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DOCTOR WHO

WORLD GAME
TERRANCE DICKS

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Commissioning editors: Shirley Patton and Stuart Cooper
Editor and creative consultant: Justin Richards
Project editor: Vicki Vrint

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Prologue

The following is an excerpt from the genuine and original summary record of the trial of the Doctor. The account with which we were, until now, familiar was substantially re-edited for the public record.

The true record has recently been released under the provisions of the Gallifreyan Freedom of Information Act.

In the High Court of the Time Lords a trial was coming to its end. The accused, a renegade Time Lord known as the Doctor, had already been found guilty. Now it was time for the sentence.

The Doctor looked very out of place standing amongst the Time Lords in their long white robes. To begin with, he was quite a small man. He wore an ancient black coat and a pair of check trousers. He had a gentle, rather comical face, and a shock of untidy black hair. But there was strength in the face too, and keen intelligence in the blue eyes.

A hush fell as the President of the Court rose and began to speak. 'Doctor, you have been found guilty of two serious offences against our laws. First, you stole a TARDIS and used it to roam through Time and Space as you pleased.'

'Nonsense,' said the Doctor indignantly. 'I didn't steal it. Just borrowed it for a while.'

The President ignored the interruption. 'More importantly, you have repeatedly broken our most important law: interference in the affairs of other planets is a serious crime.'

Again the Doctor interrupted. 'I not only admit my interference, I am proud of it! You just observe the evil in the galaxies. I fight against it.'

'We have considered your plea, Doctor, that there is evil in the Universe which must be fought, and that you still have a part to play in that great struggle. It is a plea not without merit.' The President paused. Then he said heavily, 'Regrettably, the Court's hands are tied. The abstraction of an obsolete TARDIS is a relatively trivial matter, and might be pardoned. Temporal interference, however, prolonged and repeated temporal

interference, is a far more serious matter. It strikes at the root of our Time Lord policy of non-interference in the affairs of the cosmos. It draws attention to our very existence, and for many years our safety has lain in silence and secrecy. In short, aggravated temporal interference of this nature is a capital crime, and the sentence is mandatory.

‘It is my painful duty, Doctor, to sentence you to death.’

Chapter One

Opening Moves

They were born in the same year, 1769, within months of each other.

One was English, or rather Anglo-Irish, born in Dublin to an influential, if hard-up, aristocratic family. His name was Wesley – the Honourable Arthur Wesley, to be precise. Later the family name reverted to its original form, Wellesley. It was to change yet again in later life, when he became the Duke of Wellington.

The other was a native of Corsica, a small island that was an often-rebellious province of France. His parents too were aristocrats, part of the Corsican nobility, rulers of the island on behalf of the French. The family name was originally Buona Parte. In later years it was ‘Frenchified’, and Napoleone Buona Parte became Napoleon Bonaparte.

Both men attended a military academy in France, though not the same one, and both became soldiers. Both rose in their chosen profession, one more rapidly – and far higher – than the other.

By the time he was thirty-five, Wellesley – Sir Arthur Wellesley by now – was a major-general, returning to England after a long series of successful campaigns in India.

Napoleon Bonaparte was to become Napoleon the First, Hereditary Emperor of the French.

Wellington, of course, was well aware of Napoleon’s meteoric rise, and had followed his campaigns with interest. Napoleon, on the other hand, knew little of the man who was to be his most formidable opponent. What little he had heard failed to impress him. Wellington, he said dismissively, was merely a ‘sepoy general’, a commander whose only achievement was to lead native troops to easy victories against other native troops.

Neither knew that their lives were on a collision course,

destined to meet a decade later in a clash that would determine the fate of Europe and much of the world.

The Duke of Wellington was destined to achieve a final fabulous victory on the battlefield of Waterloo, go on to become Prime Minister of England, and live into an honoured old age. Napoleon Bonaparte would die in his early fifties, a bitter and lonely exile.

At least, that was what was supposed to happen.

But what if there was...*interference*?

It was a difficult meeting, held in a security-sealed conference room just off Temporal Scanning HQ. The three Time Lords present were members of a special sub-committee of the High Council.

Their usual duties were to oversee the work of the Temporal Scanning Service. Normally this was a bureaucratic formality, which consisted of rubber-stamping the latest reports. Now, however, they had a real problem to deal with. And a problem which, horror of horrors, might actually require positive action.

They weren't happy about it.

Ragnar, the most senior, summed up their dilemma. Now nearing the end of his current incarnation, he was an elderly Prydonian, thin to the point of emaciation in his orange and scarlet robes. But if his body was frail, his mind was still sharp and his will was strong. In some ways he was the most effective of the group.

'The evidence is clear. There has been temporal interference – prolonged and repeated temporal interference. So far it is relatively trivial. Potentially, however, it is highly dangerous. It risks endangering the very fabric of time. It can no longer be tolerated. Those responsible must be tracked down and identified. Once that has been done they must be neutralised.'

Milvo, the second member of the sub-committee, nodded thoughtfully. He was a green-robed Arcalian, plump, round-faced, sleek-haired, with an air of bland cheerfulness. 'That may be so. However, we ourselves cannot be seen to interfere. Such action runs contrary to all our most cherished principles...Our reputation for detachment, for non-interference, cannot be compromised.' He paused thoughtfully. 'Particularly at a time when we are about to put a renegade Time Lord to death for

precisely that same reason! It would be most embarrassing to be found committing exactly the same offence ourselves!

Ragnar frowned. He found Milvo's habit of treating everything as a kind of intellectual joke intensely irritating. 'Nevertheless, something must be done,' he said irritably. 'Action must be taken. We are all agreed on that, I believe. And we achieve nothing by idly spinning phrases!'

The third member of the sub-committee was – nondescript. Medium height, medium build, grey-haired and grey-robed, he had a facility for blending into the background – any background. His name was Sardon.

'I might, perhaps, be able to offer a solution,' he said mildly.

The other two looked warily at him. Sardon's origins were obscure, perhaps even humble. He was certainly not a member of any of the great Chapters, those powerful political and family groups that ruled – and contended endlessly for power – in Time Lord society. His demeanour towards his more distinguished colleagues was respectful and unassuming. Nevertheless, he carried a subtle aura with him – the aura of secret power. Sardon was an extremely influential member of the committee – possibly the most influential. He was the representative of the powerful Celestial Intervention Agency, that vast and shadowy organisation that underpinned the formal respectability of Time Lord rule.

The Agency wasn't afraid of getting its hands dirty. Some said they were never clean.

Sardon registered his colleagues' worried reaction and smiled. They talked and talked, these aristocratic Time Lords, but in the end it was Sardon and his kind who provided effective – sometimes brutally effective – solutions and cleaned up the mess.

'In my humble opinion, you are right,' he said soothingly.

'Which of us?' snapped Ragnar.

'Both of you.'

'Since we seem to hold diametrically opposed opinions,' murmured Milvo, 'it is difficult to see...'

'Not at all,' said Sardon. He nodded towards Ragnar. 'You are right – the situation is urgent and action must be taken.' He turned to Milvo. 'However, you are also right – the Time Lords cannot be seen to take it.'

‘You speak in paradoxes,’ protested Milvo. ‘How can we act and not act?’

‘I did not say we could not act. I said we must not be *seen* to act.’

‘Then how –?’

‘We must use an agent. Someone we can control, and if necessary, disown.’

Ragnar looked dubious. ‘The task is both delicate and dangerous. It will require a person of great intelligence, courage and ability. It will require many kinds of skills, diplomatic and scientific, not to mention a considerable amount of low cunning. All in all, it calls for a person of truly exceptional quality. Do you have such an agent at your command?’

‘I have one in mind.’

‘Can he be trusted?’ asked Milvo.

‘I think so,’ said Sardon. ‘His life is in my hands.’

‘How so?’ snapped Ragnar.

‘He has just been condemned to death.’

The Doctor, now in his first, and what looked very like being his last, regenerated form – his second body – stretched out on a comfortably upholstered couch in a luxuriously furnished chamber and contemplated his future...such as it was. Unless his luck changed very considerably, there wasn’t going to be much more of it.

Idly he gazed around him. The big room was decorated, or rather over-decorated, in authentic Time Lord style. It was fussy, ornate, elaborate; awash with over-stuffed furniture – ornamental tables, lamps, drapes, tapestries, paintings and pieces of sculpture – everything from a formal bust of an idealised Rassilon to abstract shapes filled, no doubt, with symbolic significance.

There was a food and drink dispenser, discreetly disguised as an elegant ormolu cabinet – a device which would provide gourmet food and drink from a hundred planets. There was an entertainment centre with an ample supply of music and holovids, and even the facility to provide holographic representations of live performance.

A variety of doors led to luxurious sleeping accommodation, and a variety of elaborate baths, showers and saunas. The suite

provided everything anyone could possibly need. It was the perfect place to live – or die.

The Doctor contrasted strangely with his opulent surroundings. He made a shabby, inconspicuous figure in his old black coat and disreputable check trousers. The gentle, humorous face, topped by the mop of untidy black hair, was calm and peaceful, despite the peril of his position.

For all the luxury of his surroundings, the Doctor knew he was in an oubliette, a superior Time Lord cell for important prisoners. He knew too that he might be left there to rot for endless days – left indeed until he either regenerated or died of natural causes. On the other hand, he might be taken out for execution at any moment.

On the whole though, Time Lord justice moved slowly, and no doubt they were still deliberating his mode of dispatch. He rather hoped they would spare him temporal dissolution, the sentence passed on those who had organised the War Games. ‘Bad enough not to exist any more,’ thought the Doctor. ‘But never to have existed at all..’

His mind went back over his recent past, the seemingly endless struggle with the ruthless alien War Lords. In pursuit of a lunatic scheme of galactic conquest, they had kidnapped soldiers from different time periods of Earth and used them as human pawns in a series of war games. Their ultimate aim was to mould the survivors into an all-conquering army of super-warriors.

The cumbersome plan was already beginning to collapse of its own accord by the time the Doctor arrived on the scene. At least some of the brainwashed human victims had shaken off their conditioning and come to realise their true situation. A resistance organisation had formed, and with the aid of this movement, and of his two human companions, Jamie and Zoe, the Doctor had brought about the defeat of the War Lords.

Then had come the final agonising decision. To achieve true victory it was necessary to return the kidnapped soldiers to their own time zones, and this was beyond the Doctor’s powers.

It could only be achieved with the help of his own people, the Time Lords – and to the Time Lords the Doctor was a wanted fugitive. To ask for their help would mean almost certain capture.

The Doctor frowned, recalling the strangest part of the

whole adventure. At the moment of victory, he had been visited by a manifestation of his future self. And not for the first time. It had happened once before, in a jungle on prehistoric Earth. Claiming to be the Eighth Doctor, this future self had interfered as the Doctor was contemplating – and *only* contemplating, he thought indignantly – drastic but effective action to deal with a wounded cave man, who was hindering his escape and that of his companions.

On his second appearance, this irritatingly young and handsome figure had once again taken a high moral tone, urging the Doctor to sacrifice himself for the good of the kidnapped human victims.

‘Do the right thing,’ he’d urged. ‘Whatever the risk it’s one we’ve both got to take.’

All very well for him, thought the Doctor. He’s not the one condemned to death! Except, of course, he was. He’d pointed it out at the time. If the Second Doctor ceased to exist, so would the Eighth.

On the other hand, the Eighth Doctor had maintained that *his* existence proved that the Second Doctor must have survived his capture.

Which of them was right?

Time will tell, thought the Doctor, not for the first time. It always does.

As the Doctor pondered the paradoxes of time travel, the door opened and someone came in. An insignificant-looking someone, a grey man in a grey robe.

The Doctor swung his feet from the couch and rose. ‘Execution time? Surely not. I’d hoped for a bit more ceremony. A detachment of those nice ornamental soldiers from the Capitol Guard, solemn drum-beats, that sort of thing.’

The grey man smiled thinly. ‘No, it’s not execution time yet, Doctor. Perhaps it will never be execution time at all – it’s up to you. My name is Sardon. I’ve come to offer you a deal.’

Chapter Two

Returning Hero

Major-General Sir Arthur Wellesley stood on the quarterdeck of HMS *Trident*, wrapped in his cloak against wind and sea-spray. Steadying himself against the roll of the deck by gripping the rail, he watched the white cliffs of Dover come slowly into view. He stood apart from the little knot of naval officers clustered deferentially about the Admiral – *Trident* was Admiral Rainier's flagship – and contemplated his past, and his future.

By the end of his eight years in India he had become a great man, a conquering hero. A string of brilliant victories against the French, and the rebellious Indian princes who were their allies, had done much to secure British rule.

It had been an exciting time, and a dangerous one. Wellesley always led from the front, and he had faced death a hundred times.

He remembered being cut off and surrounded by enemy troops at the Battle of Assaye – and that damned Sergeant Sharpe had turned up and saved him. Big brute of a fellow, fought like a demon. He'd rewarded him with a battlefield commission. Wouldn't do the man any good, of course. Officers who weren't gentlemen inevitably turned to drink and came to a bad end.

There had been many similar life-threatening situations. Somehow he had always escaped the dangers and survived. It was as if something watched over him.

Still, it had all been worthwhile in the end. During his time in India he had accumulated a personal fortune of forty-two thousand pounds. Not enough to make him a nabob, as the most successful plunderers of India were called, but enough to make him independent.

On his departure from India he had been praised and feted, presented with a golden vase worth two thousand guineas and a

thousand-guinea sword. Someone had even commissioned a bust of him – a bust entitled ‘The Napoleon of India’.

Now all that was about to change. Indeed, it had changed the moment he had boarded *Trident*. On an admiral’s flagship, a homeward-bound soldier, even a knight and a major-general, was very small beer. He had been treated with polite condescension, asked cursory questions about his achievements in India by people who weren’t much interested in his replies. To sailors, nothing that happened on land was of much importance, and the only glorious victories that mattered were those of the Navy – and there were plenty of those.

Nor would things change when he went ashore. It wasn’t only Napoleon who looked down on sepoy generals. Very similar views were held in Whitehall. Wellesley knew that to establish himself in England, and to rise still further in the service, he had to serve and succeed in a European war.

Then there was Kitty – Kitty Pakenham. They had a romantic understanding before Wellesley left for India and he had asked her brother, now head of the family, for her hand. He had been turned down flat. Soon to become an earl, Tom Pakenham had no intention of letting his pretty sister marry a penniless young officer.

