this colony to live, not die.'

When the Doctor and Jamie came back to Kartryte's office, they were delighted to see that Zoe was awake and on her feet again. Dee, however, still looked worried. 'I do think you should rest a little more,' she said anxiously.

'Really, I'm fine now,' insisted Zoe.

'Excellent,' said the Doctor, coming through the door. You see, Jamie, I told you she would be all right...'

Zoe looked up at the Doctor, a serious expression in her dark eyes. 'Doctor, I need to talk to you... about what I've found out...'

The Doctor nodded. 'You know what happened at Planet Fall?'

'Everything that was recorded by the colony ship's semi-sentient computer. It was awful.'

'Yes, I rather suspect it must have been. The ship was shot down by automatic defensive systems the Tyrenians had left in orbit, yes?'

Zoe pouted, annoyed that the Doctor seemed to know everything already. 'That's why the damage was so random,' she added a little sniffily.

'And do you know what happened after the crash?' asked the Doctor gently.

'Don't you?' she retorted, still annoyed at him.

'I know a version of what happened. The Tyrenian version. I'd like to know what the colony ship's version of events is,' replied the Doctor evenly.

‘It was all very confused,’ Zoe said. ‘All sorts of systems got damaged, first from the attack and then during the crash itself, but I think I know what happened. You remember that robot we found in the hold when we first arrived?’

‘Some kind of automated battledroid; nasty little thing,’ the Doctor recalled.

‘It’s a Tennyson 405 EBD - Enhanced Battlefield Droid,’ Zoe told him precisely before adding, ‘there are a thousand of them on standby in that hold.’

‘What?’ Dee was shocked. ‘There are battledroids hidden on the wrecked colony ship?!’

Zoe nodded sadly. ‘But how did they get there. What were they doing on a civilian colony ship?’ demanded Dee.

‘According to the records they were placed on the ship by the regulating body of the Federation. A *quid pro quo* for the public presentation of the Colony Mission as being completely independent of Federation control.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Dee, frowning. ‘Are you saying we are not an independent colony?’

The Doctor turned to her. ‘With the current Federation, very little is completely independent. An outreaching colony like this had military value. By persuading Ransom to take this little army, the Federation was getting a defensive deployment for very little outlay. The strategic thinking had been that by having forces like these on outlying colonies, they had a speedy means of defence should they face any alien incursion, like the Dalek threat they are currently dealing with elsewhere. No doubt Ransom argued about it, but at the end of the day it did allow him to launch the colony ship and, as far as he was concerned, the droids were never going to be used.’

‘That’s right,’ added Zoe. ‘According to the recordings he logged with the system here, he intended to drop the lot of them into the first expanse of water he came across. Unfortunately he never got the chance -’

The Doctor picked up the story: ‘- because the Tyrenian satellite fired on the colony ship which triggered an automatic reaction from the battledroids.’

‘The EBDs have a degree of sophistication far above your average robot. They were able to react to the attack and plan a strategic assault on the perceived aggressors.’ Zoe continued. ‘They left the wreck of the colony ship and initiated an attack on the tiny Tyrenian settlement. It was all but wiped out in minutes.’

Dee was horrified. ‘And we just sat back and watched this happen?’

‘No,’ said the Doctor quickly. ‘Of course not. Ransom made every effort to abort the attack; in the end he actually assaulted the Federation AI that was overseeing the EBD action. It took time but he was successful; he did manage to override the AI and order the EBDs back where they had come from. But it was too late for the majority of the Tiyrenians; their settlement was devastated, leaving only a few of their kind who had evacuated to their underground bunker to survive in Deep Sleep.’

‘So Ransom did the right thing?’ asked Dee, still stunned by all of this.

‘He tried and he paid the price,’ the Doctor explained. ‘The Federation AI activated a medical drone and killed him before going offline itself. The birth of this colony required a lot of death,’ he added solemnly.

Zoe was looking puzzled. ‘But Doctor...’ she began.

The Doctor hushed her with a wave of his hand. ‘Not now, Zoe, eh? I think this has all been quite enough for one day. As Dee said, you need some rest.’

Zoe bit her lip, looking frustrated as the Doctor ushered Dee out of the room. Jamie hesitated in the doorway.

‘What’s up?’ he asked, recognising the look on her face.

‘Nothing, Jamie,’ she insisted.

‘Come on, Zoe, I know you better than that. You were going to say something just then, weren’t you? Did the Doctor get something wrong?’

Zoe thought for a moment, running the ‘memories’ she had absorbed from the colony ship through her head. ‘Yes,’ she said finally. ‘I think he did.’

Veena Myles strolled down the main street of Plymouth Hope and wondered what would become of it over the next few years. The influx of new colonists would be like a clean start in so many ways; how much of this original foothold would remain? She'd sat in on some of the early planning meetings and discussions and knew that the idea was to scatter the refugees around the three main landmasses of the planet, but she also knew they would rely on maintaining contact with each other. The days of the horse being the main means of transport on Axista Four were over. In effect, the CEAC staff were going to kick-start a fully industrialised modern society, doing the natural evolutionary work of a couple of hundred years in just two or three. In such a transformation, what hope was there for an anachronism like this? And yet Veena found herself hoping that some of these colonists, maybe even some of the newcomers, would find a way to keep Plymouth Hope as it had always been, a living symbol of a simpler way of being. Her thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the Doctor.

'Has Major Cartor acted against the Tyrenians yet?' he asked her.

She appreciated his directness. 'No,' she told him, 'not that I know of.'

'Good,' said the scruffy little man. 'I wonder,' he continued, 'if we might ask for another little favour. Kirann wants to open peace talks with the Realists. She thinks the original colonists should be united in the face of the approaching influx of refugees and I would like to do something similar with the Tyrenians.'

Veena was surprised.

'You think all parties can live in harmony on this planet?' she asked him, unable to hide her lack of faith in such a concept.

'Why not?' replied the Doctor. 'It's a big enough planet.'

Veena shook her head - there was something about the Doctor's simple faith that was difficult to fault. 'Okay,' she told him, 'I'll arrange some transport for you myself.'

On board the *Hannibal*, Administrator Greene was briefing Major Cartor.

'I've been talking to the Federation,' Greene began. Cartor said nothing. 'The Council has been in session and this matter has been discussed in full. It has been decided that the presence of the Tyrenians on this planet is a threat to the successful implementation of this element of the Refugee Plan. The decision was therefore unequivocal. The Tyrenians are to be wiped from the face of the planet, completely.'

'Genocide?' Cartor was not impressed at the order. 'How convenient.'

Greene raised a surprised eyebrow. 'You know the Tyrenians' history?'

Cartor's face remained impassive, giving nothing away. 'I was briefed about the possibility of encountering them.'

Greene was interested in this unexpected development. 'Really? The generals want their toys back, do they? Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you. Your orders are simple. Destroy the Tyrenians. Every last one.'

Chapter Seventeen

Kirann noticed the changes at the Realist settlement as soon as Veena brought the shuttlecraft in to land. The breakaway group's prefabs had used to be the largest feature, scattered between the crumbling ruins of the original Tyrenian buildings, but now they too were dwarfed by new structures. The shuttles had been busy hauling materials down from the *Hannibal* and an army of engineers and droids were now fully occupied constructing what appeared to be a small town. In a few short hours, the site had been transformed from a makeshift camp into a bustling town that matched the size of Plymouth Hope. Kirann noted that whereas the Federation personnel on the ground at Plymouth Hope were almost entirely civilians, the occupants of this new outpost were mainly military.

The Realists themselves were milling around, watching all this activity with suspicion. Some were beginning to pack their belongings, such as they were, into bags. Kirann saw one couple starting to dismantle their home. It seemed the Realists were preparing to leave; perhaps she would have a better reception than she thought.

Hali was waiting for her in the shelter she had shared with Max. She looked up eagerly as Kirann entered.

'Any news?' she asked immediately, not bothering with any greeting.

Kirann shook her head. 'Not yet,' she admitted. Max was in intensive care aboard the *Hannibal*. Hali, like all of the colonists, had very little idea about the limits of Federation medical ability; it was all too much like magic, but she had great faith that the medics on board the ECSV would be able to save Max. Kirann wasn't so sure. She guessed that medical science might have moved on during her lost years but she had also seen Max's wounds and she was not at all

certain that there was much anybody could do for him. She kept this thought to herself, however.

Hali was looking at Kirann, as if for the first time. What she saw was a young woman, perhaps 30, strong, full of life; it made Hali feel old. She was probably only a few years older than Kirann but she knew that she looked older. A harder life, she supposed. But of course there was more to it than that. And despite appearances Kirann was far, far older than she was.

‘This is weird,’ she said eventually. ‘You look younger than me, but I know you used to know my great-grandfather.’

‘I did?’

‘He used to write a diary, on paper... real back to basics stuff. It’s been handed down in my family, generation to generation. He wrote about you; I think he might have been a little in love with you. His name was Brock.’

Kirann’s eyes widened. ‘Hathan Brock? Oh my goodness, how could I forget? We were going to live together when we reached here. He drew the short straw and got a landing assignment. I remember him being there just before I went under...’

Hali frowned, not following.

‘He was my penultimate visitor before I was put into suspended animation,’ clarified Kirann. ‘He survived the crash?’

Hali smiled. ‘And lived to a ripe old age too.’

‘But he found someone else... your great-grandmother?’

‘Not until late in his life. I think he was her third husband. Family legend has it that she kept wearing men out!’

Kirann laughed. ‘I’m glad he found happiness.’

‘He never stopped loving you, though,’ Hali told her. ‘Would you like to see the diary?’

Kirann looked away, to hide the tear that was trickling down her face. ‘Perhaps another time. I need to talk to you about more pressing matters.’

Hali was already ahead of her. ‘You want us to come back to Plymouth Hope. Before the refugees arrive.’

Kirann was surprised. She wiped her tear away surreptitiously and looked over at Hali.

'Things are changing on the planet. I think my father would want to us to face the future united rather than divided.'

'And *Back to Basics*?'

'It was never a gospel, just an ideal. Things will have to change.'

Hali nodded. 'I'll talk to my people. But I don't think there's going to be a problem.' She nodded in the direction of the Federation buildings. 'Anyway, the neighbourhood has gone to the dogs recently!'

'What about your other "neighbours" - the Tyrenians? What's happening with them?' asked Kirann.

Hali shook her head firmly. 'Nothing at all. But I get the impression they won't be around much longer. The soldiers look like they're preparing for war.'

'As long as they don't make any moves just yet,' commented Kirann. 'The Doctor and his friend Jamie have gone to talk to the Tyrenians.'

Hali was thinking. 'You know, it seems to me the aliens were here before we were... Surely this planet is big enough for us all to live on?'

'You surprise me - after what they did to Max?'

'They only attacked us to rescue what they thought was one of their own. The one who attacked Max was sick. I don't think that's quite enough to warrant genocide.'

Kirann was struck by the passion with which Hali spoke. She really had underestimated her. 'We're all just trying to survive on a planet that none of us is native to. I think we all have a right to live here, and given half the chance I think we can live here in peace.'

'I hope that they agree with you. That's what the Doctor has gone to discuss with them. Peace.'

Jamie wasn't particularly happy. Once again the Doctor seemed to be ignoring common sense. He had got it into his head that it would be possible to talk rationally with the aliens. Jamie didn't think that talking rationally was

something the dog creatures were very interested in. As far as he was concerned, they'd only managed to get out of the bunker because of the intervention of the Federation marines; the thought of the Doctor strolling back to the Tyrenians on his own and unguarded was something Jamie couldn't allow. So he had decided to accompany him, albeit with less than good grace.

'This is more like it, Jamie, a good walk in a bracing wind,' burred the Doctor enthusiastically as they reached the crown of a small hill.

'Aye,' muttered the Scot, with much less enthusiasm. 'On our way to meet a whole bunch of beasties.'

'Jamie, how many times must I tell you, the Tyrenians are not monsters. They're just like you and me.'

'Except for the big teeth, the pointy ears and the hair all over the place,' complained Jamie. 'They're great big walking doggies with big guns and short tempers.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'No, Jamie, they are most decidedly not. They are an intelligent species and I'm sure if we treat them as such they'll prove me right. Anyway, I need a machine that they may have on their ship.'

The Doctor explained to Jamie about the mysterious data crystal that Kirann had given him, taking care to leave out the complicated details about who it was who had given the thing to Kirann in the first place. The subtleties of a temporal paradox would mean little to Jamie.

'So you think the doggies' machine will read this crystal thing, then?' Jamie asked.

'Well, I do hope so,' ventured the Doctor optimistically. 'Now then, here we are.'

Jamie looked in the direction the Doctor was pointing. All he could see was a large and, despite the wind, placid lake.

'It's a lake,' he said, disappointedly.

'What do I keep telling you Jamie? Appearances can be deceptive. Now let's haul up our flag and see what happens.'

Jamie had been carrying a long pole to which the Doctor had tied a patch of white material. He now unfolded the makeshift flag and planted it. 'Now what?' he asked. 'Now we

wait,' announced the Doctor, finding a suitable rock and sitting down.

They didn't have to wait long. A few minutes later the airlock appeared in mid-air above the lake. The Doctor wasn't at all surprised but Jamie was gob-smacked. 'Oh, Doctor, you could have warned me!' he complained.

'And missed that look on your face? Hardly,' the Doctor laughed. As Jamie watched, now in total amazement, the gangway extended itself from the mostly invisible ship. As soon as the base of the walkway touched the ground the Doctor hopped on to it and began climbing towards the airlock. Jamie hurried after him.

As the Doctor reached the top of the path, the outer airlock door hissed open and he disappeared inside. Jamie had to jump to join him as the doors began to close immediately. Moments later they were totally enclosed inside the airlock. Jamie looked around him nervously. They appeared to be in a rather tiny enclosed space. The Doctor had said that there was a further pair of doors to open opposite the point that they had entered but, as yet, there was no sign of any movement.

'Doctor, do you no' think this might be a trap?' he asked.

'A trap? Oh I shouldn't think so, Jamie. They must have seen our white flag.'

Jamie coughed. The air in the small room had an odd flavour to it; it tickled his throat.

'Aye, but how do you know that they know what it means, eh?' demanded Jamie between further coughs.

The Doctor's confident expression faded quickly. 'Oh my, that is a thought...' he began. As he had done before the Doctor started to work on the sensors but Zenig had obviously done a spot of reprogramming himself. The invisible gas that had been silently pumping into the airlock on Zenig's orders did its work and the Doctor fell unconscious. The Doctor and Jamie both succumbed at the same time and tumbled to the floor. The gas continued to pump into the room. The doors remained fixed shut. Neither the Doctor nor Jamie appeared to be breathing any longer.

'You seem to be taking all this very well,' commented Zoe, sipping the steaming mug of hot chocolate that Dee had just made for her. The Loyalist medic had asked Zoe to help her identify some of the mysterious medical equipment in her medicentre. Zoe was no expert in medical technology but she had agreed to help as much as possible. For a couple of hours they had examined some of the machines that Dee had always ignored before now. They had managed to uncover and deduce the function of a couple of diagnostic tools: a digital thermometer and some kind of bone scanner. Dee had been amazed at the things that had been to hand that might have helped her (or Max before her) save lives. Although, as she confessed to Zoe, she suspected that Max might just have used some of this himself in secret. Some of these things do look as if they've seen some use,' agreed Zoe, 'but not recently. How long is it since Max left?'