Now, eight years later, the officer was a knight of the realm, a major-general, no longer penniless. The family would find it harder to refuse – if he asked. But should he ask? Kitty’s memory had faded over eight years. He’d thought there might have been other suitors. But a recent letter from a friend had informed him that Kitty was still unmarried, still living with her family. Always quiet and shy, she went little into society, living the life of a recluse. And, said the friend, ‘No one has paid her the slightest attention.’

There could be little doubt that Kitty, sweet shy Kitty, was still waiting for him. In which case, wasn’t it his duty to ask for her hand once more? Especially now when the request might well be granted? Arthur Wellesley had never neglected his duty.

Distracted by thoughts of love and war, Wellesley let go of the rail and began to pace the deck.

Suddenly a voice boomed down from above. ‘Wellesley! Look out!’

Wellesley looked upwards into the rigging and glimpsed

something flashing down towards him. Instinctively he leaped aside. The deck lurched in a sudden swell and he staggered and lost his balance, falling to one knee. In the same moment something flashed past his head and slammed into the deck beside him.

The noise attracted the attention of the little group of officers. They found the sight of Wellesley clambering awkwardly to his feet vastly amusing.

‘Still not got your sea-legs, Wellesley?’ one of them called.

‘One hand for yourself and one for the ship, y’know!’ cried another. ‘You landlubbers never learn!’

Young Midshipman Faraday, hovering at the edge of the group, was more concerned. He hurried over. ‘I trust you are not hurt by the fall, sir?’

‘Less so than if I had not fallen,’ said Wellesley grimly. He pointed to the deck at their feet. ‘One of your mariners aloft is damnably careless.’

At their feet lay a massive piece of oak, shaped like a giant egg and inset with two internal wooden wheels.

‘What the devil is it?’ demanded Wellesley.

Faraday knelt beside it. ‘It’s a pulley sir. Looks like the mains’l block.’ He gave Wellesley a baffled look. ‘But...it’s impossible. If this broke loose the sail would be down. Someone must have taken a spare block aloft for some reason and then dropped it.’ He shifted the pulley and looked up. ‘It’s all right, sir, the deck’s not scarred. A little smudged, but we’ll soon shift that.’

‘Damn your deck, boy,’ said Wellesley. ‘It fell just where I was standing. If I hadn’t moved it would have shattered my skull.’

‘Yes, of course, sir,’ said Faraday. ‘Carelessness with ship’s equipment aloft merits a flogging. I’ll see that the man responsible is found and punished.’

‘Do that,’ said Wellesley grimly. ‘And thank the man who warned me as well.’

‘Warned you, sir?’

‘Someone shouted a warning from up aloft. Bellowed like a foghorn, saved my life. You must have heard him.’

Faraday looked puzzled. ‘Can’t say I did, sir. Now, if you’ll excuse me?’ He hailed a nearby seaman. ‘Bosun, fetch a party to

clear this disgusting mess away and swab the deck. I'll just check the rigging, and see if I can find the culprit.'

He sprang into the rigging and disappeared upwards with monkey-like agility.

Wondering about the identity of his unknown benefactor, and reflecting that a possibly dirty deck seemed to matter much more than his potentially shattered skull, Sir Arthur Wellesley turned and went below.

In a void beyond Space and Time three voices conferred.

'Your plan failed, then?' The voice was a woman's, a rich contralto, and it could not conceal a certain quiet satisfaction.

'Unfortunately so,' said a young male voice sulkily. 'The others must have had someone aboard the ship as well – Latour, probably. He sent a telepathic warning, Wellesley moved, the missile missed.'

'Such a pity,' said the female voice mockingly. 'They preserved him from all your efforts in India, and now this one, too, has failed.'

'A pity indeed,' said the young man's voice. 'The move was so neat, so unobtrusive. History would never have missed an obscure Indian Army officer, killed by a tragic accident at the moment of his return. No Duke of Wellington – and a very different Waterloo!'

'History is tenacious,' said a third voice. This too was male – old and infinitely cynical. 'It resists change, tends always to revert to its original track. You must try again.'

'Oh I shall,' said the younger voice. 'Already I have an even better scheme, one which cannot fail. In a single blow, I shall crush them, by sea and by land. What I shall do –'

'Recount your triumph when it has actually happened,' said the old voice dryly. 'And our little Corsican?'

'We are keeping an eye on him,' said the seductive female voice. 'He is at a dangerous stage, and has many political enemies...'

'And your opposition? Have they been active?'

'They have made a few feeble attempts to sabotage his career,' said the young male voice arrogantly. 'They have had little success.'

'After all,' said the seductive female voice, 'in his case, history is on our side. Until the final catastrophe at Waterloo, our Napoleon's career was one of almost continual success. We have only to change the final result.'

'Wellington is the key to that,' said the young male voice. 'Wellington and Nelson. Once those pieces are removed from the board, my plan will take care of both at one stroke...'

'Beware complacency,' said the old voice. 'Napoleon too could be taken out of play. Like you, the Opponents might attempt some early intervention – and history would never miss an obscure lieutenant of artillery.'

'We shall be wary, Excellency,' said the female voice. 'With you as our Controller we cannot fail.'

'I am flattered by your confidence. But remember we are playing against our own kind. Do not underestimate them. Abide by our Rule. The hand of the Player must never be seen. Above all, remember the Credo.'

In the eternal night-darkness, three voices united in the ritual chant.

Winning is everything – and nothing.

Losing is nothing – and everything.

'All that matters is the Game.'

Chapter Three

The Deal

‘A deal,’ said the Doctor. ‘Good old Gallifrey. There’s always a deal, isn’t there?’

‘Fortunately, for you, Doctor, in this case there is. It is up to you to decide whether or not you wish to take advantage of it. If you’re too noble to compromise, you can always choose to stand by your principles and die.’

The deviousness and corruption of Gallifreyan politics had been one of the Doctor’s primary motives for leaving the Time Lords in the first place. He had become heartily sick of their endless intrigue, back-stabbing and double-dealing. However, it appeared that, for once, the system might actually be going to operate to his advantage.

The Doctor decided that, under the circumstances, the very special circumstances, it would be wiser to play the game. He had little choice. As his visitor had just pointed out, being condemned to death cuts down one’s ethical options very considerably. And if he was going to play the political game again he must do it wholeheartedly. The more greedy and grasping he appeared, the more they would trust him.

‘I’m willing to listen at least,’ he said carelessly. ‘After all, I’ve very little else to do. What do I get out of this proposition of yours?’

‘Your life, for a start. The death sentence commuted into a period of exile. Eventually, when the fuss has died down and all the scandal you’ve caused has been forgotten, there’s the possibility of restoration to full Time Lord status.’

‘Quite an attractive employment package under the circumstances,’ said the Doctor.

‘I should have thought so,’ agreed his visitor. ‘Especially when you consider the current alternative.’

‘And what do I have to do to earn all these highly desirable fringe benefits? Something you don’t care to dirty your hands

with, I suppose?’

‘You will be asked to carry out a mission, possibly several missions, for the people I represent.’

‘The Celestial Intervention Agency, I take it?’

‘If you care to think so, Doctor.’

‘What else can I possibly think? Who else but the Agency would be unscrupulous enough to employ a condemned criminal like me to do their dirty work?’

The insult left Sardon completely unperturbed. ‘You are free to draw your own conclusions, Doctor.’

‘And what are these missions?’

‘I should be happy to brief you on the first – once you have assented to my general proposition.’

The Doctor considered for a moment. ‘I think I can do that – provided that you assent to certain conditions of mine.’

‘Doctor, you are scarcely in a position to make terms –’

‘Oh, but I think I am,’ interrupted the Doctor. ‘You would never even have considered a scheme such as this unless you were desperate. That means you need me just as much as I need you. Possibly more.’

‘There are others we can employ.’

‘With my talents and qualifications? I doubt it.’

‘You’re very confident.’

‘I’m a genius,’ said the Doctor, simply.

It was Sardon’s turn to consider. After a moment he said, ‘And your conditions?’

‘I risked my life and sacrificed my liberty to ensure that the kidnapped soldiers on the War Games planet were returned to their proper places and times. I should like to assure myself that this has been done.’

‘You have the word of the High Council. Indeed, I can vouch for the fact that all the transfers were successfully carried out. I was one of those who supervised the whole operation, and I can give you my personal assurance...’

‘Quite,’ said the Doctor. ‘I should very much prefer the evidence of my own eyes.’

‘What exactly do you want?’

‘To be returned to one of the Earth time zones in question – a zone of *my* choosing – so that I can satisfy myself that all is well. Once I have done so – then I’m at your service! Refuse my

request and the deal is off.’

Sardon gazed thoughtfully at him, trying to measure the strength of the Doctor’s determination. Was he bluffing? Sardon sensed he was not. There was a core of steel beneath that unassuming exterior.

Irritated, he considered abandoning the whole operation. But the Doctor was right. At this crucial stage he would be difficult to replace. It was, after all, a case of setting a thief to catch a thief...

‘Well?’ said the Doctor. ‘What do you say?’

Sardon had the authority to agree at once, but he decided to make the Doctor sweat a little longer. There was still a chance he might crack, abandon his demands and plead for his life. Sardon temporised.

‘The decision is not mine to make, Doctor. I must consult with my colleagues. If they consent, I shall return to make the necessary arrangements.’

‘And if they refuse?’

‘Then you revert to your original status as a prisoner under sentence of death. Your fate will no longer be my concern.’ Sardon rose and moved towards the door. ‘We shall meet again shortly, Doctor. Or not, as the case may be.’

It was the summer of 1794 and Napoleon Bonaparte, newly appointed General of Artillery to the Army of Italy, was striding through the sun-baked streets of Nice. He was an unimpressive figure, thin and short, his hair lank and uncared for, his uniform worn and shabby.

He crossed the Place Dominique, newly re-named Place d’égalité, looking up at the gang of workmen busily erecting a guillotine. A little crowd of soldiers stood around its base. Some of them saluted him, some did not. Napoleon gave them one swift glance and marched on. They were typical of the soldiers he had to work with, the army that was to invade Italy. Shabby, half-starved, long unpaid, and, not unnaturally, on the verge of mutiny.

But he would make something of them. All his life he had faced difficulty and danger, always escaping death and achieving success. Something watched over him. Was he not, after all, a man of destiny?

On a sudden impulse he turned back. ‘Soldiers!’ he cried. ‘Gather round!’

Sluggishly they obeyed, staring curiously at the shabby little general with the dark face and burning eyes. ‘Soldiers!’ cried Napoleon again. ‘You are naked, starving. The state owes you much – it can give you nothing. I shall lead you into the most fertile plains on Earth. Rich provinces, great cities will be at your disposal. There you will find honour, glory and riches. Soldiers of Italy, will you be wanting in courage?’

There was an astonished silence, then a ragged cheer. Satisfied with his experiment, Napoleon moved on. He would parade the whole army, regiment by regiment, and deliver the same speech. Of course, it still needed work...

He walked on past the port to his lodgings, several rooms in a fine house in the Rue Villefranche, in the east of town. As he entered the hall, a portly, grey-haired man came forward to greet him. This was the former Count Laurenti, owner of the house, a minor aristocrat whose new-found revolutionary enthusiasm, and co-operation with the revolutionary authorities, had, so far, kept his head on his shoulders.

‘News from Paris, General Bonaparte,’ said Laurenti excitedly. ‘Citizen Robespierre has been executed!’

Napoleon froze for a moment, his eyes flashing. ‘You are sure?’

‘Positive. Arrested one day, beheaded the next. I had the news from Junot, your aide. He called here to tell you.’

Napoleon didn’t speak.

‘Perhaps the worst of the Terror is over with Robespierre gone,’ whispered Laurenti. ‘They will dismantle the guillotine, release the political prisoners.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Napoleon, and he went up the ornate marble staircase to his room. He flung open the window and stared out at the port. It nestled in a little cove and there were fishing boats drawn up on the beach. It reminded him a little of the Corsican coast of his childhood.

Robespierre, the great Robespierre, dead! Truly, the Revolution was devouring its children. The question was, who was next? Even in the Army, political influence was a necessity these days. In Paris, Napoleon had been one of Robespierre’s protégés, and his rapid promotion had made him enemies. This

could be their chance. There was nothing to be done, he decided. He turned away and sat at the table, plunging into the mass of paperwork that awaited him.

Some time later he was disturbed by angry voices from the front door. There were footsteps approaching his room, followed by a thunderous knocking at the door. ‘Yes?’

The door opened to reveal two gendarmes, an agitated Laurenti behind them.

‘Citizen-General Bonaparte,’ said one of the gendarmes. ‘You are under arrest!’

‘On what charge?’

‘Treason against the Republic. We have orders to take you to the prison at Fort Carre in Antibes.’

‘This is abominable,’ spluttered Laurenti. ‘The Republic has no more loyal citizen than General Bonaparte. I shall organise a petition...’

Bonaparte held up his hand, silencing Laurenti’s protests. ‘You have a warrant?’

One of the gendarmes produced a document. ‘Here, Citizen-General. Signed by Representative Saliceti.’

He handed over the document. Napoleon studied it.

It was just as he had feared. Saliceti had always hated him. Robespierre’s disgrace and death meant that Napoleon’s main source of political protection in Paris was no more. Saliceti had seized his opportunity, trumping up these charges of treason. They were false, of course – but many a head had rolled because of faked charges. There was nothing like a revolution for conveniently disposing of your foes.

Napoleon decided to bide his time. Just as he had enemies, he had friends who would work for his release.

He handed back the warrant. ‘Very well. I will come.’

The door to the Doctor’s luxurious oubliette opened, revealing the ornately uniformed form of a captain of the Capitol Guard. Behind him in the wide corridor were a couple of guardsmen – armed, the Doctor noticed, with staser-rifles.

Apparently it was to be execution after all.

The Doctor sighed and rose to his feet. ‘I take it my request failed to meet with approval?’ Before the captain could reply he went on, ‘I don’t call this much of a ceremony. Couldn’t you run

to a full-scale firing squad? I was once a member of the High Council, you know. I might even have been in line for President! Surely I deserve a better send-off than this?’

Sardon appeared from behind the guards. ‘Your request certainly failed to meet with approval, Doctor. Do you wish to withdraw your demands and accept your mission? It’s your last chance to live.’

The Doctor’s mind was racing. Was Sardon bluffing? On the whole, the Doctor thought he was. But should he bet his life on being right?

‘You’re lying,’ he said. ‘If my request had been refused, you wouldn’t be here. Unless you have a morbid taste for executions, of course. So what *are* you doing here?’