'Four years, three months, two days,' Dee told her with sadness. Dee had suggested that they stop for refreshments and promised to tell Zoe how the split had happened. She explained that she and Max had been a couple for years, solid as a rock. All they lacked was a wedding ceremony and a family. The thing was, the wedding kept getting put off.

'It was always next year, and then next year would roll around, and first it was too damn cold to get anything arranged, and then it was the planting season, then the hot season, harvest time...' she sighed again. 'There was always a reason to postpone but no one ever doubted that we would marry eventually.'

'And have children?'

Dee nodded sadly. 'Then I got pregnant and everything changed. Pregnancies are rare on Axista Four. No one knows quite why - maybe there's something in the air or in the water, who knows? Maybe someone will find out now but back then we just shrugged and accepted it as our lot. So it was a minor miracle that I fell pregnant and, although we tried to keep it a secret... well, it's not such a big place and walls have ears if you know what I mean. Soon everyone knew. Which made it so much harder when...'

Dee broke off, sobbing, tears rolling down her face.

‘What is it?’ asked Zoe, concerned.

‘I’m sorry. It’s been five years now and I still can’t get over it. My baby died inside me before I could even give birth to him. Max did everything he could, but it just wasn’t meant to be.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ said Zoe, meaning every word. In her own time, birth and pregnancy had become so controlled and carefully monitored that anything like this was unheard of. Zoe couldn’t imagine what it must have been like for Dee - and for Max. Zoe said as much and Dee gave out a sharp bitter laugh.

‘Max? Who knows how he felt about it. We never spoke about it.’

‘You never spoke about the fact that your son had died?’ Zoe didn’t understand.

‘We just never spoke. The thing is, grief affects people in different ways. For Max it was just the last straw, the final push he needed to come out and say what he felt about *Back to Basics*. I never saw any of the public meetings he held but I was told about them. Apparently he was brilliant, passionate, logical, commanding. When he said he wanted to leave and start afresh, people were pushing each other out of the way to volunteer. Of course, she helped.’

‘Hali?’

Dee nodded, the tears having dried up now.

‘She was a neighbour’s daughter. Always a livewire, always getting into the No-Go Zone and coming back with little things from the colony ship. She was just a kid. ‘Least I thought she was. Turns out, when I wasn’t looking, she’d grown up into quite a woman. And while I was in here “recovering” she was giving Max the support he needed. And when they went - to a “Real” future, as they put it - she went with them.’

Zoe thought she understood now. ‘He left you to be with Hali!’

‘Sometimes,’ Dee confessed, ‘sometimes I even wonder if the whole breaking away was a means to an end, a way to

ditch me without having to face me every day.’ She laughed bitterly. ‘How arrogant is that?’

‘Stranger things have happened because of love,’ Zoe told her, and then blushed. For all her book-knowledge she had little personal experience of that kind of passion. Perhaps one day, she thought, when I’ve had enough of travelling with the Doctor. Not for a long time yet, though, she added to herself.

Dee pulled herself together and drained her mug of chocolate. ‘So that’s my version of how the Great Split occurred.’ She smiled self-deprecatingly and added, ‘...how the colony split in two as well!’

‘And now - if the two groups merge again how will you feel about that?’ asked Zoe.

‘The same way I’ve always felt,’ answered Dee staring out at the red-drenched sunset. ‘I’ve never stopped loving Max, he just stopped loving me.’ She looked up into the darkening sky, searching for a glimpse of the bright new star that was the ECSV ‘I just hope they manage to save him. For Hali’s sake and mine.’

‘This really isn’t necessary, you know,’ complained the Doctor but the Tyrenian warriors who were manhandling him paid him no attention. ‘We just want to talk...’ The Doctor trailed off as he and Jamie were thrown into a sturdy-looking cage, about ten feet square. The door was slammed shut and some kind of lock put on it. ‘I don’t think they want to talk, Doctor,’ said Jamie, but as if to prove him wrong one of their jailers turned and addressed them.

‘Commander Zenig will see you shortly,’ he said, before walking off.

The Doctor and Jamie had recovered consciousness quite quickly and had awoken to find themselves surrounded by a horde of the doglike aliens, all pointing weapons directly at them. With gestures more than words, the Tyrenians had made the Doctor and Jamie stand and had then pushed them roughly to the teleport chamber. They’d made the jump back to the Tyrenian bunker and had been bundled into a

dark and cavernous storage area, where the cage had been waiting for them.

Jamie looked around with interest. The cage seemed to have been constructed in some kind of hold; large numbers of Tyrenians were systematically unpacking boxes of weapons.

‘That’s odd,’ commented the Doctor, watching the aliens at work. ‘Don’t those energy weapons look familiar to you, Jamie?’

Jamie looked. Most of the weapons in the future looked the same to him but the Doctor was right about these: they did ring bells. ‘They look the same sort of thing that the marines have,’ he realised finally. ‘Mebbe they use the same armourer,’ he suggested, trying to explain the coincidence.

‘I don’t think so, Jamie. No, there’s something else.’ The Doctor brooded for a moment, continuing to observe the Tyrenians carefully. ‘Does anything else strike you as odd about our hosts?’ he asked carefully.

Jamie shrugged. ‘Odd? Well they are walking, talking doggies if that’s what you mean?’

‘Yes, they seem to be, don’t they? But look at the way they walk, the way they carry themselves. And look at those hands with the opposable thumbs.’

‘Aye, what about them?’

The Doctor’s face was contorted into a grimace as he struggled to make sense of what he was seeing. ‘It’s just not very canine,’ was all he could say.

Before he could take the thought any further, they were interrupted by the arrival of Zenig.

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor, beaming. ‘You must be in charge.’

‘I am Commander Zenig and you are an enemy of the Tyrenian race,’ announced Zenig with cold simplicity.

‘Well, I won’t argue with the former but I do take issue with the latter,’ began the Doctor. ‘You see we’re here on behalf of the human colonists

‘The human killers,’ interrupted Zenig, ‘who destroyed our settlement and stole our planet.’

The Doctor realised that this was not going to go as well as he had hoped.

‘There has been some... misunderstanding in the past,’ he concurred. ‘But the humans want peace not war. This planet is big enough for all of you. No one else has to die.’

Zenig looked as if he was listening and considering the Doctor’s words but then he shook his head.

‘I hear what you’re saying but I cannot let my commander’s death go unanswered. It would be... dishonourable.’

‘What would be honourable?’ asked the Doctor. ‘What price must we pay? More death?’

‘A duel. Ritual combat. A human champion against a Tyrenian. That would be honourable,’ Zenig answered carefully.

‘Well, if it’s a fight you’re after...’ Jamie interspersed.

‘No, Jamie,’ said the Doctor hurriedly in a low voice, ‘I really don’t think -’

‘You accept the challenge?’ Zenig cut through, addressing Jamie directly.

‘Aye, if it will get us out of this cage. Fair fight and when I knock your best man off his feet, you promise to listen to the Doctor. Deal?’

Zenig regarded Jamie and his outstretched hand with suspicion before grasping it and shaking it.

‘Deal,’ he agreed. He turned to one of his lieutenants. ‘Make the arrangements. We are to have a Blood Duel.’

The Doctor looked somewhat worried as the cage was opened and Jamie was taken out. ‘Don’t worry, Doctor, I can take one of these things,’ Jamie told him confidently as he was pulled away. ‘I’ll see you later.’ And then Jamie was gone.

‘I doubt that you will,’ commented the Tyrenian guard as he re-secured the lock on the cage.

‘Why’s that? What is this Blood Duel, then?’ asked the Doctor, concerned.

‘What does it sound like? It’s a fight,’ explained the Tyrenian as if to a child.

‘Until blood is spilled, I suppose?’ guessed the Doctor.

‘Until death!’ replied the alien, grinning broadly, revealing his sharp teeth.

It was the noise that alerted them. The inhabitants of Plymouth Hope had never heard anything like it. They spilled from their homes looking towards the source - the colony ship - wondering what new horror was about to engulf them. Was the ship finally collapsing after all these years?

It was impossible to see exactly what it was making the noise at first. There was a mechanical precision to it and the sound of movement of heavy objects. It was the sound of long-sealed doors rising: of dormant technology reactivating.

And then they began to see them. Moving in precise lines, like some kind of optical illusion, line after line of battledroids, inactive since the warfare that had occurred and been forgotten at Planet Fall. A thousand walking, thinking, killing machines emerged from the most secret, untouched cargo vaults of the colony ship and marched out of the wreckage.

And watching them, from one of the *Hannibal’s* shuttlecraft, was the man who had reactivated them. Major Jonn Cartor. He issued the droids with new commands. Locate and destroy the Tyrenians. Maximum Force.

Chapter Eighteen

It didn't look like much of an arena, thought Jamie, as he was directed into the area where the ritual combat was going to take place. There were about half a dozen one-metre-high beacons marking a rough circle, but nothing to secure them together. A symbolic border rather than a functional one. Not that there was any chance of escape. Word had spread about the human willing to fight one-to-one with a Tyrenian and the rest of the hold was so full of spectators that Jamie could no longer see the cage holding the Doctor.

Jamie weighed up the short sword that he had been given. It looked sharp enough and moved well through the air when he essayed a couple of moves. In addition to the sword, he had been given two other items: a small round shield and a piece of body armour that protected his chest and torso, but at the price of slightly reducing his mobility. It was made of some kind of plastic but felt tougher. Jamie remembered the time the Doctor had taken him to Ancient Rome. They had visited a gladiatorial spectacle and, recalling what he'd seen then - before Victoria, appalled at the crowd's blood-lust, had insisted that they leave - Jamie felt a shudder of *deja vu*. Here on this far-flung planet in his distant future he was about to recreate what he had seen in Ancient Rome. The Doctor had been right. There was something odd about this - even Jamie could sense it.

Before he could think about it any longer, there was a stirring in the crowd as the Tyrenians loudly welcomed their champion. Jamie swallowed. His opponent was a big specimen, the largest of the aliens he had seen so far, broad-shouldered and sturdy. The breastplate armour could not conceal the well-honed body beneath it. Suddenly, Jamie became aware of Zenig standing up to address the crowd.

‘Let the contest begin,’ he said simply before stepping out of the arena and pressing something on one of the beacons. Immediately each of the beacons lit up and started to emit a humming sound. Jamie’s confusion must have been evident on his face because his opponent enlightened him. ‘Force field,’ he said simply. ‘Hit it once, it will give you a nasty shock. A second time, it doubles the current. A third’ - he paused and began to grin - ‘kills. But I wouldn’t worry about that possibility. I will kill you myself first.’

And with that the alien lunged forward, jabbing his short sword toward Jamie’s arm. Only Jamie’s quick reflexes saved him from losing first blood. Jamie tried to put all thoughts out of his head, save for the fight. The alien was quick and clever but Jamie used his shield well and matched the speed of his opponent. The crowd roared their approval as the Tyrenian attacked again and again, pushing Jamie back on to the defensive. Then Jamie made his first offensive move, ducking down under a wide slashing move and coming up under the alien’s sword arm with the face of his shield. The Tyrenian fell backwards but managed to carry Jamie with him, using his feet to lift Jamie off the floor and toss him, flying head over heels, over his head into the force field. The air crackled with energy and blue lightning jumped all over Jamie’s body before he fell back into the arena with a heavy thud, dropping his sword.

The Tyrenian moved quickly in, not to attack but to kick the sword out of Jamie’s reach. It slid across the floor of the hold, bounced off a beacon and slid under the force field. The alien smiled with delight but in the split second he was looking in the direction of the sword rather than his opponent Jamie had got to his feet and jumped on his back. To his horror Jamie realised that he could understand what the watching Tyrenians were chanting. ‘Kill, Kill, Kill!’ they called wildly. Jamie held on as the beast tried to throw him again. He’d volunteered for this fight in order to give the Doctor a chance to do something. He just wished the Doctor would hurry up and do whatever it was he was going to do.

The battledroids were massing at the edge of the forest. Zoe, Dee and some of the other Loyalists had come up from the town to see what was happening. The droids were linking up with each other, making more complex shapes from the combination of their individual parts.

‘They’re transforming,’ said Zoe, amazed. ‘Look they’re forming some kind of aircraft.’

Now Zoe had pointed it out Dee could see that she was right. The battledroids had formed into a small fleet of aircraft and in perfect unison the amalgamated droids were launching into the air. There were about two dozen of them, Dee estimated. Once airborne they assumed a precise formation and set off in the direction of the Tyrenian base.

‘Where do you think they’re going?’ Dee wondered but Zoe was already running back down towards the town.

Zoe had never run so fast in her life. Of course, spending any time with the Doctor involved a certain amount of running, usually away from some terrible monster or clanger, but it was far less common to be running towards something. She had to do something about those droids. There could only be one target for them, the alien base - where the Doctor and Jamie were. She had to tell someone from the ECSV what was happening.

She hurtled into the Administrative Centre, hardly able to breathe as a result of her exertions. ‘Is Veena here?’ she demanded. The cool figure of Mr Greene, the Federation Administrator, looked up from his desk as she entered. ‘I’m afraid not, Miss Heriot. But there’s no need to be alarmed, the taskforce is purely a precautionary measure.’

Zoe gave the man a long look and decided not to waste her time any further talking to him. She hurried out again and was delighted to run into Veena who was heading for her fighter craft.

‘Do you know what’s going on?’ she demanded of the Federation officer.

Veena looked grim. No idea, but I intend to find out. The activation signal came from the *Hannibal*. If we’re to stop it we need to be up there.’ she said.

“We”?’ asked Zoe.

‘I’m not about to stand around and watch a genocide. That’s not why I joined up. I’m going to try to stop this before it’s too late. Are you coming?’

Zoe didn’t have to be asked twice. They hurried to the fighter craft and were airborne moments later.

From the window of his office Administrator Greene watched the ship take off. He returned to his desk and activated his communicator. ‘Major Cartor, Greene here .Your first officer is on her way back. She was just in here making some wild claims about the legitimacy of our current plan of action. I trust I can rely on you to put her right about a few things?’

He waited patiently for an answer, knowing that Cartor hated taking orders from him.

Finally it came. ‘Copy that,’ confirmed Carter’s voice, evidently speaking through clenched teeth.

‘I’m sorry, Major, did I hear you right?’

‘I said “Copy that”, sir,’ repeated Carter, almost spitting the final word out. Greene smiled. As long as the chain of command was respected, he was happy.

The Doctor was frustrated; the fight had started, but with the mass of Tyrenian bodies between him and the action it was impossible for him to see how Jamie was doing. He fingered the small crystal that Kirann had given him - certain that it was an important piece of the jigsaw but not sure what puzzle he was doing. Something about the Tyrenians perhaps? There was something distinctly wrong about them; if only he could put his finger on it. The Doctor noticed that his guard was also paying attention to the fight - perhaps now would be a good time to make a bid for freedom. The lock securing the door of the cage didn’t look very complicated but it resisted all attempts to have the sonic screwdriver used on it. The Doctor searched through his voluminous pockets for an alternative. His fingers alighted on a hairpin, which, once bent into shape, made quick work of the lock. Keeping his eyes on the backs of the Tyrenian

spectators, the Doctor slipped out of the cage, closed the door behind him and sneaked out of the hold.