Sardon sighed. ‘You win, Doctor – though I wasn’t exactly lying. Your request certainly wasn’t approved of – however, it *was* granted. I am here to escort you to Temporal Dispatch.’

The Doctor waved towards the guards. ‘Then why...?’

‘You have proved to be a somewhat elusive character in the past. We don’t want you to disappear en route, do we?’

‘You think I’d try to escape?’ said the Doctor indignantly. ‘Nonsense, I never thought of such a thing! Where would I go?’

‘To take refuge with some of your disreputable Shobogan friends, perhaps?’

The Doctor, who had been contemplating just such a plan, smiled wryly and said nothing.

‘Come along, Doctor,’ said Sardon. The Doctor came.

He was marched along endless Capitol corridors to a concealed lift, which carried the Doctor and his escort deep under ground. They emerged into an area humming with machinery and walked between banks of consoles to a high-ceilinged, bare chamber.

Two Time Lords were waiting, one ancient and emaciated, the other sleek and plump. A complex control console lined one wall, attended by a technician.

‘My colleagues,’ said Sardon. ‘Gentlemen, this is the Doctor.’

‘Let’s get this nonsense over with,’ said the ancient Time Lord querulously.

He nodded to the technician, who busied himself at the console controls.

‘Extend your right arm, Doctor,’ said the second Time Lord.

The Doctor obeyed. There was a tingling sensation in his right wrist and a silver bracelet formed around it. The Doctor examined it. ‘What the devil is this?’

‘That, Doctor, is a ‘Time Ring,’ said the ancient Time Lord. ‘The technology, perhaps, is new to you.’

The Doctor tugged at the bracelet. There was, he noticed, no obvious point of closure. The thing appeared to have sealed itself.

‘It cannot be removed,’ said the sleek Time Lord. ‘At least, not by you.’

‘It will take you to the time zone you wish to visit,’ said Sardon. ‘And return you to us here, at a time we decide, to perform as we would wish you to.’

‘Anyone would think you didn’t trust me!’ said the Doctor indignantly.

The old Time Lord smiled thinly. ‘Have you decided which time zone you wish to visit?’

‘I have,’ said the Doctor.

‘Hold the time and place in your mind. The temporal transference beam will do the rest.’

He waved to the technician and a beam of light shone down from somewhere in the high ceiling. Slowly the Doctor faded away.

‘Well, it is done,’ said old Ragnar. ‘Mind you, I am not at all sure that it is wise.’

Milvo shrugged. ‘What harm? We can indulge him – for a time. The Doctor will be far more use if he serves us willingly.’

‘Precisely,’ said Sardon. ‘We hold him on a short leash.’ He turned to the technician. ‘Show us.’

The technician adjusted more controls and after a moment a monitor screen glowed into life. It showed a shabby figure standing beside a muddy road – a road that led through a desolate, ruined landscape.

‘See that the Doctor is observed at all times,’ ordered Sardon. ‘And keep the temporal retrieval mechanism on constant stand-by. Come, gentlemen. We must plan the next stage of this operation.’

Milvo yawned. ‘What further planning is needed? We retrieve the Doctor when we are ready, brief him, and dispatch him to carry out our mission.’

‘Yes, but not alone,’ said Sardon. ‘Whether the Doctor succeeds or fails in his own petty affairs does not greatly concern me. When he departs on our mission he must have a companion – one of our choosing. Brilliant as he is, he is erratic. He needs someone to monitor him, and keep him in line.’

‘Well who is going to do that?’ asked Ragnar peevishly. ‘You don’t appear to be having much success so far.’

‘I hold the Doctor firmly in my grasp,’ said Sardon. ‘With the Time Ring we can retrieve him at any time, whether he’s willing or not.’

‘And who is going to control him on our behalf?’ asked Milvo.

Sardon smiled. ‘I have the very person in mind. I think the Doctor will be pleasantly surprised.’

Chapter Four

Replay

The Doctor found himself standing at the edge of a road. It wasn't much of a road, mind you. It was muddy and rutted and potholed, barely distinguishable from the surrounding landscape.

It wasn't much of a landscape either. An unending sea of mud, stretching in all directions, broken up only by the occasional glimpse of a shattered farmhouse, or ruined barn. The land on either side of the road had once held houses and gardens and farms – fertile cultivated fields. But it had been fought over so often, churned up again and again by advancing and retreating armies that it had become a wasteland.

The soldiers of this war had a chilling name for the place: *No Man's Land*.

It was a dull and misty winter afternoon with a hint of rain in the air. From somewhere in the distance came the dull rumble of heavy artillery.

The Doctor waited. Soon he heard the sound of an engine coming towards him. The sound was rasping, spluttering and uneven, suggesting that the vehicle was in a bad way. But somehow it laboured on.

The Doctor peered through the mist in the direction of the sound. He saw a square vehicle, lurching along the road towards him. It was so caked with mud it was impossible to discern what colour it might once have been.

As the vehicle came closer the Doctor jumped up and down waving his arms.

'Hey!' he yelled. 'Hey, huzzay, hullo!'

The vehicle came to a halt. Close up, it was just possible to make out the red cross painted wide and fat on the side.

Through the open window, the Doctor saw a woman in uniform at the wheel of the ambulance. She had the faintly horsey good looks typical of the female English aristocrat.

Beside her was a young man. He wore the uniform of a lieutenant in the British Army.

‘Sorry to be a nuisance,’ said the Doctor. ‘I wonder if you could possibly give me a lift.’

‘A lift?’ echoed the woman. ‘Where to?’

‘Oh, to anywhere at all. I seem to have got separated from my delegation.’ The Doctor smiled in what he hoped was an appealing manner.

The woman smiled back. ‘I don’t see why not, sir, always room for a little one.’ She had a high, clear, upper-class voice.

‘Splendid, splendid!’ said the Doctor, rubbing his hands.

‘Seems to be my day for picking up stray lambs,’ she went on. ‘I found the Lieutenant here just back down the road wandering around.’ She held out her hand. ‘Jennifer Buckingham – Lady Jennifer actually, not that it matters a jot.’

The young man beside her said, ‘Carstairs, Jeremy Carstairs.’

‘Smith,’ said the Doctor. ‘Doctor John Smith.’

He studied the two young people thoughtfully. They were old friends, comrades-in-arms. The three of them had shared life-and-death adventures on the planet of the War Games. But Lady Jennifer and Lieutenant Carstairs didn’t know it. Not any more. The Time Lords had wiped it from their memories.

So they didn’t recognise him. Which, thought the Doctor, was just as it should be.

Carstairs got out of the ambulance and held open the passenger door. ‘Perhaps you’d care to sit in the middle, Doctor?’

The Doctor climbed onto the long front seat, and Carstairs got back in beside him and closed the door. Lady Jennifer put the engine into gear and with a spluttering and coughing the ambulance lurched on its way.

Just a few more checks, thought the Doctor. ‘Have you been out here long?’ he asked.

‘Only about six months,’ said Lady Jennifer. ‘Though I must say it seems like forever.’

‘I’ve been here for over a year,’ said Carstairs. ‘I came out near the beginning in ‘14. Had a couple of leaves, though.’

So far, so good, thought the Doctor. On the War Games planet, their memories blurred by their kidnappers, they would have been quite unable to answer such questions. One final test...

‘I should imagine you lose track of time out here,’ he said casually. ‘I certainly do. What’s the date exactly?’

Carstairs frowned. ‘It’s the 18th, I think, November the 18th.’

‘Year?’

‘1915 of course!’ Carstairs smiled a little uncertainly. ‘You can’t be that confused already, Doctor!’

‘November the 18th, 1915,’ confirmed Lady Jennifer. ‘How long have you been out here?’

The Doctor shrugged apologetically. ‘Just long enough to get myself lost and confused.’

Everything checked out, thought the Doctor. The Time Lords had kept their part of the bargain. Soon he would have to keep his. At the first opportunity he would slip away and wait for the Time Lords to retrieve him.

Little did he know that events were to take a very different course before that happened.

They continued chatting as the ambulance trundled on.

The technician watched the ambulance for a while. He yawned. Surely there was no need for continuous surveillance? He would check on the Doctor from time to time – when he remembered.

He switched off the monitor and turned away.

Chapter Five

Serena

The Lady Serenadellatrovella – known to her peers as Serena – was at work in the Capitol Library when the summons came. Seated at an ornately decorated terminal, one of the hundreds ranked in the vast, high-ceilinged hall, she was studying the records of the most recent Presidential Election, trying to work out the truth of what had actually happened, where it lay buried between the lines of the official accounts.

Serena was studying past politics for a reason. She was ambitious – politically ambitious. There *had* been female members of the High Council, of course. Time Lord society was far too evolved to countenance discrimination – at least, not openly. There had even been occasional female Presidents, but not many. Serena felt that there should be more – herself amongst them.

To achieve her aims, she had first to distinguish herself. Not burdened with undue modesty, she knew she had many advantages. Her family, for instance, one of the oldest and most powerful on Gallifrey. In theory all Time Lords were equal – but some were considerably more equal than others.

Unfortunately, her family had achieved all its ambitions long ago, and was now content to rest upon its distinguished history and its aristocratic laurels, regarding any participation in actual politics as rather vulgar.

Then there was her appearance. Tall and slender with green eyes and elegantly patrician features, her golden hair piled above a high forehead, Serena was startlingly beautiful. She even *looked* like a President.

The handsome and aristocratic young officers of the Capitol Guard regarded her with ambitions that were anything but political. None of them had enjoyed the slightest success. She was known as the Ice Maiden.

She was studying the events in the life of a certain Councillor Taskor, who had risen with meteoric speed and then suddenly vanished from public life, when her screen went blank and a message appeared. It was brutally short:

The Lady Serenadellatrovella will report immediately to Room 30007 in the Administrative Complex.

BY ORDER OF THE HIGH COUNCIL

Unaccustomed to arbitrary commands, Serena was tempted to ignore the message, however such a summons was unusual enough to be intriguing. And it wouldn't do to offend a body one was bent upon joining some day.

She closed the file she was working on, accessed the Capitol directory, and put up a map and detailed directions to her destination and memorised them.

Composedly she switched off her terminal, rose and made a stately exit from the library.

Several young scholars watched her go, sighed hopelessly, and returned to their studies.

Room 30007 proved to be one of a maze of mysterious control rooms and obscure offices deep beneath the Capitol. Serena entered and found herself in a small, plain office where a thin, dark, intense-looking young man sat at a terminal.

He looked up with interest – a little too much interest, she thought – but said nothing.

'I am the Lady Serenadellatrovella –' began Serena.

He rose and bowed. 'You are expected, my lady. This way.' He touched a hidden control and a door in the far wall slid aside. He waved her through, followed her, and the door closed behind them.

Serena found herself in a small but luxuriously furnished conference room. The highly polished table held a monitor and a communications console. Facing her, at the head of the table, sat an inconspicuous-looking grey-robed figure. He rose and bowed. 'Greetings, my lady. Thank you for coming.'

'The form of the summons gave me little choice,' said Serena icily.

'Please, be seated.'

Serena ignored the invitation. 'Why am I here?'

'If you will be seated, it will be my pleasure to explain. My name is Sardon. This is my assistant, Luco.'

Sardon might look unimpressive, thought Serena, but he was far from negligible. He was totally unimpressed by her for a start, unlike his assistant, and somehow he radiated a quiet and confident authority.

Luco pulled back a chair and Serena sat. Luco took the chair beside Sardon and the two of them faced her across the gleaming table.

Serena looked disparagingly at Sardon. 'You are a member of the High Council?' Her tone conveyed that she thought it extremely unlikely.

Sardon shook his head. 'The least of their servants. But I speak with their voice on this occasion – and their full authority.'

'What do you want of me?'

'You have been chosen for a mission. It offers you an opportunity to serve your planet and your people. It brings great dangers and great rewards.'

'What is this mission?'

Sardon paused. 'You must understand that this is an affair of the utmost security. Should you accept, you will speak of it to no one.'

'What if I refuse?'

'Then your memory of this interview will be erased.'

'That will not be necessary.'

'It will be done all the same, my lady,' said Sardon. 'Shall I continue?'

Serena inclined her head.

'You will accompany a renegade Time Lord known as the Doctor, a condemned criminal, to Earth in the eighteenth century,' said Sardon.

'Not a particularly pleasant assignment,' said Serena coolly. 'What is the necessity? And for what crime was this Doctor condemned?'

It was the dark young man who answered. 'For unauthorised temporal interference.'

'And the mission?'

'You will supervise his efforts to detect those perpetrating unauthorised temporal interference in human affairs.'

‘On the well-known principle of setting a thief to catch a thief?’ said Serena.

‘Precisely,’ said Sardon. ‘But let me reassure you, my lady. The Doctor is no common criminal. By the latter years of his first incarnation he was a distinguished member of the High Council, widely regarded as a potential President. But he was always difficult, rebellious. Eventually he went too far. He quarrelled with his colleagues over a point of principle – the circumstances are still obscure – stole an obsolete Type 40 TARDIS and absconded, taking with him a young relative who insisted, apparently, upon accompanying him. For some time he roamed the cosmos, interfering in the affairs of various planets, Earth in particular, on the side of what he conceived to be good. Not until now, some time after his first regeneration, has he been apprehended.’

‘How?’

‘He stumbled across a scheme which involved the kidnapping of large numbers of the citizens of Earth from different time zones. The Doctor engineered the defeat of the scheme, but returning the captured humans was beyond his powers. So he turned to us, his own people, for help. We returned the humans to their proper times and places.’

‘And the Doctor?’

‘He was captured, tried and condemned to death.’

‘It seems a poor reward for his altruism.’

‘Perhaps so. Now he has a chance to live, to redeem himself – with your help.’

Serena thought silently for a moment. For all Sardon’s talk of the High Council, she knew perfectly well who he represented. Only the Celestial Intervention Agency would launch an operation such as this. It was possible he had the High Council’s blessing as he claimed – and equally possible that they knew nothing of his plans. That hardly mattered. The Agency was a powerful, if hidden, force in Gallifreyan politics. And with their backing...

‘You spoke of rewards,’ she said.

Sardon leaned forwards. ‘You are ambitious, my lady...’

‘Is that surprising, in one of my family?’

‘Your family, although eminent, is relatively ineffectual,’ said Sardon bluntly. ‘It has long been inactive in politics. Political

success requires both money and influence. Those whom I represent are lavishly supplied with both. With their support...'