Once in the corridor he relaxed. It was obvious that all the Tyrenians were watching the big fight. The Doctor was torn: should he try to help Jamie or take the chance to investigate the crystal at last? With a slightly heavy heart, he decided that Jamie would have to fend for himself for a moment - he really *had* to get some answers from the crystal. He started to explore and quickly came across a room of computer consoles. Inside he saw a couple of boxes of the now familiar-looking crystals. He pulled the one Kirann had given him from his pocket again. It was a perfect match. A glance at the computer consoles confirmed that there was a slot into which the crystals could be placed.

The Doctor sat at a console, slipped his data crystal into the reader and began to access the data. 'Oh my...,' he said to himself as the information poured out of the tiny crystal on to his screen. 'Oh my goodness me...'

Both Jamie and his Tyrenian opponent, who had been introduced to him as Gorhay, were beginning to tire now, and from the sounds of the crowd, some of the audience were too. What should have been quick and clean was proving to be much more complicated. Zenig, despite himself, was impressed. The human had conducted himself well and matched Gorhay in every move. Both gladiators were carrying small cuts and numerous bruises but both, although a little unsteady, were still on their feet. Zenig wondered if there was any honour in declaring the battle void. A quick glance at the crowd of Tyrenian warriors cheering on Gorhay soon put Zenig straight. They had all been loyal to Lorvalan and had been shocked to hear of his death when they had been revived in the last few hours; they needed to see this through to the end.

Jamie staggered and ducked under another vicious swing from his opponent. Both combatants had lost their swords now: the Tyrenian's had spun off into the crowd Jamie's still lay tantalisingly out of reach just beyond the line between

two of the beacons. A few moments ago Jamie had forced his opponent into the force field and he had been horrified at the sight of the alien shaking in the electrical current. Now, if what he had been told was true, the force field was primed to kill. His opponent had clearly been thinking along the same lines and the fight had become more of a wrestling match, with each of the fighters trying to force the other into the deadly force field. Again, the two of them grappled with each other. The alien had the advantage of height but Jamie had the greater lower body strength. He managed to roll with the pressure, spinning away from his opponent and kicking him behind the knee. Whatever the alien's physiognomy it was similar enough to Jamie's own for him to know it would have the desired effect. The alien sprawled forward. For a moment neither of them moved. And then they both saw it at the same time - Jamie's sword was lying just a foot or so from the alien's outstretched hand. Both of them knew the risk but if they could endure the pain of the force field for just a split second - long enough to retrieve the sword - they might just get themselves the advantage they needed.

Jamie could almost see the thought going through the alien's head and was not surprised when he lurched forward, stretching out his arm towards the sword. At the same moment, without Jamie being very aware of his actions, Jamie was also in motion, hurling himself forward, over the prone body of the alien. Like runners reaching for the finishing tape both Jamie and the alien stretched out towards the force field and their fingers penetrated it at exactly the same time. Blue lighting flashed along their arms, more powerful than before and both Jamie and the alien warrior let out loud screams before tailing inert to the floor.

There was a moment of silence and then a voice breaking it with urgency.

'Let me through, let me through. You must stop this fight. You must.'

It was the Doctor, holding the data crystal up in one hand like a lighter at a rock concert ballad. The crowd parted for

the human and the Doctor could see that he was too late; the fight was over and both gladiators were lying immobile.

‘Oh my goodness, no...’

The Doctor hurried into the arena, passing without harm through the force field that appeared to have burnt itself out.

‘This is all so unnecessary and wrong,’ he announced.

Zenig climbed down from the watching platform to join him.

‘What are you talking about, human?’ he demanded.

‘That’s just it,’ said the Doctor exasperated. He glanced around, checking that only Zenig would be able to hear his explanation. ‘You’re as human as he is,’ he whispered, pointing at Jamie. ‘There is no Tyrenian race!’

Veena was out of the pilot’s seat almost before her engines had died. As the hatch opened, she jumped down to the deck impatiently, not waiting for the automatic gantry to extend itself from the wall of the flight deck. Zoe quickly followed her, amused that she was, once again, back on *Hannibal* in exactly the same spot that she had made her initial escape from.

Veena led her through a maze of corridors, determined to reach the bridge in the shortest possible time. *En route* she located a workstation and gave Zoe the relevant clearance to access it. ‘See what you can do to countermand the orders to the battledroids. I assume you can find your way around a computer system?’

Zoe smiled confidently. ‘I should think so. Where are you going?’

‘To speak to Cartor. If possible I’d prefer him to cancel the attack himself - I don’t like the idea of going behind the back of my commanding officer - but I cannot stand by and let an entire race be destroyed for no good reason. That would make us no better than the Daleks.’

‘Good luck!’ Zoe called after Veena as she strode away. Veena acknowledged her with a wave and disappeared around the corner. Zoe settled down to the workstation. Thankfully, although state of the art, it had an old-fashioned

touch-screen input system, which Zoe preferred rather than trying the sensor helmet device again. She started to spin through the core memory systems looking for something that would be useful.

While Zoe was getting into the computer system, Veena was walking on to the bridge. There she found Lieutenant Harvard in the captain's chair. 'The major?' she demanded brusquely.

'In his ready room, sir,' Harvard responded, sitting up straight where a moment ago he had slouched. Veena headed straight for the door that led to the captain's private office and waved her wrist at the ident panel. The door slid open.

'Sir?' The room was in semi-darkness. At first she couldn't see Cartor at all and then she realised that he was sitting at the desk with his chair turned so that all she could see was the back of his head.

'Ah, Veena, I should have expected you to find me...'

'Sir? Are you okay?'

Veena was wrong-footed. She was all fired up for a passionate argument and was surprised to find Cartor in such a subdued mood.

'A leader has to lead, Myles. You have to take the tough decisions, you have to know when to stand up for yourself, when to do the right thing.'

'And you always have, sir,' Veena told him, appalled at the level of self-doubt Cartor was suddenly experiencing.

'No. I've done what I was told. Always. The good soldier. Point me at a target and fire. That's what I am; part of the Federation military machine.'

'No, sir, that's not true.'

The chair swung round.

'Myles, don't bullshit me. I've been used...' Veena couldn't make out what was wrong with what she was seeing. Cartor was slumped in his chair, but she couldn't see why. Was he ill? His eyes flickered as if he was about to fall unconscious but somehow he rallied.

'The droids. They've been programmed to wipe them out.'

‘The aliens? I know.’

‘No, not just the aliens. All of them. The Loyalists, the Realists, the whole damn lot. They used to call it scorched earth. Burn it down and start again. Clean slate for the refugees. And nothing left of what came before...’ He flagged again and Veena was suddenly aware of some movement at her feet. She looked down and saw something liquid. Thick and red.

‘Computer. First Officer Myles override. Lights up,’ she ordered. And as the light level rose she realised the true horror of what Cartor had done to himself. A ragged red scar slashed across both wrists and across his chest, his life-blood was pooling beneath the desk. Instinctively she knew that it was too late to do anything for him. He had made his decision and taken his own life. If she was to save the lives of everyone on the planet she would have to hurry.

Jamie’s head hurt. Actually a lot more of him hurt than that but right now it was his head that was at the top of the list. He blinked his eyes experimentally, shocked to find that he was still alive. ‘What happened to the other fellow?’ he managed to ask.

‘Jamie!’ It was the Doctor, delighted to see his young friend regain consciousness.

‘Aye, well, it takes more than a spot of that electricity stuff to get rid of a McCrimmon, you know.’

‘Well, I should know that,’ smiled the Doctor.

‘Doctor - you promised an explanation?’

Jamie looked over and saw that Zenig was with them. They were in a smaller room, a medical centre, he guessed, from the half-dozen beds that filled the room.

‘Yes, yes, of course. I just wanted to make sure that Jamie and your lad -’

‘Gorhay.’

‘Had survived their little tussle...’

‘Gorhay is fine. As is the youth. So please - you promised me some answers.’

The Doctor nodded and produced the data crystal. 'Why don't I let the man speak for himself?' he suggested and loaded the crystal into the reader of a computer. On the screen a human figure appeared.

'Stewart Ransom,' said the Doctor helpfully. The figure on the screen began to talk.

'There are things that need to be recorded that I'm not proud of. Things I've been...' The man paused, searching for the right word. 'Things I've been associated with that I have to get off my chest. There is intelligent life already existent on our target planet - human life. To be precise, enhanced humans. They call themselves Tyrenians and believe themselves to be the last survivors of a star-travelling warrior race but they are not. Their memory, their history, everything that they believe to be true about themselves is fiction. Their unique appearance is a result of DNA splicing.'

The Doctor glanced sideways at Zenig, who was watching the screen with a shocked expression on his face. Ransom continued his tale. He explained about a man called Gustav Tyren, a brilliant geneticist employed at a company controlled by Ransom to develop a product for the Federation military. They wanted 'super-soldiers', humans with enhanced fighting capabilities, a new species that could be developed and cloned and used as front line troops. Tyren had always been fascinated by dogs and found a way to program certain canine attributes. He had only been partially successful. His work took time, however, and the Federation decided to pursue other options, specifically battledroids with reprogrammable specifications for different terrains and battlefields. Finally, the Federation had withdrawn the funding and ordered the destruction of all specimens. Tyren had refused to stop his work and, for a while, the younger Ransom had continued to sign the cheques, but eventually the money drain was too much. Reluctantly Ransom had told Tyren that the project would have to be terminated. Tyren was devastated and begged Ransom to change his mind.

'So I compromised,' Ransom explained, a haunted expression on his face. 'You have to remember this was years

ago; I was so much younger then. I arranged for the Tyrenians to “escape” from the space-station laboratory that they had been created in. They stole a spaceship, one that I had made sure would be available to steal, and disappeared. There was a delay in alerting the authorities,’ Ransom allowed himself a small smile. ‘A communications problem. By the time they had been told about it, the Tyrenians were long gone.’

On the screen, Ransom ran his hands through his hair and glanced off-camera to one side, as if checking something. When he continued it was with a new urgency.

‘I - and my company - were fined of course, heavily, and Tyren lost his research licence but that was the limit of the Federation’s ability to punish us. Life went on. The Tyrenians were all but forgotten. Certainly I forgot them - until many, many years later when I was persuaded by my wonderful daughter to make some changes to my life, and I embarked on this current project. The survey data I used to select our target planet was the same data I had installed into the ship the Tyrenians had stolen. Perhaps at some subconscious level I knew that; who knows what tricks our minds can play on us? Maybe it was just fate. Whatever it was, when a fresh survey drone checked out the Axista system anew it found evidence of the Tyrenians. Unfortunately it was a Federation survey drone and the Federation officials were adamant that they had to be dealt with. That kind of DNA splicing was now illegal throughout known space, and the Federation was one of the major bodies signed up to the treaties banning such activity. The Tyrenians were an embarrassing leftover from a less enlightened time. A loose end that had to be dealt with.’

Again, Ransom glanced off-camera. He seemed to be under some considerable stress. ‘For my part,’ he continued, ‘they were an inconvenience. With them on Axista Four we would not be allowed to colonise the planet and, in every other regard, climate, size, rotation, everything was perfect. But I also felt a responsibility for the Tyrenians. They had been made in one of my own labs by a man working for me. I was torn, unable to talk about this to anyone, especially Kirann.’

Again the man looked away and then back at the camera. He looked guiltier than ever now.

‘In the end, I agreed to go along with the Federation’s plan. They would secretly install an offensive force of battledroids on my ship, which would be activated when we arrived on Axista Four. The Tyrenians would be wiped out but I could claim I had no knowledge of the action. My colony would get its chance to live and grow, and the Tyrenian mistake would be forgotten.’

Zenig growled: a low angry sound in his throat.

‘And now we’re here and it seems the Tyrenians still have some surprises for us. Their defensive satellites have attacked and wounded us; we’re going to crash. If we survive the impact, the battledroids will activate and attack the Tyrenians. I guess you might say that I deserve this. I should have spoken up against the Federation’s ideas. The Tyrenians have as much right to life as anyone. And that’s what this colony is meant to be about. Hope and life, not death and despair.’

The camera shook and the picture broke up for a moment. In the background an alarm began to sound.

‘I may not live to see it but I hope that some of us survive whatever is about to happen: human *and* Tyrenian. Is it too much to hope that some survivors of both groups might make a success of this colony together? I sincerely hope so. I have to go now. Kirann, if you ever get to hear this, I’m sorry to have let you down like this. I changed but not soon enough, and the legacy of my earlier follies has been my downfall. But I love you and I’m proud of you. Goodbye.’

With that the man got to his feet, reached forward and the screen went black.

Zenig turned to look at the Doctor. ‘We are human?!’

‘Apparently. But it’s not too late to realise Ransom’s vision...’

Before the Doctor could elaborate a Tyrenian rushed into the room.

‘Sir, the humans’ battledroids are surrounding the ship.’

Zenig was still reeling from discovering the truth about his so-called 'race'. 'Completely surrounded?'

The warrior nodded.

'Then we must defend ourselves,' Zenig announced.

The Doctor jumped in between them. 'No wait. Why keep fighting? Let them come in, I have an idea...'

There was a limit to the amount of information even Zoe could absorb. Her head was beginning to ache and her eyes were finding it hard to focus. She let her head fall on to her arms and closed her eyes for a moment. It was at that precise moment that Veena reappeared. Zoe didn't know what had happened to her in the last few minutes but there was a definite change in Veena; she looked paler, older and was carrying herself with a new authority somehow.

'Have you found a way to stop the droids?' she asked.

With a start Zoe sat up, rubbing her eyes. 'It's no use,' she confessed. 'I can't do it. Not like this.' Zoe's eyes flickered in the direction of the sensor hat and then away again but not before Veena had noticed.

'You need direct hook-up,' said Veena with a sudden insight.

'I can't do that,' Zoe insisted urgently. 'Not again.'

Veena grabbed her by the wrists and looked directly into her eyes.

'You have to. We must stop those droids before they kill everyone on the planet.'

'Everyone?'

'Everyone. Including the Doctor and Jamie. You have to try, Zoe. I know the thought of it is traumatic but the fact that you were hooked up to a similar set-up recently will be an advantage. Zoe, you're the only person who can save them.'

Zoe could feel tears rolling down her cheeks. It wasn't meant to happen like this. The Doctor was meant to deal with the last-minute rescues. She swallowed hard, making her decision, the only one she could make.

She reached out for the sensor helmet.

The Doctor watched, agitated, as Tyrenians came and went, reporting the latest stage of the fighting. The battledroids had made three incursions and at each of the hull breaches they were making steady progress, fighting their way ever deeper into the Tyrenian ship.

‘They’re on floor six now, sir. We’ve fallen back again,’ reported a warrior.

Zenig nodded an acknowledgement. ‘Any casualties?’

‘Two injured, no deaths.’

‘And the charges?’

‘Set and primed.’

The Doctor hurried over to Zenig. ‘Charges?’ he asked, nervously.

‘Explosive charges on all floors. That was your plan wasn’t it, Doctor? Lure the droids into the bunker and then destroy it?’