'With their covert support,' corrected Serena. 'I should not care to be publicly linked with...those who you represent. Someone of my name must be fastidious in her associates.'

The young man, Luco, flushed angrily. 'You would not be the first bearer of a noble name to benefit from our assistance.'

It must be galling to be universally despised, thought Serena. Even if you were universally useful.

Sardon waved his angry assistant to silence. 'Covert support, of course,' he said impassively. 'Such an arrangement would suit our purposes as well as yours.'

Quite so, thought Serena. It would scarcely suit the purposes of the Agency to have it known exactly how many members of the High Council it had bought or blackmailed. According to popular rumour, it was a good two-thirds, though some put the figure considerably higher.

Sardon's voice hardened. 'Well, my lady? Do you accept this mission or not?'

Serena considered briefly. There were dangers in forming an association with the Agency. They would certainly seek to control her, perhaps totally. Equally well, once she was in a position of power, she might well succeed in controlling them. The possibilities were intriguing. And as Serena knew, great success could never be attained without great risk.

'I accept, she said. 'When do I meet the Doctor?'

'Very soon,' said Sardon. 'He is currently on Earth, as it happens, checking that the Earth captives have been safely returned.'

Serena looked surprised. 'Whatever for? Surely you informed him that this had been done?'

'I did. He refused to accept my word – or that of the High Council.'

'And you permitted this?'

Sardon shrugged. 'He made it a condition of his acceptance of the mission.'

So, the Doctor had the strength to strike a bargain, thought Serena. Even under the shadow of death.

'You are confident of his return?'

'He is temporonically tagged,' said Luco. 'We can observe

him – and retrieve him – at any time. Would you care to take a look at him?’

‘Very well.’

Luco went to the monitor and operated controls. He waited for a moment and then nodded. ‘Yes, there he is.’ He stepped aside and waved Serena to the monitor.

She rose, and crossed to the screen. It showed a little group of figures outside the outer wall of some kind of chateau. One solitary figure was being marched up to the wall by a little group of soldiers.

She studied the picture more closely. The soldiers were carrying rifles. ‘This Doctor of yours...Is he a small, rather untidy man with a shock of black hair?’

‘That’s the Doctor,’ said Luco. ‘Scruffy little fellow, isn’t he?’

‘I should retrieve him without delay,’ said Serena calmly. ‘He appears to be about to face a firing squad.’

‘What?’ Sardon leaped to his feet, stared at the screen incredulously for a moment, then stabbed furiously at some controls. ‘Temporal Control? Retrieve the Doctor at once! At once, do you hear me? And Rassilon preserve you if you bring me back a corpse. Summon Councillors Milvo and Ragnar immediately.’

He whirled round to Serena. ‘Forgive me, I must go to Temporal Control at once. Thanks to those bungling fools this mission may be over before it has begun.’

He ran from the room, followed by Luco. Serena smiled and followed them at a more sedate pace. It was amusing to see the impassive Sardon lose control. She wondered if the little Doctor would survive.

Lieutenant von Schultz, the young officer in charge of the firing squad, placed the man who called himself the Doctor with his back to the chateau wall, and assembled the firing squad in front of him.

From a vantage point close by, an old man stood observing the scene with eager approval. He was about sixty, with a high forehead and hooded grey eyes. He was wrapped in a cloak against the morning chill, and he leaned upon an ivory handled stick. Beside him stood an extraordinarily beautiful woman with a cloud of black hair and startlingly blue eyes. She was wrapped

in furs and her expression, unlike that of the old man, was sombre and concerned.

His arrangements for the Doctor's execution complete, Lieutenant von Schultz looked towards the watching old man for instructions.

Savouring the moment the old man called mockingly, 'Blindfold, Doctor? Last cigarette? We must do things properly.'

'No blindfold,' said the Doctor. 'Not on such a lovely morning. And I don't smoke, it's very bad for the health you know.'

The old man smiled, and gestured to the lieutenant to proceed.

'Ready,' shouted Lieutenant von Schultz, his voice cracking a little. 'Aim...'

The soldiers raised their rifles.

Von Schultz, a sensitive soul, averted his eyes.

'Fire!'

Nothing happened and Lieutenant von Schultz looked up in surprise.

The firing squad was staring bemusedly at the section of wall where the odd little figure had been standing. They hadn't fired because there was nobody to shoot at.

The Doctor was no longer there.

The old man stared at the empty space in furious bafflement.

The beautiful dark-haired woman threw back her head and gave a peal of laughter.

'You jolly well took your time,' said the Doctor indignantly as he faded back into view in the Temporal Control anteroom on Gallifrey.

'You were only under intermittent surveillance,' said Milvo irritably. 'Can't you go anywhere without getting into trouble, Doctor?' He held out his hand.

The Doctor pushed back his sleeve and the Time Ring dropped into Milvo's palm.

'Now, Doctor, we have indulged your whimsy. It is time for your work to begin.'

'Just a minute before we start,' said the Doctor. 'There's something odd going on in Earth 1915. Some kind of historical interference. I'm not sure who's doing it or why, but it needs

looking into. I'd be happy to –'

'No, Doctor,' said Ragnar firmly. 'No more delays, distractions or diversions. We have much to do.'

The Doctor sighed. 'Yes, I suppose I do, don't I...'

Sardon burst into the room, Luco close behind. 'Is he –' He broke off, seeing the Doctor. 'You survived, I see.'

'Barely,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'My little trip was nearly over before it had begun.'

'I gave orders for continuous surveillance,' said Sardon, with a coldly furious glance at the terrified technician. 'My apologies, Doctor. There will be an enquiry.' He glanced at Milvo and Ragnar. 'Thank you for your attendance. I know that numerous duties await you, and I must not detain you further.'

More relieved than offended by this summary dismissal – the less they knew of Sardon's operation the better – Ragnar and Milvo made a dignified exit.

Sardon turned to the Doctor. 'Now, Doctor, if you will come with me...'

'One moment,' said the Doctor. 'I tried to tell your two colleagues but they didn't want to know. I stumbled across temporal interference on Earth in 1915 – the very thing you want me to investigate.'

'Indeed,' said Sardon. 'You must tell me more, Doctor.' He held up his hand. 'Not now. You need rest, refreshment...' He glanced at the Doctor, now somewhat bedraggled after his recent adventures. 'A change of clothes, perhaps...'

'I like these clothes,' said the Doctor indignantly. He looked down at himself. 'Though I admit a wash and brush-up wouldn't come amiss. Look, about this temporal interference...'

'Later, Doctor, at the briefing meeting. You shall tell me everything – and meet your new colleague at the same time.'

Chapter Six

The Briefing

Washed, brushed, tidied and considerably cleaner, the Doctor marched jauntily into the conference room. He was followed by Sardon, and by two members of the Capitol Guard who took up positions by the door.

Sardon dismissed the two guards with a wave of his hand. 'Station yourselves outside. Stay alert.'

The guards left and the door closed behind them.

'I see you still don't trust me,' said the Doctor.

Sardon smiled. 'My dear Doctor, if I could trust you, you wouldn't be of any use to me.'

Two people were waiting for them at the table, a dark, thin-faced young man seated behind a monitor screen, and a tall, startlingly beautiful young woman with green eyes and blonde hair. The young man rose as they entered, the young woman stayed put.

'My assistant, Luco,' said Sardon. 'This is the Lady Serenadellatrovella, who will be your companion on this mission. You may address her as Serena.'

The Doctor stared at Serena. 'Companion? You mean she's going to be my assistant?'

'No, Doctor,' said Serena. 'I'm going to be your supervisor.'

It wasn't a good start.

The Doctor was outraged. 'Supervisor? Now see here, Sardon, if you think I'm going to be bossed about by some inexperienced amateur...'

'I refuse to take part in this mission unless our respective positions are made clear,' said Serena coldly. 'If this – this convict refuses to acknowledge my authority, there is absolutely no point...'

'Convict?' said the Doctor indignantly. 'Who are you calling a convict you mannerless minx?'

‘You were convicted of a crime, were you not, Doctor? A capital crime, I believe?’

‘Well, yes, but...’

‘There you are then – you’re a convict. As far as I’m concerned,’ Serena went on calmly, ‘you’re simply out on parole. A parole which may well be revoked unless your behaviour shows considerable improvement.’

‘In my day,’ said the Doctor scathingly, ‘well brought up young ladies were taught to show respect for their elders and betters.’

‘Then perhaps your day is done, Doctor. What are you a doctor of, by the way?’

‘Practically everything!’

‘Lady Serena, Doctor, please,’ said Sardon soothingly. ‘Lady Serena will accompany you, Doctor, as our representative. She will ensure that you observe the designated parameters of your mission – and, of course, she will render you any assistance that lies within her power.’

‘There you are then,’ said the Doctor. ‘Assistant!’

‘Supervisor,’ said Serena.

Sardon sighed. ‘Let us not get bogged down in disputes over nomenclature. Lady Serena’s role contains elements of both functions. Now, shall we begin the briefing?’

The Doctor and Serena glared stubbornly at each other but neither spoke.

Taking silence for consent, Sardon said, ‘Luco, perhaps you would begin?’

Luco tapped controls and studied his monitor. ‘Temporal scanning has detected a pattern of systematic interference in the affairs of Earth. The pattern is concentrated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century – a period marked by extended bouts of warfare between England and France. In particular, there have been attempts to influence the careers of two key figures. Arthur Wellesley, who becomes in due course the Duke of Wellington, and Napoleon Bonaparte, who rises from lieutenant to general, and from First Consul to Emperor of the French. Others have been the subject of interference, but efforts seem concentrated on these two.’

‘What action has been taken so far?’ asked Serena.

‘Luco here paid a number of undercover visits to the

relevant period,' said Sardon. 'Unfortunately his efforts were completely unsuccessful.'

'What kind of interference do you suspect?' asked the Doctor. 'Positive or negative?'

'Both,' said Sardon. 'Those concerned are being both attacked and protected.'

'Interesting,' said the Doctor. 'It suggests the existence of two opposing factions.' He brooded for a moment. 'Let me tell you about my experiences on Earth in 1915, the time of their First World War.'

'Must you, Doctor?' said Serena.

'Yes I must. Just be quiet and listen, young lady. Perhaps you might learn something.'

He gave them a detailed account of his meeting with Major Winston Churchill, who had resigned as First Lord of the Admiralty when the failure of his plan to attack Turkey via the Dardanelles put a temporary end to his political career. He had returned to the Army, insisting on serving in the front line in France¹.

The Doctor told of the plot against Churchill. 'The plan was either to kill him, or to kidnap him, fly him to Berlin and frame him as a traitor,' he said. 'And with Churchill dead or disgraced, the Second World War would have gone very differently. A successful German invasion in 1940, and Hitler victorious!' He looked round the little group. 'Don't you see the similarity? It's the same technique! An attempt to pervert the course of human history by sabotaging the career of a key figure *at an early stage!*

Almost in spite of herself, Serena found that she was fascinated by the Doctor's story – and impressed by his courage and resourcefulness.

'Did you discover who was responsible?' she asked.

'There were two of them,' said the Doctor. 'Count Ludwig Kroner and Countess Malika Treszka. A man in his sixties – high forehead, hooded grey eyes – and an extraordinarily beautiful young woman. She had black hair and blue eyes, an unusual combination.'

'You sound rather taken with her, Doctor,' said Serena.

¹ For a full account of the Doctor's adventures in 1915, see Doctor Who: Players by Terrance Dicks.

‘Nonsense,’ said the Doctor. ‘Fortunately, however, she took a fancy to Major Churchill and helped us to escape.’

‘Helped your fellow captives to escape,’ said Serena. ‘Not you.’

‘I’m not as handsome as Major Churchill,’ said the Doctor modestly. ‘Besides, my capture wasn’t her fault. I stayed behind to cover the getaway of the others, and lingered a little too long.’

‘Did you discover anything more about them?’ asked Sardon.

‘Not really. The Count claimed to be Danish, the Countess, Hungarian, but I rather doubt it. I’m not sure they were even human.’

‘Why do you say that, Doctor?’ asked Luco curiously.

‘I’m not sure. I sensed something about them – something alien.’ He smiled wryly. ‘Perhaps it takes one to know one!’

Sardon rose. ‘Well, Doctor, we have told you all we can. Perhaps you would care to go over the temporal interference traces with Luco here? You will need to decide at what point you wish to intervene.’ It was a command, not a suggestion. ‘If you will come with me, Lady Serena, I will brief you on the transportation arrangements. We will meet later at the TARDIS and your first mission can begin.’

Serena and Sardon left the conference room and Luco went over to the monitor. He adjusted controls, and complex, swirling patterns appeared on the screen.

‘Are you familiar with temporal graphology, Doctor?’

‘Rather more so than you, I imagine, young man,’ said the Doctor testily. ‘Get on with it!’

Luco picked up a light-rod and pointed to the screen. ‘The first traces are apparent *here...*’

Some time later the Doctor, his head still spinning with whirling tempographs, was marching along a corridor with Luco, escorted by two members of the Capitol Guard.

They still didn’t trust him, he reflected. Hadn’t it occurred to them that once inside the TARDIS he could soon slip out of their grasp? There was Serena, of course, but he could easily deal with her. Strand her on some pleasant little planet like Metebelis Three, send a message telling the Time Lords where to pick her up...

On the other hand he *had* given his word, and the Time

Lords had kept theirs. But was a promise extracted under the threat of death really morally binding?

The Doctor was still wrestling with his conscience when they turned a corner into a shorter dead-end corridor. There was a door at the end. It opened as they approached, revealing a small bare chamber. In the centre of the chamber stood a police box. The Doctor and Luco and their escort went through, and the door closed behind them.

The Doctor stood for a moment, beaming at the familiar square blue shape. Now he was reunited with the TARDIS, things would sort themselves out.

He gave the old girl an affectionate pat, and as if in response the door swung open. The Doctor turned to the two guardsmen. ‘Thank you, gentlemen, we shan’t need your services any more. A very smart turnout, if I may say so.’

The guards looked somewhat nonplussed. Prisoners didn’t usually dispense compliments. Then again, since their duties were largely ceremonial, they very rarely had any prisoners.

They came to attention, saluted, turned and marched away.

The Doctor went into the TARDIS, Luco close behind him.

Sardon and Serena were standing by the console, but the Doctor ignored them. He froze, looked around the control room. Superficially everything was the same – but different. Things seemed more...streamlined, and the old, comfortable shabbiness was gone. Everything was gleaming and new.

He turned indignantly to Sardon. ‘This isn’t my TARDIS!’

‘Well of course it isn’t, Doctor. We could hardly send you on a potentially dangerous mission in an obsolete Type 40.’

The Doctor waved his hands. ‘But – but the exterior...’

Sardon smiled. ‘We copied your quaint blue box-shape to make you feel at home, Doctor. But it’s only temporary. In future the TARDIS will appear to be whatever you need it to be. This model has a fully operational chameleon circuit.’

‘I was always going to repair the one on my TARDIS,’ said the Doctor defensively. ‘Things kept turning up somehow, and what with one thing and another...’

He swung around, scanning the control room. He seemed to be sniffing the air. ‘I don’t like it! It feels different, alien. A TARDIS isn’t just a machine, you know. There’s a telepathic

link. One builds a relationship over the years. *My* TARDIS was an old friend.'

'Sentimental nonsense, Doctor,' said Serena crisply. 'This TARDIS is a newly designed, fully functional Type 97. A great improvement on your old relic.'

'I like old relics,' said the Doctor sulkily. 'I'm something of an old relic myself.' He marched over to the many-sided console and walked around it. 'The whole configuration of the controls is different! How am I supposed to operate it?'

'You have no need to operate it,' said Sardon. 'Lady Serena is fully conversant with this model. You have only to tell her where and when you wish to go.'

'This is absurd! If I'm not to be in control of my TARDIS –'

'Ah, but as you yourself pointed out, Doctor, it isn't your own TARDIS,' said Sardon. 'It is ours.'

'It is equipped with everything you'll need, Doctor,' said Lucio. He waved towards a monitor set into the console. 'A full record of the tempographs that alerted us to the interference. A complete and detailed archival chronography of Earth history...'

'Earth history as it is *intended* to be, that is,' said Sardon. 'Without alien interference.'

'There is a complete wardrobe of Earth clothing, suitable outfits for every period. Also a variety of identification papers and various documents of authority. A generous supply of Earth currency – paper, gold and silver, in the form of appropriate notes and coins.'

'All right, all right,' said the Doctor. 'Let's get started, shall we?'

'Have you decided on your entry point?'

'I have.'

'Very well,' said Sardon. 'Let me emphasise one thing, Doctor. Your mission is to observe any temporal interference and, if possible, to identify those responsible. That done, you will return and report. *We* shall deal with the offenders. You are not to take any action yourself. Do you understand what I am saying to you?'

The Doctor looked hard at him. 'Oh yes. I understand very well.'

'Then we will leave you. Goodbye Doctor, Lady Serena. Goodbye and good luck.'

Sardon and Luco left the TARDIS, and Serena went to the control console. She turned to the Doctor. 'Where to, Doctor?'

'The South of France. A little town on the coast called Antibes.'

'And when?'

'1794, Earth time. August the 9th.'

'Certainly, Doctor,' said Lady Serena, her hands flickering over the controls. 'Morning or afternoon?'

Sardon and Luco were standing in the doorway of the chamber. Luco wasn't happy.

'With respect, I am not convinced of the wisdom of this scheme. An amateur and a renegade! Why not send one of our own people? Why not send me again?'

'And interfere in the process of human history? My dear Luco, what a shocking idea.'

'Do you think the Doctor won't interfere?'

'Of course he will. He's incapable of doing otherwise.'

'Then surely the effect is the same.'

'Not at all. The Doctor's mission is strictly unofficial. As far as the cosmos knows, he is still a renegade on the run.'

'But the presence of the Lady Serena –'

'If he fails – an impressionable young person seduced into joining him.'

'And if he succeeds?'

'Our representative – demonstrating that the operation was carried out responsibly, under proper supervision.'

'You think her presence will restrain the Doctor?'

Sardon shrugged. 'I doubt it. But if the Doctor interferes in human history, he will be doing so against my express orders. You yourself heard me issue them.'

'In the full knowledge that they would not be obeyed!'

'Precisely! I –'

Sardon broke off as a pleasantly musical sound, a sort of crooning, humming filled the air and the TARDIS faded away before their eyes.

'The question has become academic,' said Sardon briskly. 'The Doctor is on his way.'

Chapter Seven

Execution Day

The Governor of the fortress of Fort Carre in Antibes stared at his visitor in unbelieving horror. 'Citizen-Representative Latour, are you sure of this instruction?'

The Citizen-Representative, a tall, hawk-faced man in sombre black, said impassively, 'The orders of the Committee of Public Safety are quite clear, are they not?' He tapped the document on the table.

'But – execution?!' stammered the Governor. 'I thought, we all thought, the Citizen-General had been cleared, and would soon be released. Now comes this order for summary execution.'

'Your expectations are quite irrelevant,' said Latour. 'All that need concern you is the decision of the committee.'

'But it is all most irregular. There has been no formal trial, not even a tribunal. And surely, in the case of such an eminent prisoner as the Citizen-General...'

'The Citizen-General has been tried *in absentia* in Paris. The sentence is death.' Latour tapped the document. 'As you see.'

'But why is the decision so sudden?'

'Fresh evidence has been discovered. Evidence that Citizen-General Bonaparte accepted a bribe of a million livres from the Italians to sabotage the Italian campaign. The Committee feels that an immediate example must be made to discourage the activities of further traitors.'

'I refuse to believe it,' said the Governor. 'General Bonaparte has always been a poor man, he cares only for his duty.'

'Perhaps General Bonaparte became weary of his poverty,' said Latour. 'It is the poor man who is most susceptible to the lure of foreign gold.'

'Not General Bonaparte.'

'There are other charges,' said the Representative wearily. 'I

am tired of this wrangling, and I wish to hear no more protestations. I bring you a warrant for General Bonaparte's immediate execution, ratified by the Committee of Public Safety in Paris. Do you refuse to carry it out?

'I cannot refuse,' said the Governor. 'As you know full well.' The Revolutionary Committee of Public Safety was all-powerful. To incur its disfavour meant death – as Robespierre had recently discovered.

'Then proceed with the arrangements for the execution. You have the necessary apparatus?'

'There *is* a guillotine here at the fort,' admitted the Governor reluctantly. 'In the rear courtyard. It has not been used since...for some time.'

He meant, but dared not say, since the worst days of the Terror, when counter-revolutionary heads had rolled in the south, as they had all over France. 'It may be – unserviceable,' he went on.

'Have it checked and if necessary repaired,' ordered Citizen-Representative Latour. 'We wouldn't want anything to go wrong, would we? I have certain other business in the area. I shall return as soon as it is concluded – and I shall expect to find everything in readiness for the execution.' He paused at the door. 'I warn you, Governor, do not fail me. Delay in carrying out the orders of the Committee of Public Safety could be seen as counter-revolutionary activity. Nobody, whatever their position, is immune from the justice of the people.' He stalked out, leaving the Governor uneasily fingering his own neck. His cravat suddenly seemed too tight.

The strangely shaped device in the centre of the control console – the Doctor supposed it must be a new design of time-vector generator – ceased its smooth rise and fall and Serena looked up.

'We have arrived, Doctor.'

She switched on the exterior monitor and the Doctor found himself looking at a vista of fountains, flowerbeds and palm trees.

'Where are we?'

'A small park on the outskirts of Antibes.'

The Doctor rubbed his hands. Now that the adventure was beginning, his spirits were rising rapidly. 'Splendid. Let's take a

look outside.’

‘Not dressed like this,’ said Serena. ‘I propose to go and change. You had better do the same. This way, Doctor.’

She left the control room and the Doctor followed.

Serena showed him to a vast, mirror-walled dressing room, where an astonishing variety of clothes hung in long racks. ‘You should find something suitable here. The documentation files are in the adjoining room. I’ll meet you back in the control room.’

The Doctor strode into the control room wearing white breeches, a neatly tailored, long-tailed black coat with frilled shirt and cravat, and gleaming black boots, the whole ensemble completed with a short travelling cloak.

Serena appeared moments later wearing a long, high-waisted gown, a travelling cloak and bonnet. ‘Very becoming,’ said the Doctor. ‘Shall we be off?’

‘I take it you have provided yourself with suitable documentation?’

The Doctor patted his breast-pocket. ‘I am Citizen-Representative Henri Dupont, a special investigator for the Committee of Public Safety, authorised to go practically anywhere and do practically anything.’

‘How nice for you,’ said Serena.

‘What about you?’

‘I have papers identifying me as Marie Lebrun, occupation – seamstress, residing in Paris.’

‘That’s very unassuming of you.’

‘I assumed that since we are about to enter an immediate post-revolutionary era, with the Terror not completely over, the assumption of too aristocratic an identity would be unwise.’

‘Quite right, my dear, mustn’t lose your head,’ said the Doctor. ‘Citizeness-Seamstress Lebrun, a good honest name and a good honest trade. That should do very well.’

‘Won’t people be curious about me? About why I’m with you, I mean. If you’re so important, why are you dragging a humble little seamstress around with you?’

The Doctor paused, choosing his words. ‘For a start, you don’t look much like a seamstress, you’re much too beautiful. And well...’

The Doctor spoke completely matter-of-factly but Serena

found that she was pleased by the compliment, and annoyed at herself for being pleased.

‘Go on, Doctor.’

‘Believe me, it’s not at all unusual for important political figures to be accompanied on their missions by attractive and unexplained young ladies. No one will ask any questions, especially in France.’

‘I see,’ said Serena icily. She touched a control. The TARDIS doors opened and they emerged into the sunshine of the park.

The park stood on a little hill. Below them, the narrow streets of the small town stretched down to the harbour, where the massive shape of Fort Carre was outlined against the clear blue sky.

The Doctor sniffed the warm, flower-scented air. ‘Very pleasant. What about the TARDIS?’

‘What about it?’ said Serena.

The Doctor glanced over his shoulder. The TARDIS was nowhere to be seen. In its place stood a small, ornamental fountain.

‘Jumping Jehosaphat!’ said the Doctor. ‘It’s so long since I had a working chameleon circuit...Let’s hope we recognise it when we get back. Come on!’

‘Where to?’

‘The fortress,’ said the Doctor. ‘Napoleon was briefly imprisoned there about this time.’

‘What for?’

‘Some trumped-up charge. The Revolution was starting to implode and everybody was arresting everybody on suspicion of everything.’

‘What happened?’

‘The charges collapsed and he was released.’

‘Then why are we here?’

‘It was an unstable period,’ said the Doctor. ‘He could just as easily have been guillotined, lots of innocent people were.’

‘So if somebody wanted to intervene in history...’ said Serena.

‘Exactly,’ said the Doctor. ‘This would be a very good time, with Napoleon at his most vulnerable. And the scan showed temporal interference at just this period.’

They began walking towards the park gates.

Napoleon Bonaparte sat at the little wooden table in his room at the fort. He was writing to Representative Saliceti, one of the men responsible for his arrest. He knew Saliceti wouldn't listen – after all, he was the one who had dreamed up the fake charges in the first place. But it was politically important to keep on proclaiming one's innocence as loudly as possible.

You have suspended me from duty, arrested me and declared me suspect. I am disgraced without being judged, or judged without being heard...

He looked up as he heard the door to his room open. A voice whispered, 'Citizen-General!'

He looked up and saw one of the sentries who were always stationed outside his door. The soldier put a finger to his lips and came into the room.

'Forgive the interruption, Citizen-General.'

'Well?'

'There is a plan to free you, Citizen-General, this very night. Colonel Junot, your aide, has recruited several of the garrison, we are all agreed...If the sentries on duty refuse to co-operate there are enough of us to overcome them.'

'No! I forbid it.'

'But Citizen-General, once you are free, back at your headquarters and surrounded by your soldiers, let them try to rearrest you if they dare.'

'I tell you no! I am touched by your loyalty – by all your loyalties. But to escape would be to admit my guilt, and I am guilty of nothing. I must be cleared, cleared by the authorities and released.'

'But what are your soldiers to do, Citizen-General? How can we help you?'

'Tell Junot and the other officers to continue to urge my innocence to General Dumerbion and the Representatives. That is how they can serve me best.'

'I urge you to reconsider, Citizen-General,' said the soldier urgently. 'To escape may be your only chance. Even tonight may be too late.'

'What do you mean?'

The soldier lowered his voice. 'Today the Governor received a visit from a member of the Committee of Public Safety. Voices

were raised...After his visitor left, the Governor ordered an inspection of the guillotine in the rear courtyard. It is to be placed in full working order...'

'No doubt some poor fellow is to be executed,' said Bonaparte. 'One of the other prisoners. It is very sad but...'

'There are no other prisoners, Citizen-General,' said the sentry. 'Only you.'

There came the sound of footsteps in the corridor and the sentry moved hurriedly to the door.

The Governor entered, his face grave. He banished the sentry with a gesture and turned to Bonaparte.

'Citizen-General Bonaparte, I must ask you to prepare yourself. I bring grave news.'

The Doctor and Serena were enjoying a pleasant stroll through the narrow streets of Antibes. The sleepy little southern town basked peacefully in the afternoon sunshine and the streets seemed almost deserted. 'Nice to see the Riviera before it becomes fashionable and over-crowded,' said the Doctor. 'First the English aristocracy came, then old Scott Fitzgerald and all those rich Americans. By the time Brigitte Bardot settled in San Tropez you could hardly move. And then there were the Germans with their beach towels.'

'It's quiet enough now,' said Serena. 'Where is everybody?'

The Doctor produced a Breguet watch from his fob-pocket and consulted it. 'Lunch-time,' he said solemnly. 'Every good Frenchman is at lunch from twelve till two. It takes more than a revolution to change that!'

They arrived at the imposing pile of Fort Carre, looming over the harbour, and the Doctor marched straight up to the sentry at the main gate.

'I am Citizen-Representative Dupont of the Committee of Public Safety,' he said authoritatively. 'I wish to see the Governor immediately.'

The sentry called the Sergeant of the Guard and the Doctor repeated his demand.

The sergeant looked harried. 'I regret, Citizen-Representative, the Governor is engaged.'

'My business cannot wait,' snapped the Doctor. 'Engaged with what?'

‘With the, er, the ceremony...’ said the sergeant evasively.

‘What ceremony?’

‘The execution, Citizen-Representative. If you could just be patient, I’m sure the Governor will see you as soon as it’s over...’

‘Whose execution?’

‘Citizen-General Bonaparte. It’ll be over in a few minutes. It may be over already...’

‘What!’ roared the Doctor. ‘This is exactly what I was sent here to prevent. Take me to the place of execution immediately!’