‘Well, no, actually, it wasn’t.’ The Doctor drew himself up to his full height and tried to find his most serious expression. ‘I hadn’t intended this to be a suicide mission. I meant for us to teleport to your ship at the last moment, leaving the droids here.’

‘I think I prefer my version,’ Zenig smiled coldly. ‘We will use the teleport to escape but will set the charges to go off after we depart.’

Another warrior hurried in. ‘The entire force of droids is now within the bunker,’ he announced.

‘Excellent. Then it’s time to leave. Come on, Doctor.’ Zenig led the way down the nearest corridor, closely followed by the Doctor and the other command-deck Tyrenians.

At the teleport the mass evacuation quickly began; in groups of ten the Tyrenians began teleporting across to the ship. The Doctor looked on in amazement as group after group filed into the room and disappeared.

‘Where’s Jamie?’ he asked after a while, worried that the Scots lad had not returned.

‘He went to help defend the rear entrance,’ Zenig told him. ‘Operate the teleport for me, I’ll go and look for him and his group. They should be here by now.’

Hurry,' shouted the Doctor. 'Those droids are getting closer!'

Zenig disappeared at a run.

Jamie and his three Tyrenian companions were running for their lives. They dived round a corner just ahead of a missile that exploded, showering them with debris. Jamie helped the giant Goyran to his feet.

'That was close,' the Tyrenian champion muttered.

'Aye and they'll be closer again if we don't get a move on,' replied Jamie, leading them away down the side corridor. Suddenly he stopped as the distinctive grey shape of one of the battledroids rolled into view at the end of the corridor. Jamie turned to look the other way but a second droid had appeared behind them. They were trapped. Jamie could hear a mechanical whirring as a weapon slid into place on the outstretched arm of the nearest droid.

Zoe was screaming. Veena looked on horrified as the girl jerked around in her seat, threatening to dislodge the sensors clipped to her wrists and strapped around her forehead. Her face was bathed in sweat, her hair limp on her head. The barrage of data she was receiving seemed to be hitting her physically. Veena took her pulse and was shocked to find it racing. If Zoe remained connected for much longer she was going to suffer a heart attack.

Zoe was lost. Lost in a world of data. She no longer had a body, or a name. All she had was a single idea, a single thought, and a command; deactivate the droids. If only she could find the right place, in this universe of data, to place her message. And then she saw it, like a single silver needle in a haystack of golden corn. She dived forward, reaching out for the port she needed, stretching for eternity across infinity until finally she made contact and gave her command.

To Veena watching it was like seeing a puppet having its strings cut; one moment Zoe had been hyperactive, the next she was slumped and unmoving. Veena just hoped that she'd been successful in her mission.

Jamie opened his eyes and looked up. Silence. No missile whizzing through the air. No battledroid advancing on him. Silence. The droids were frozen, deactivated.

‘Someone’s switched the power off,’ Goyran suggested.

Suddenly there was movement from behind the battledroid and Zenig appeared. ‘Come on,’ he shouted at them, ‘the bunker’s wired to blow in two minutes.’

Jamie got to his feet and did as he was bid. Now was not the time to give up on running.

The Doctor looked up anxiously as Jamie and the final handful of Tyrenians ran into the teleport room, Zenig bringing up the rear.

‘Go on Doctor, get into the transport area,’ ordered Zenig as the rest of his warriors and Jamie did the same thing.

‘What about you?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Someone’s got to operate the teleport,’ he said simply.

The Doctor, realising what he intended, jumped down and hit the send control. Jamie and the other Tyrenians disappeared, leaving the two of them alone.

‘This isn’t necessary, Zenig. How long have we got before the big bang?’

‘About a minute. Give or take. You’d better get going.’

‘Not without you.’ The Doctor folded his arms defiantly. ‘There must be an auto-send function...’

Zenig shook his head. ‘I’m the only one who knows,’ he said simply. ‘I want my people to have a future and their own identity. Without me, only you and your friend Jamie will know the truth; will you promise me you won’t betray my people?’

‘Of course we won’t. One more lie on Axista Four won’t hurt anyone... But you don’t have to die...’

‘I don’t agree. While I live there’s a chance I might let the truth slip out, maybe not now, but when I’m old and in my dotage. This is the best way.’

Suddenly Zenig wasn’t looking at the Doctor; his attention had been taken by something arriving at the door. The Doctor turned to see what it was, realising what an old trick

he had fallen for just a split second too late as Zenig chopped at the back of his head and sent him into unconsciousness.

Zenig leapt forward to catch the Doctor and laid him gently into the transport area before going over to the controls.

'Goodbye, Doctor,' he murmured as he pushed down the 'send' control and the strange little man disappeared.

Zenig checked his chronometer, which was counting down to the self-destructive charges he had set. There were seconds left. Zenig began to wonder what death would feel like but before he got very far with the thought the series of massive explosions began, ripping apart the bunker, destroying the entire army of battledroids and taking his own life.

EPILOGUE

Chapter Nineteen

The Doctor waited while Administrator Greene sat and considered his proposal. After what seemed like an age, the Federation representative finally spoke.

‘And they came from where?’

The Doctor smiled, but his eyes remained cold.

‘The planet Tyrenia,’ he answered, as if it had been obvious. ‘It’s the third planet of a twin-star system in Sector Five. Well, at least it was before the great accident.’

‘The great accident, yes, of course,’ said Greene nodding. ‘What was it again? I do want to make sure the records have it right. Meteorite strike?’

‘Plague,’ stated the Doctor. ‘It all but wiped the race out. The few thousand Tyrenians that managed to escape to Axista Four are all that are left of the race. Space refugees, much like the ones you’re sending here.’

‘Indeed, indeed. And I’m sure they’ll be as welcome as the other newcomers,’ commented the Federation man, with a politician’s lack of conviction.

‘You’ll ensure the records back on Earth are corrected?’ demanded the Doctor softly. ‘There do appear to have been some inaccuracies in the current versions.’

‘Consider it done, Doctor. The Empire thanks you for your help in these sensitive matters.’

‘Empire? I thought you were from the Terran Federation?’

‘Things change, Doctor. And Earth Empire has a nice ring to it, don’t you think?’

The Doctor shrugged. ‘To be honest I don’t really care what you call yourselves, as long as you let the people here on Axista Four get on with their lives without interference. And I do mean all the people in the widest sense - humans, Tyrenians, the new refugees...’

'I'm sure they will, Doctor. Will you be staying on to see the arrival of the first refugee ship?'

The Doctor hesitated and was rewarded with a fleeting look of horror that passed over Greene's face as he contemplated the Doctor giving him an affirmative answer. He decided to put the Administrator out of his misery.

'No, I don't think so.'

Greene watched the small stranger leave and breathed a sigh of relief. This wasn't the solution to the Tyrenian problem that he had been sent to achieve, but it was a solution. He just hoped his masters saw it the same way. Soon he'd be back in suspended animation *en route* to one of the new Empire strongholds to receive his new orders, and his next mission. He just hoped that, wherever it took him, he wouldn't run into the Doctor - any of them - again.

The party was still going on in Plymouth Hope City; a belated celebration for the arrival of Kirann and the other newly revived original colonists who were now joining the colony. It was also a celebration of the peace accord with the Tyrenians.

The Doctor found Zoe and Jamie sitting on the porch outside Tam Kartryte's old sheriff's office. Kirann and Billy Joe were with them and their host, all sitting and chatting about the future of the colony. It had been agreed by all parties that Plymouth Hope City would remain a unique and special place. Enough of the defrosted original colonists were interested in maintaining a more liberal version of *Back to Basics*. Most of the Realists, including Hali and Max, who, against the odds, had made a full recovery from his injuries, had agreed to return to be a part of it. In spite of the massive influx of refugees, it appeared that Stewart Ransom's dream was going to live on.