Serena was impressed, almost in spite of herself. Such was the force of authority emanating from the Doctor that the sergeant obeyed as if hypnotised.

‘This way, Citizen-Representative.’

The sergeant led them through an arch, across a central courtyard, through another arch and into a smaller courtyard behind the fort. In the centre of the courtyard rose the sinister shape of a guillotine. A little group of soldiers and civilians stood at its foot. Two shirt-sleeved soldiers were on the scaffold, operating the machine.

Just as they entered the yard the triangular blade of the guillotine came crashing down.

For one ghastly moment the Doctor thought he was too late. With enormous relief he saw that the execution platform of the guillotine was empty. This had been a test. A final test.

One of the civilians, a tall, hawk-faced man dressed in black, called, ‘Satisfactory. Bring out the prisoner.’

A man entered the courtyard from a nearby doorway. A smallish man in shirt and breeches. His hands were bound behind him, and his lank black hair was tied in a tight queue at the back of his neck. He was flanked by two soldiers.

The sergeant marched up to the little group by the guillotine. ‘Gentleman to see the Governor on urgent business.’ He glanced at Serena. ‘Gentleman and lady.’

‘Not now,’ snapped the hawk-faced man.

The Doctor strode forward. ‘Yes, now! My business will not wait. Are you the Governor?’

A worried-looking grey-haired man said, ‘I am the Governor. What can I do for you, sir?’

‘For a start, you can explain what is going on here.’

‘We are about to execute Citizen-General Bonaparte.’

‘On what authority?’

The Governor turned to the hawk-faced man. ‘The authority of a death warrant delivered by Citizen-Representative Latour – this gentleman here.’

‘I demand to see it!’

‘By what right?’ asked Citizen-Representative Latour.

‘I am Citizen-Representative Dupont, Special Investigator for the Committee of Public Safety,’ said the Doctor imposingly. He stared accusingly at Latour. ‘All our Representatives are well known to me. You, I may say, are not among them.’

‘Nor are you known to me,’ said Latour.

Naturally not, since they were both impostors, thought the Doctor.

Latour returned to the attack. ‘This man is an impostor, Governor. Seize him!’

‘I have all the necessary papers to prove my identity,’ said the Doctor. He produced an impressive sheaf of documents.

‘As have I,’ said Latour, producing an even bigger sheaf.

Both men thrust their documentation at the beleaguered Governor. He took and studied them in turn, first Latour’s and then the Doctor’s, and returned them to their owners.

‘Both sets appear to be authentic,’ he said helplessly. ‘How can I tell otherwise? We have reached a stalemate.’

‘Not quite,’ said Latour. He produced a roll of parchment and spread it out. ‘I hold a death warrant for Citizen-General Bonaparte, signed by the Committee of Public Safety.’ He held it up to the Doctor. ‘Do you bear a pardon?’

‘Why would I carry a pardon for something which was never supposed to happen in the first place?’ said the Doctor. ‘The charges against General Bonaparte have proved to be groundless and are all dismissed. I was sent here from Paris to arrange for his immediate release.’

‘Nonsense!’ cried Latour. ‘This man is lying. Carry on with the execution.’

He brandished his parchment menacingly.

‘That death warrant is a forgery Governor,’ shouted the Doctor. ‘This man is an impostor.’

‘You are the impostor, Dupont,’ snarled Latour. ‘I warn you Governor, if this execution is not carried out immediately, you will replace Bonaparte at the guillotine!’

The Governor paled at the threat. He looked appealingly at the Doctor. 'I am sorry, Citizen-Representative. Since the warrant appears genuine, my hands are tied, there is nothing I can do.'

'Of course there is something you can do,' said a cold, clear voice. It was Serena, speaking for the first time. All eyes turned towards her.

'You can *delay* Governor,' she went on. 'Delay until the full truth is known.'

'But what is the point of that, Mademoiselle? The decision must still be made. Where is the benefit in delay?'

'Do use your intelligence, my dear Governor. If this unfortunate man has truly been condemned, you can always execute him later. All that has been lost is a little time.'

The Governor nodded. 'Yes, that is true.'

'On the other hand, if you execute him now in error, his head can scarcely be restored to his shoulders.'

The tormented Governor seized on the solution with enthusiasm. 'And that is undeniable. A most logical suggestion, Mademoiselle. The execution will be postponed, and you, gentlemen, will both remain in the fort as my guests until this matter is cleared up.'

The Doctor gave Serena a thoughtful look. Latour and his warrant could hardly survive investigation. But neither would the Doctor's cover story. They'd saved Bonaparte's head, at least for the moment. Possibly at the cost of their own.

Serena had been watching Latour, studying his reaction, which appeared to be one of baffled fury. Suddenly she shouted, 'Doctor, look out!'

Latour had snatched a heavy pocket-pistol from the side pocket of his coat. He swung round and trained it not at the Doctor, but at the silent, bound prisoner, who stood waiting his fate.

The Doctor sprang, grabbing Latour's wrist and forcing his arm upwards. The pistol exploded with a thunderous report. The Doctor and Latour fell to the ground, grappling furiously. The pistol, the Doctor saw, had a second barrel...

He tightened his grip on Latour's wrist and grabbed the pistol barrel with his other hand, trying desperately to wrest it free. But Latour was appallingly strong and wiry. He wrenched

himself from the Doctor's grasp, sprang to his feet and took careful aim at the prisoner.

There was the sharp crack of a pistol shot – and Latour staggered and fell.

A tall, extraordinarily beautiful woman had come into the courtyard. She wore a long black travelling cloak and she had a cloud of black hair and, incongruously for her colouring, deep blue eyes.

The Doctor scrambled to his feet, staring at her incredulously. They had met before. She had called herself Countess Malika Treszka, and she had been part of the plot to kidnap Winston Churchill.

The surprising thing was that the meeting had taken place in the Doctor's past and Earth's future – in a chateau in northern France in 1915.

Chapter Eight

Reunion

The dark-haired woman tucked the pistol inside her cloak and approached them. Ignoring the rest of the group, she came close to the Doctor.

‘Why, Doctor, how nice to see you again.’

The Doctor bowed. ‘An unexpected pleasure. A very unexpected pleasure, if I may say so. A considerable amount of time separates this meeting and our last.’

The Countess smiled. ‘It seems like a hundred years since we first met – doesn’t it?’

It was that and more, thought the Doctor. They’d first met in 1915, over a hundred years in the future. Sometimes the paradoxes of time travel made even the Doctor’s head spin.

‘So it does,’ said the Doctor. ‘At least a hundred years, Countess.’

She held up her hand. ‘No titles, please. I resigned mine when I joined the Revolution.’

‘My companion did much the same thing. And I have dispensed with my doctorate. I am now Citizen-Representative Dupont, Special Investigator for the Committee of Public Safety.’

‘Of course you are, Doctor. Even with our new names, we are old friends, are we not?’

The Governor bustled forward. ‘You identify this gentleman, Madame?’

‘Of course.’

‘And you are?’

‘I am Madame Lafarge, a close personal friend of General Dumerbion. I am here on the General’s business.’

‘And what business might that be, Madame?’

‘The immediate restoration of General Bonaparte to freedom.’

The Doctor nodded at the bound figure, standing motionless between the two soldiers. ‘May I suggest that you release the General, Governor?’

By now the Governor was thoroughly confused. He was a simple soul, and the rapid progression of dramatic events had been too much for him.

‘I’m not sure...the situation remains more than a little unclear...’

The Doctor pointed to the huddled body of Latour, sprawled face downwards on the cobbles. ‘This man’s own actions prove the falsity of his claims. He tried to involve you in the judicial murder of General Bonaparte. When that failed, he attempted to assassinate him himself.’

The Governor hesitated, still confused and indecisive.

‘I think I can resolve your difficulty, Governor,’ said Madame Lafarge. ‘Since General Dumberbion knew I was coming to Antibes, he entrusted me with this letter.’ She produced an envelope from beneath her cloak and held it out. ‘All charges against General Bonaparte have been investigated and proven groundless. He is to be released at once and restored to his former rank and duties.’

The Governor took the envelope, extracted the letter and studied it. He beamed. ‘Clarity at last! This letter is undoubtedly genuine. I recognise the General’s signature – and indeed the ink is still fresh!’ He snapped orders to the soldiers guarding Bonaparte and one of them began freeing him from his bonds.

‘May I ask how your so-timely intervention came about?’ he asked.

‘We heard rumours that the General’s enemies were plotting against him,’ said Madame Lafarge. ‘I set off from Nice the moment the letter was written.’

‘I discovered the details of the plan in Paris,’ said the Doctor. ‘I hurried here for exactly the same reason.’

‘Of course you did,’ said Madame Lafarge. She glanced curiously at Serena. ‘Won’t you introduce your charming companion?’

The Doctor beckoned Serena forward. ‘Permit me to introduce Mademoiselle Lebrun, my – ward. Mademoiselle Lebrun, Madame Lafarge.’

‘And what is Mademoiselle’s occupation?’

‘She is travelling with me to broaden her experience of the world.’

‘I’m sure you’ll do that for her, Doctor,’ said Madame Lafarge. The two women looked at each other with instant mutual dislike.

Bonaparte strode over to them, rubbing his wrists. He bowed. ‘Citizen, Citizeness.’ He turned to the Doctor. ‘You have saved my life twice. Once from Madame Guillotine...’ He looked at the sinister machine in the middle of the courtyard and shuddered. He prodded Latour’s body with the toe of his boot. ‘Once from the bullet of this assassin.’

‘I tried,’ said the Doctor modestly. ‘In both instances it was this lady who actually succeeded.’

‘I am well aware of it,’ said Bonaparte. He took Madame Lafarge’s hand, bowed over it and kissed it. ‘Whoever else you are, Madame, you are quite clearly my guardian angel.’

‘You do me too much credit, General,’ said the Countess demurely. ‘I am merely a humble patriot, anxious to do her duty. France cannot afford to lose one of her greatest soldiers in her hour of need. The Army of Italy is waiting for you to lead it to glory.’

Nothing like laying it on thick, thought the Doctor. He studied the little cameo with interest. Bonaparte, small, sallow, almost insignificant-looking – yet you could feel the strength of will, the force inside him. And he was one of the key players in the history of the nineteenth century. Would the world have been a better place if Latour had succeeded in removing him from history? Who could tell? The essential thing was that he hadn’t been removed, not before his time. Human history must be allowed to play out its allotted course.

Then there was the mysterious Countess – somehow the Doctor still thought of her as a countess. What were her true aims? She had been willing to assist in the kidnapping of Winston Churchill, another of history’s key players. Yet she had also assisted in his escape – on a sudden whim, simply because she liked him. It was as if she regarded it all as some kind of game.

A game, thought the Doctor. A game, with players...

It was quite clear that Bonaparte was immensely taken with her. If one of her aims was to get close to him, she was well on

the way. Bonaparte had always had an eye for a beautiful woman. The famous Josephine was only one of many.

The Doctor became aware that the Countess was following up her advantage.

‘My carriage awaits outside the fort, General. I will be happy to convey you back to your headquarters in Nice. General Dumberbion eagerly awaits your return.’

Bonaparte bowed. ‘If you will give me time to resume my uniform, Madame, and gather my few belongings, I shall be happy to join you.’

‘An excellent idea,’ said the Governor. He was clearly relieved at the prospect of getting rid of this important political prisoner who had given him so much trouble. ‘Allow me to escort you, General.’ He turned to the two soldiers who had been waiting to operate the guillotine, and pointed to Latour’s body. ‘Take this carrion away. Later we will try to identify him.’

Bonaparte shrugged. ‘It is of no importance. Some assassin, hired by my enemies – and I know who they are.’ He gave a general bow of farewell and headed for the door from which he had first appeared, the Governor trailing behind him. The two soldiers who had been his guards crashed to attention as he passed.

‘I think we’d better be on our way as well,’ said the Doctor. ‘There’s nothing more for us to do here.’

‘There is nothing more for you to do anywhere, Doctor,’ said the Countess. ‘I advise you to return to your own time and place, wherever that may be, and refrain from any further interference in my affairs.’

‘My aim was to prevent interference,’ said the Doctor mildly. ‘Interference in the allotted course of human history.’

‘As was mine – on this occasion at least. We were on the same side for once – fortunately for you.’

‘And for you,’ said Serena. ‘Not to mention General Bonaparte. Without our help, you would have been too late.’

‘I fully admit it, my dear,’ said the Countess. ‘Which is why I am allowing you and your comical little friend here to leave unharmed. But do not cross my path again. Next time we might be enemies.’

‘We were enemies once before,’ said the Doctor. ‘Yet you changed sides.’

‘Briefly and temporarily,’ said the Countess. ‘Occasionally I allow myself these little indulgences – but I don’t make a habit of them.’

The Doctor looked thoughtfully at her. ‘I wish I knew what you were really up to. You preserved Napoleon’s life – what’s your next move, I wonder?’

The Countess looked quizzically at him. ‘To ensure his eventual victory of course.’

‘Victory in Italy? That’s due to happen anyway. He’ll come home a hero.’

‘Victory against England.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘That sounds like serious interference. How do you plan to achieve it?’

‘You expect me to tell you?’ She laughed. ‘Why not? It might be amusing. My young colleague has a plan that will ensure Napoleon’s success.’

‘How – and where?’

‘By land and sea, or rather, by sea and land. Victory by sea and land at a single stroke!’

‘I’m afraid I don’t follow.’

The Countess laughed, enjoying his puzzlement. ‘You’re not meant to. It’s a puzzle for you, Doctor. But don’t worry about it. Even if you solve it, there’s nothing you can do. Now, I’d better go and find the General.’ She smiled down at the Doctor. ‘Do remember my warning. I like you little man, I really do. But don’t get in my way again, or I might have to kill you.’

With a nod of dismissal, she turned and headed inside the fort.

Serena was furious. ‘Well, of all the arrogant condescending...How dare she talk to us like that!’

‘Over-confidence, Serena. It can work to our advantage. Look how much she’s told us, all out of sheer conceit.’

‘And did you hear what she called you? Little man!’

‘Rubbish,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m of average height. Just like Napoleon actually.’

‘You two are rather alike altogether,’ said Serena. ‘Small, dark and conceited!’

‘Don’t you start,’ said the Doctor. ‘Come on.’

The Doctor and Serena crossed the courtyard, went through the archway, and retraced their steps to the main gate. No one

tried to stop them.

Outside the gates a small carriage was waiting, presumably that of the Countess. A thin, elegantly-dressed young man was peering impatiently out of the window. As the Doctor and Serena emerged from the gates of the fort he called, 'I say! You there – over here!'

The Doctor and Serena exchanged glances. Serena would have ignored him but the Doctor said quietly, 'No, let's see what he wants.'

They turned and walked back to the coach. The young man inside had classically handsome features, romantically curling hair and the petulant air of someone accustomed to getting his own way at all times.

He stared boldly at Serena, who gave him a look of blank disinterest, and glanced briefly and dismissively at the Doctor.

'I am Monsieur Valmont,' he announced self-importantly, looking at the Doctor as if he expected him to be impressed. 'I'm waiting for a lady – we're supposed to pick up some general or other. Any sign of them in there?'

'I believe there has been some slight administrative delay, sir,' said the Doctor. 'The lady and the General will be with you shortly.'

'Well, they've been a damned long time about it. Pop back in and hurry 'em up, will you?'

He spoke with the air of someone who expected everyone else to jump to do his bidding.

'Why don't you pop yourself?' said Serena icily. 'Do you imagine we've got nothing better to do than run errands for you?'

Valmont stared at her in astonishment, but before he could reply the Doctor said humbly, 'I should be delighted to oblige you sir, but my time is not my own. I am late for an important appointment.'

He bowed, and led Serena away.

As they walked up the hill towards the park she said furiously, 'Why didn't you put that young popinjay in his place, Doctor – or let me?'

'It always helps to know the face of the enemy,' said the Doctor. 'It helps even more if he underestimates you.'

'Who was he, do you think?'

‘Unless I’m much mistaken he’s the Countess’s young colleague – the man with the plan. All we’ve got to do now, is work out what it is!’

Chapter Nine

The Plan

In the void beyond Space and Time, the three voices were conferring once more.

'To kill one of our own was perhaps – excessive,' said the cynical old voice reprovingly. 'And not for the first time as I recall.'

'The unfortunate Count Praetorius? His death was a regrettable accident – my arm was joggled as I fired.' The Countess's voice was penitent, but an undertone of amusement bubbled beneath it.

'The killing of the equally unfortunate Latour, however, was quite deliberate.'

'I had no choice,' protested the Countess. 'He was a member of the opposing team and he was about to kill Bonaparte. He was acting in person, may I remind you, in breach of our most important Rule.'

'As were you, when you shot him.'

'As I say, I had no choice. With Bonaparte dead, the Game would have been already lost.'

'There will be other Games.'

'Perhaps. But I do not care to lose.'

'And this Doctor...why did you allow him to depart?'

'I felt that more than one killing might draw attention. Besides, he amuses me.'

'He interfered in the Game of Hitler and Churchill,' the old voice reminded her. 'Later he, or another of his kind, brought the Game to an end.'

'All the more reason to let him live,' said the Countess arrogantly. 'He defeated us in the Game of Hitler and Churchill. I intend to avenge that defeat by crushing him in the Game of Napoleon and Wellington.'

'If he does not crush you,' said the sulky voice of the man who called himself Valmont. 'Was it necessary to tell him of my plan?'

'How can he compete if he does not know the moves?' This time the mirth in the Countess's voice was undisguised. 'Besides, I gave him the merest hint. He may never interpret it.'

'Probably not,' agreed Valmont. 'I got a good look at him and he didn't seem very impressive to me. Quite a timid little fellow. Girl was a looker, though...'

'The Doctor is a Time Lord,' said the old voice. 'The girl too, probably. They are a dangerous and devious race. Do not underestimate them.'

'We need not fear the intervention of the Time Lords,' said the Countess. 'The Doctor is a renegade, a fugitive from his own people. They will not seek to avenge him.'

'You are sure of this?'

'I made discreet enquiries after our last encounter. Indeed, I have a useful contact. The Doctor is alone. I shall toy with him for a while, before I destroy him.'

The Doctor and Serena sat sipping tea in an elegant eighteenth-century drawing room, configured in the TARDIS by Serena at the Doctor's request. There was striped wallpaper, flowing drapery, spindly-legged chairs and tables.

'I hope the room is satisfactory, Doctor?' said Serena.

'It'll do, it'll do,' said the Doctor abstractedly. 'This affair seems to be concentrated in the eighteenth century, I thought it might put us in the proper frame of mind.' He put down his teacup and began striding about the room.

'Land and sea,' he muttered. 'By land and sea, that's what she said. But what did she mean?'

'She meant to lure you into a trap,' said Serena. 'Why else should she tell you anything?'

'Because it amused her. It's all a game to her, you see. In fact I'm rapidly coming to the conclusion that it really *is* a game.'

'What kind of a game?'

'A formal game with rules – and human lives for pieces. A multi-temporal game with opposing players. Two teams of opposing players. That fellow Latour must have been from the other team.'

'Judging by the way she dealt with him, it appears to be rather a rough game.'

'Oh it is! A sort of chess, using real human beings as pieces, a ruthless interference with human history. I suspected as much during that business at the chateau, now I'm certain of it. It's the same technique, you see. Take out a key piece and the whole game changes.'

‘And Latour wanted to take out Napoleon?’

‘Precisely. That’s why the Countess shot him.’

‘Who are these people, Doctor?’

‘Well, they’re not people for a start, are they? Not human, I mean. Not even mortals – though they can die when in human form.’

‘What are they then?’

‘Some kind of trans-dimensional beings, I think. Trans-dimensional and multi-temporal. Very tricky customers.’

‘You think they have time-travel capability?’

‘Considering that I first met the Countess in 1915...’

Serena thought for a moment. ‘This business of temporal interference...You said Napoleon wasn’t supposed to be executed or killed?’

‘No indeed. History says he was cleared and released. He goes on to command the Army of Italy and rises to supreme power.’

‘Which is precisely what the Countess said will happen. She wasn’t interfering in history at all.’

‘She was playing for her side, blocking the opponent’s move. Doesn’t mean she won’t make a few interfering moves of her own.’

‘Against whom?’

The Doctor struck his palm with his fist. ‘Against the English, of course. She said so!’

‘Why must it be the English?’

‘They were Napoleon’s main enemy. Like Hitler, he conquered most of Europe. And just as with Hitler, the English – the British – were the ones he could never finally defeat. The ones who brought about his downfall.’

‘The Countess said she was going to ensure his victory.’

‘By land and sea...’

‘No. Doctor, not exactly. She changed it. She said by sea and land.’

‘So she did! Land and sea is the usual expression. Why change the order?’

‘An order of events, perhaps? Sea first, then land?’

‘An order of victories!’ said the Doctor. ‘English victories that she plans to turn into defeats.’

‘How?’ asked Serena practically.

‘By removing the key pieces in each case – the usual technique.’

Serena sighed. ‘It’s an interesting theory, Doctor. But since we don’t know precisely which English victories are concerned...’

The Doctor’s face fell. ‘That’s very true.’

Serena wasn’t daunted. ‘However, we can speculate. The logical assumption is that she’d choose the most important ones. You’re supposed to have studied this period, Doctor. Which was the most important English victory by sea?’

The Doctor thought for a moment. ‘Trafalgar, that’s obvious.’

‘And by land?’

‘The final battle was the one that really counted. Waterloo.’

‘And the key pieces?’

‘Nelson at Trafalgar, Wellington at Waterloo! That’s it! She plans to eliminate Nelson and Wellington. There’s no doubt about it, Serena, I really am a genius.’ He caught the look in her eye and added hastily, ‘Mind you, you were a great help.’

Serena’s voice brought him down to earth. ‘Don’t forget “at a stroke”, Doctor.’

‘What?’

‘That’s what she said. “By sea and land at a stroke.” Which implies that one single event will bring about the result she wants.’

‘Ah, yes. But that’s not possible. Trafalgar happened in 1805, Waterloo in 1815. One out at sea, the other far inland.’

‘What of it?’

‘Don’t you see? The two victories are ten years and hundreds of miles apart. How can she hope to destroy two men at a single blow when they’re totally separated by both Space and Time?’

Once again Serena’s logical mind supplied a possible solution.

‘She doesn’t have to eliminate these people actually on the field of battle,’ she pointed out. ‘Some time, any time, earlier would do. They just have to be together.’

‘But they never met!’ shouted the Doctor. He paused, suddenly thoughtful. ‘Or did they? Control room, Serena!’ He dashed from the room.

More sedately, Serena followed. She found the Doctor stabbing futilely at the console.

‘If you would tell me what you’re after, Doctor...’

‘Earth history archives, early nineteenth century, of course. Cross-reference Nelson and Wellington.’

Serena busied herself at the controls and a monitor sprang into life, words and pictures scrolling across the screen. After several tense minutes the screen froze. Serena said, ‘One match, Doctor. Just one. They met once, briefly and by chance at the Colonial Office.’

‘When?’ asked the Doctor eagerly. ‘Does it say when?’

‘On the 12th of September, 1805.’

‘Time?’

‘Mid-morning.’

‘Aha!’

Serena looked up, hands poised over the controls. ‘Well, Doctor?’

The Doctor was pacing up and down the control room, lost in thought. ‘Well what?’

‘I take it that’s our next destination?’

‘Yes, yes, of course. Better make it a few hours earlier. We don’t want to arrive bang in the middle of it.’

‘The middle of what?’

‘The assassination, of course...They’re going to try and kill Napoleon and Wellington at one and the same time.’

Chapter Ten

Assassin

The Doctor and Serena were strolling up and down Downing Street, always keeping within sight of the entrance to the Colonial Office. They had been strolling up and down since early that morning, and Serena, for one, had had enough of it. They had tried patrolling separately just to break things up, but that hadn't worked out too well.

On his own, the Doctor, despite his respectable attire and generally inconspicuous appearance, had collected a number of suspicious glances.

Serena on her own had collected glances of quite a different kind. Several prosperous-looking gentlemen, who should surely have been concerned with the affairs of the nation, had shown a desire to stop and make her acquaintance. Many of them had made a wide variety of friendly propositions which Serena – who had led, in some ways, a sheltered life – had failed, at first, to understand. When she did understand them she had been outraged and complained vehemently to the Doctor.

'It's disgraceful,' she said. 'They're all respectable-looking middle-aged men as well. You'd think they'd have something better to do with their time.'

'It's a licentious age, I'm afraid, Serena,' said the Doctor. 'What's more, we're close to the centre of Government.'

'What has that got to do with anything?'

'They're probably all politicians,' said the Doctor. 'Politicians don't change much over the ages.'

They had continued their vigil together. Strolling slowly along, arm in arm, they seemed to attract less notice, though Serena still attracted lascivious glances. The Doctor just got envious ones.

Finally their long vigil was rewarded. A carriage drew up and a small one-armed man alighted, assisted by the deferential

porter, and entered the Colonial Office.

‘There’s Lord Nelson,’ said the Doctor. ‘That’s one!’

Shortly afterwards, a second carriage arrived, and a tall, beaky-nosed soldier sprang out and strode briskly inside. ‘And there’s the Duke,’ said the Doctor. ‘So far so good!’

‘Well, they’re both there, Doctor,’ said Serena. ‘Now what?’

‘We wait,’ said the Doctor. ‘Wait and watch. Now that they’ve both arrived, the enemy will make his move...’

In a small anteroom in the Colonial Office in Downing Street, two gentlemen were waiting to see Lord Castlereagh, the newly appointed Secretary for War. His lordship had sent an apologetic message – he was delayed by urgent affairs of state, and would see each of them as soon as possible.

One of the visitors was a tall, sunburnt man in his mid-thirties. His hair was cropped short, he had a distinctive beak of a nose, and he wore the uniform of a major-general.

The second man, who wore Naval uniform, was about ten years older. Physically, he was far from impressive. Small and thin, he looked frail beside the tall soldier. His right sleeve was pinned back and empty, his right eye glazed and sightless. Yet of the two he was by far the more distinguished.

The soldier was Sir Arthur Wellesley, newly returned from India. An unemployed major-general, he was aware that an Indian reputation, no matter how distinguished, didn’t count for much in London. He had come to lobby Castlereagh for a worthwhile command in Europe.

The little sailor was Admiral Lord Nelson. He too had a string of victories behind him. The fighting spirit in that frail and wounded body, and the charm and charisma that the blunt, non-sense Wellesley lacked, had made him England’s greatest and most loved hero.

The two men could hardly have been more different in temperament. Nelson’s warmth, his charm, his instinctive sympathy for the men under his command, had made him the most popular, the most beloved of leaders. He led by consultation and discussion and his captains were ‘a band of brothers’.

Wellesley’s officers feared him more than they loved him. He hated any kind of discussion and consultation and believed in

one single authority – his own. He didn't care if his men loved him or not, as long as they obeyed his orders. He was often heard to say that most of them were scum, 'enlisted for drink'.

They were certainly a tough lot, and Wellesley kept them in order with discipline that was as ruthless as it was effective. Military offenders were flogged. Looters were hung.

On the other hand, he took care that, as far as possible, his men were well provisioned and well supplied. So long as his soldiers followed his orders he led them to victory, and got as few of them as possible killed in the process. They didn't exactly love him – but they were always glad to see his tall figure and beaky nose on the battlefield.

The two men were talking, or rather one was talking and the other listening. Lord Nelson was holding forth animatedly and at some length on the state of the country and on affairs on the continent.

The more taciturn Wellesley listened patiently, though not without an occasional comment of his own. He criticised Vice-Admiral Calder's recent fleet action against the French Admiral Villeneuve. 'It was feeble, my lord, feeble! He failed to make a dash at the enemy – the kind which produces the conclusive victory your lordship has taught the British public to expect.'

Nelson agreed enthusiastically. 'I have always told my officers, no captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside the enemy!' He was equally ready to pronounce on military affairs. 'Sardinia, that's the place, Wellesley,' Nelson said. 'They should send you with an expedition to attack the French in Sardinia, that's the weak point.'

Wellesley listened with polite amusement as the excited little admiral held forth on the dithering and incompetence of the Government and the proper conduct of the war. Yet he was far from bored. On the contrary – Nelson's analysis of events was shrewd and well-informed.

It was significant, thought Wellesley, that the Admiral's concerns extended far beyond Naval affairs, and the fate of the ships under his command. He understood that naval warfare, all warfare, was inextricably linked with politics and diplomacy. It occurred to Sir Arthur Wellesley that the same was true of military affairs. There were lessons to be learned here...

The Doctor and Serena posted themselves close to the entrance of the Colonial Office. From time to time the Doctor looked impatiently at his watch, as if waiting for someone who was very late.