The Doctor beckoned to Zoe and Jamie and quietly the three of them slipped away from the party and started to head back towards the colony ship.

'Shouldn't we at least say goodbye?' asked Zoe, feeling rude.

‘Oh, you know me, Zoe: I never was much good at goodbyes. I think it’s much better if we just disappear quietly when no one is looking,’ explained the Doctor. ‘Anyway, we have to leave. I overheard Kirann and Tam talking about appointing a new sheriff and I really don’t want to have to disappoint them.’

‘Are you sure they were talking about you, Doctor? Billy Joe reckoned I should have been the new sheriff,’ complained Jamie.

‘In that case, we really must be going,’ replied the Doctor, with a smile. But as they headed past the corral, a figure stepped out of the shadows. It was Veena. Behind her they could see lights burning in the offices of the CEAC as work continued in preparation for the arrival of the refugees.

‘Going somewhere?’ she asked.

The Doctor looked embarrassed. ‘Yes, we thought we should be on our way. We don’t like to stay anywhere too long; it’s not really our style. You understand how it is.’

Veena sighed. ‘You can say that again. All my life I’ve lived on starships; it’s all I’ve ever known.’

‘It suits some,’ commented the Doctor.

‘But don’t you ever want a home? Somewhere to settle down?’ Veena asked him wistfully.

‘I’m lucky,’ smiled the Doctor. ‘I can take my home with me.’

‘I hear you’re to be made Acting Captain of the *Hannibal*,’ Zoe interjected, trying to brighten the mood.

Veena nodded. ‘Apparently making it permanent is just a formality,’ she told them.

‘So how come you don’t sound too happy about it?’ asked Jamie, noting the sadness in her voice.

Veena looked over in the direction of Plymouth Hope, a strange expression on her face. ‘Because I’m not sure I’m going to accept it,’ she explained. ‘Maybe it’s time for *me* to settle somewhere...’

The Doctor nodded his head, sagely. ‘Why don’t you go and join the party?’ he suggested. ‘I’m sure they’ll make you very welcome.’

Veena smiled, gave them all a quick hug, which Jamie rather liked, but which embarrassed the Doctor, and then headed towards the sounds of laughter and singing coming from the tavern.

‘Come on,’ said the Doctor to his companions. ‘Time for us to go home too...’

The Doctor’s uncanny instinct for locating his space-time machine soon had them back inside the TARDIS. Jamie lost no time in disappearing into the massive interior in search of food. Zoe remained in the console room, watching as the Doctor made some pre-flight checks to his instruments.

‘Doctor,’ she began, unable to stop a thought that had been nagging her for a while now. The Doctor seemed to be totally absorbed by his work at the console.

‘Yes, Zoe?’ he said abstractedly.

‘What you said to Kirann and the others... About what happened at Planet Fall. It wasn’t exactly the same as the version I got from the computer’s memory.’

‘Wasn’t it?’ replied the Doctor, innocently.

‘No,’ continued Zoe. ‘No it wasn’t. According to the computer, Ransom *had* known about the droids and when he recognised the Tyrenians for who and what they were, he had stood back while the battledroids wiped them out.’

‘Really? Is that what the computer said?’

‘It’s what the records show. So Ransom wasn’t the great hero everyone makes him out to be. He was willing to go along with genocide...’

The Doctor looked up from his instruments and smiled kindly.

‘Really, Zoe, it was all a long time ago. Even computer memories can “cheat”.’

‘But if the colony was built on a lie don’t they deserve to know that?’ Zoe persisted.

‘Sometimes,’ the Doctor suggested, with infinite patience and wisdom, ‘sometimes it’s actually better to let the legend stand.’

Zoe was about to argue further, when the inner door swung open and an angry-looking Jamie returned clutching a small chocolate bar.

‘Doctor, you’ve got to do something about that machine - it’s still turning out the most disgusting food I’ve ever eaten.’

‘In that case,’ said the Doctor, ‘let’s see if we can’t find somewhere else to go for lunch, eh?’

And, with that, the Doctor smiled to himself and pushed the dematerialisation control. The TARDIS began a new journey into the infinite possibilities of creation.

Somewhere, an infinite amount of time and space away, or perhaps only a nano-second or micron away, the same space- time craft was also travelling through the Vortex.

‘Professor!’

Ace was angry. She’d come back to the console room, wondering why the TARDIS was no longer in flight, and found it empty, save for the abandoned Five-Hundred-Year Diary lying on the Doctor’s chair. Moments later, the doors had opened and Ace had a fleeting glimpse of some kind of spaceship interior before the Doctor had grasped the red-handled door control and pulled it down to close them.

‘Ah, Ace. There you are. Just had to pop out on a little errand. Nothing to worry about. Did you want something?’

Ace was waving the leather-bound book in her hand.

‘You said you didn’t know where it was!’ she complained.

The Doctor made an attempt to look apologetic. ‘Yes, I did, didn’t I? Well, I must have found it. Never mind, eh? You don’t want to worry about all that history. All in the past, isn’t it? Dusty relics and all that, isn’t that what you said? Let’s just get on with the here and now, don’t you think?’

The Doctor started setting co-ordinates and had put the TARDIS in motion.

‘But what about Axista Four? What happened in the end?’ Ace demanded.

‘In the end? Axista went nova and the planet became a fireball, but not for millions of years.’

‘I meant about the colony. Ransom’s dream.’

‘Oh that. Like I told you, legend has it that it had a long and happy existence; a really successful venture.’

‘But did the legend lie?’ Ace persisted.

The Doctor’s eyes twinkled. ‘Of course not. Why would it?’

He finished adjusting the controls on the console and strode over to his seat. Ace was still flicking through the pages of his diary. He’d have to make sure that got lost again as soon as possible.

‘Professor?’

‘Yes, Ace?’

‘What was “the terrible Zodin?”’

The Doctor sighed. ‘Now *there* was a legend...’

About the Author

COLIN BRAKE has stopped counting the years now and is resigned to never being very tall. Colin worked as a BBC Script Editor from 1986 until 1992, during which time he made efforts to steal Andrew Cartmel's *Dr Who* writers to work on *EastEnders* and named horse races in the series *Trainer* after Telos and Mondas. Which was nice.

In 1989 Andrew Cartmel invited Colin to visit the studio recording of *Ghost Light*. During the evening Cartmel introduced him to Sylvester McCoy and suggested that he might be his successor as the *Doctor Who* Script Editor, thus ensuring that this never came to pass. This was, of course, the so-called Cartmel Masterplan.

As a freelance television writer Colin has written scripts for various programmes including *Bugs*, *EastEnders*, *Family Affairs*, *Crossroads* and *Doctors*. He contributed a short story to *Decalog 3* and wrote the Eighth Doctor novel *Escape Velocity* which introduced Anji Kapoor and, apparently, entirely failed to provide a suitable climax to the 'Earth Arc'. But hey, the Doctor got the TARDIS back - what more did you want?

Colin lives with his wife Kerry in Leicester, along with his two small children, Cefn and Kassia, and far too many books.

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Thanks, as always, to my wonderful wife, Kerry, who put up with me and my moods as deadlines hurtled towards me at unpleasant speeds, causing me to work all sorts of odd hours, and copy-edited with her usual efficiency and occasional brutality. (Yes, honey, I do know what a comma is for; I just forget sometimes in the mad heat of creativity, all right?)

As usual any similarity between any of the characters in this book and any real person is one of those weird coincidences of life, so don't sue and don't get upset.

Finally a note to my old friend Bleddyn Williams: it's about time your name was on a book spine, buddy; pull your finger out!

Cheers.

Colin Brake, March 2003