Finally yet another carriage arrived. A man wearing an official uniform of some kind and carrying a small packet, got out and went into the Colonial Office.

‘Come on said the Doctor urgently. ‘This is it! That was, what’s-his-name, Valmont.’

‘The man in the Countess’s carriage,’ said Serena. ‘I know. What are we going to do?’

They were already hurrying towards the Colonial Office.

‘I must intercept him,’ said the Doctor. ‘You distract the porter.’

‘How?’

‘Insist on seeing Lord Nelson,’ said the Doctor.

‘How am I supposed to manage that?’

‘I don’t know. Improvise. Be dramatic. Say you’re Lady Hamilton?’

They hurried into the foyer of the Colonial Office and a uniformed porter came forward to greet them. ‘May I assist you?’

‘That man who just came in,’ said the Doctor urgently. ‘Who was he?’

Such was the authority in his voice that the porter answered automatically. ‘Official Foreign Office messenger with official documents for Lord Castlereagh –’ He broke off. ‘Here, what’s it to you? Who are you?’

The Doctor dodged round him and sprinted up the wide Colonial Office staircase. The porter yelled, ‘You, come back!’ and made to set off after him.

But he was blocked by Serena, who flung herself into his arms.

‘Madam, please...?’

Serena grasped his wrists. ‘I beg you, I must see Lord Nelson. It’s a matter of life and death.’

The porter struggled to free himself, but Serena was surprisingly strong. ‘His lordship is waiting to see Lord Castlereagh, madam. I’m sure he’ll see you as soon as he’s free.’

‘You don’t understand,’ sobbed Serena, showing a talent for melodrama that surprised even herself. ‘I am Lady Hamilton. I

must see my hero before he departs for battle...'

The Doctor reached the top of the stairs in time to see the messenger disappearing through a door at the far end of the long corridor to his right.

He hurried after him.

Lord Nelson was holding forth on the proper conduct of the war. 'The Peninsula, Wellesley, that's the key. Boney's conquered so much territory that his forces are stretched far too thin, and the Spanish are unreliable allies at best...'

He was interrupted by a deferential tap on the door. It opened revealing a slim, handsome young man in the uniform of a Foreign Office messenger. He bowed low.

'My lord, Sir Arthur, my humble apologies for this interruption.'

He sounded, thought Lord Nelson idly, more smug than humble.

'Well?' snapped Wellesley.

The messenger held out a sealed packet. 'Vital documents from the Foreign Office. It is essential that Lord Castlereagh receives them as soon as possible. At present he cannot be interrupted, but if the first of you two gentlemen to see him would be kind enough to pass them over...'

'Damned cheek if you ask me,' grumbled Wellesley. He turned to Lord Nelson. 'That will be you, my lord. If you have no objection to being used as a messenger boy...'

'None at all,' murmured Nelson.

'Very well,' said Wellesley. 'You can put the documents on the table. His lordship will take them in to Lord Castlereagh.'

The messenger placed the packet on the table between the two men, bowed again and turned to leave.

A smallish black-haired man shot into the room as if fired from a cannon and tackled the messenger, bringing him down. Pinning down his opponent by sitting on his head, the Doctor yelled, 'Nobody touch that packet, it's a bomb!'

The porter burst into the room, accompanied by a younger colleague, Serena close behind them. The Doctor jumped up, dragged the messenger to his feet by the scruff of his neck and thrust him into the arms of the two porters. 'Hang on to him,

he's an assassin!' Ignoring the struggling young man he studied the packet.

'Delayed action fuse, most likely,' he muttered. 'Just enough time for him to get safely away, matter of a few minutes probably.' He turned to the porters. 'I need a window, overlooking some kind of open space, as near as possible. Quickly now!'

The younger porter, a little brighter than his bemused colleague,' said, 'Back along the corridor, sir, third window on the right. Looks out on the garden.'

Gingerly the Doctor picked up the packet from the table – it wouldn't do to jar it – and hurried down the corridor. When he reached the third window it was shut. He put the packet down carefully at his feet and struggled to raise the window. Long unused, it opened a bare inch and then stuck. The Doctor heaved, but it was no good.

A voice behind him said, 'Allow me to assist you, sir.' He turned and saw Sir Arthur Wellesley.

'Please, go back to the anteroom,' said the Doctor. 'Better yet, leave the building and take Lord Nelson with you. If this thing goes off...'

Ignoring him, Wellesley thrust powerful fingers into the gap below the window and began to heave. The Doctor joined him, they both strained desperately – and the window shot open with a protesting shriek.

It revealed a small walled garden with a stagnant-looking pond at the centre.

'Excellent,' said the Doctor. 'Now then...'

He picked up the packet, took careful aim and skimmed it through the window. It arced through the air, dropped in the exact centre of the stagnant pond with a scarcely audible splash and sank.

That was all.

Wellesley looked down at the Doctor with tolerant amusement. 'Didn't think it could really be a bomb, y'know. Far too small to do any real damage. I'm afraid, sir, you may be in considerable trouble for destroying important Government papers.'

'Wait,' said the Doctor.

There was a deep muffled *crump*, the floor vibrated beneath

their feet, windows rattled and shattered all around, and the blast thrust them back like an invisible giant hand as the pond erupted into a huge column of water. The column hung poised for a moment and then collapsed, showering the windows around the garden with water-drops.

‘My God, sir,’ said Wellesley, who seldom swore or blasphemed. ‘If that device had exploded inside a small room...’

The Doctor nodded. ‘England would have lost two of her greatest heroes.’

‘One surely,’ said Wellesley. ‘I have had some small success in India, but my name is little known here in England.’

‘It will be. Today the fate of England depends on Lord Nelson. One day it will depend on you. Never doubt it.’ Wellesley looked at him strangely. ‘You are among the prophets, it seems.’ He changed the subject. ‘What kind of powder were they using? If I had something like that in my cannon...’

‘It would blow them to pieces,’ said the Doctor. ‘The explosive was – experimental, not currently available. Be content with the black powder you have. Your muskets and cannon wreak quite enough slaughter for the present age.’

They began walking back to the anteroom, and found concerned clerks and officials milling about outside. Wellesley brushed them aside, ignoring their questions and they went inside.

Serena and the hall porter were talking to a bemused Lord Nelson.

‘I assure you, my lord, the lady *said* she was Lady Hamilton,’ insisted the porter.

‘Nonsense,’ said Serena. ‘I said I was *from* Lady Hamilton, with a message for his lordship. Her ladyship begs that you will return to her side as soon as you are free.’

Lord Nelson smiled. ‘She already has my assurance that I will do so. Still, my dear Emma has always had a tendency towards the dramatic – her early theatrical background, no doubt.’ He took Serena’s hand and kissed it. ‘It was kind of you to bring the message. I hope these unfortunate events haven’t caused you too much distress.’

He gazed into her green eyes and smiled, and Serena felt a flutter of quite unaccustomed emotions. She curtsied. ‘Not at all, my lord. It was a pleasure to be of service.’

Nelson turned to Wellesley. 'I collect that our friend's intelligence about the packet proved to be accurate?'

'You may say so, my lord,' said Wellesley dryly. He swung round on the porters. 'Where is our assassin? Safely incarcerated?'

'I'm afraid he got away, sir,' said the porter miserably. 'We had hold of him and somehow he just – vanished.'

'You bungling fool,' said Wellesley. He looked ruefully at the Doctor. 'Have we any clue to the man's identity? Or that of his employers?'

The Doctor shook his head.

'For that matter, we have little clue as to *your* identity, sir,' said Nelson gently.

'Well, I am usually known as the Doctor...'

'No shillyshallying, sir,' said Wellesley. 'Who are you? And more to the point, *what* are you?'

The Doctor had foreseen that sooner or later someone would corner him with such a question. He had prepared an explanation.

'The Prime Minister runs a small private intelligence department,' said the Doctor. 'Those who belong to it prefer to remain as inconspicuous as possible.'

(Both these statements were perfectly true, reflected the Doctor. They just didn't apply to him. Of course, if anyone chose to assume that they did...)

'So, you're one of Mr Pitt's spies,' said Wellesley.

'The term secret agent is preferred in the profession,' murmured the Doctor. 'An inglorious profession in many ways – but then, both of you must be aware of the importance of intelligence.'

'Very true, sir,' said Nelson. 'I'd sacrifice another limb to know exactly where Villeneuve's fleet is heading.'

Wellesley nodded in agreement. 'The secret of success in battle lies in finding out what's on the other side of the hill. It's easier by far if someone comes and tells you.'

'You deserve both praise and reward for what you have done today,' said Lord Nelson. 'I shall see that Lord Castlereagh is made aware of how much we owe you.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'I should be grateful if my name were not to be mentioned in this affair. Let it be thought that

you discovered and dealt with the would-be assassin yourselves.'

There was a note of authority in his voice which both men responded to instinctively. These days they were more accustomed to giving orders, but they were used to taking them too.

'Very well,' said Wellesley. 'If that's what you want.'

'Something else,' said the Doctor. 'It would be well to persuade Lord Castlereagh that the assassination attempt should be hushed up as far as is possible. We don't want to cause a panic.'

'It scarcely seems fair, sir,' said Lord Nelson. 'You have saved both our lives, and we don't even know your name.'

The Doctor couldn't resist it. 'The name's Smith,' he said. 'Doctor John Smith...'

Chapter Eleven

Plots and Plans

It took some time to get away from the thanks and the questions but they managed it at last. It was still a fine sunny day and the Doctor and Serena were strolling across St James's Park towards the TARDIS, now in the elegant shape of a small ornamental pavilion.

It struck the Doctor that there was something to be said for the perpetual police box. At least you could always recognise it. How embarrassing it would be to lose the TARDIS because you'd forgotten what it looked like.

'What now, Doctor?' asked Serena. 'Back to Gallifrey to report?'

'Certainly not,' said the Doctor indignantly. 'We haven't got anything useful to report yet.'

'We've confirmed that there is deliberate interference in human history.'

'We knew that when we came,' said the Doctor crossly. 'What we still don't really know is why! What's their final aim?'

'It is all very confusing,' said Serena. 'A mysterious somebody tries to get Napoleon executed – then this equally mysterious Countess turns up and shoots the somebody, saving Napoleon in the process. Then her associate tries to blow up Nelson and Wellington.'

'As I said, it's a game, two opposing teams. But why? Interference for the sake of it? Or is there some long-term plan? When I first met the Countess, she seemed to be trying to reverse the result of the First World War. Or maybe it was the Second, Churchill was far more important in that. Now she wants Napoleon to win the Napoleonic wars...'

'So what are we going to do next?'

The Doctor considered for a moment, looking around the park. It was so calm, so peaceful, after all the recent excitement.

Trees, grass, a lake. Formal flowerbeds, blazing with colour. Elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen strolling along the paths. There was even a little flock of sheep, grazing in the distance.

‘Oh peaceful England!’ he murmured.

But peaceful England wasn’t where they would find the answers. And unless they found them, Napoleon’s armies might soon be making England a lot less peaceful.

Serena was growing impatient. Her life was dedicated to efficiency, and the Doctor often seemed distressingly vague and scatterbrained.

‘Well, Doctor?’

The Doctor came to one of his sudden decisions. ‘I think we should go back to France. To Paris.’

‘And risk getting our heads chopped off?’

‘Oh I doubt it. Not if we stay in this year. It’s over ten years since we helped to rescue Napoleon, and the Revolution is well and truly over.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Oh yes. Napoleon said so.’

‘He did?’

“‘The Revolution is over,’” he said. “*I am the Revolution!*” By now he’s made himself Emperor.’

‘That’s very fast work,’ said Serena. ‘All in only ten years? How did he manage it so quickly?’

‘Conquered Italy, came back a hero, entered politics, became one of three ruling consuls, ditched the other two and became First Consul, and then – Napoleon the First, Emperor of the French! He’s a very remarkable little fellow.’

Serena’s mind went back over recent events. ‘You know who I found remarkable, Doctor? Lord Nelson. Such an unlikely hero. The other one, Wellesley, was exactly what one would expect. Tall, strong, arrogant, the perfect military hero. But Nelson...So quiet and gentle.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I know what you mean. I don’t think any other leader was so loved by his men – officers and sailors alike.’

‘And he was so small and frail-looking, and those terrible wounds he’d suffered...’

‘You can never tell what humans are capable of,’ said the Doctor. ‘That’s what makes them such a fascinating species.’

Nelson is all fighting spirit – the physical problems he just ignores.’

He decided not to tell her that, even if everything went as it should, Nelson would die at Trafalgar, shot down by a sniper. But not till after victory. Foreknowledge of history wasn’t always an unmixed blessing.

After a moment Serena said, ‘Why Paris?’

‘It’s a crucial year in the war,’ said the Doctor. ‘Napoleon has an army gathered at Boulogne poised to invade England as soon as he gains control at sea. If I know the Countess, she’ll want to make sure he succeeds.’

‘But you’ve put a stop to her plan to make the English lose at Trafalgar.’

‘The Countess usually has a back-up plan – and a back-up for the back-up. She may even have another try at helping the French win Trafalgar. In any event, she won’t be far away...’

Serena stopped before an ornamental pavilion and the Doctor gave her a worried look.

‘I just wish I knew what she was planning next...’

Serena opened a door in the pavilion, and they went inside. There was a crooning, humming sound which attracted the attention of an elegantly dressed gentleman on the way to his club for lunch. He looked up in time to see the pavilion fade away. He studied the now empty patch of grass through his quizzing glass and shook his head. Too much champagne at the gaming tables last night...Resolving to be more moderate, he went on his way.

Somewhere in an inter-dimensional void outside Time and Space, the Countess was making new plans.

‘Are we all present?’ said the cold old voice of the Adjudicator. A murmur of assent came from the formless beings, gathered in the infinite void.

‘This assembly has been convened at the request of the Countess,’ said the old voice. ‘She has, I understand, a proposition to put before us.’

‘Why should we listen to the propositions of a murderess?’ said an angry male voice. ‘Twice now she has killed in the course of a Game. Not some worthless human but one of us! Two who could and should have been Immortals, Players of the Game, are lost to us forever.’

The Countess spoke. ‘It is because I regret those deaths so deeply, because I have thought long and hard on the cause of them, that I come

before you.'

'You and you alone are the causes of those deaths,' said the angry voice. 'You know that if we are killed when in human form we must truly die, like any mere mortal. That is the Rule – though why...'

'The Rule is necessary,' said the old voice. 'If there is no death there is no danger and the Game becomes meaningless. Let the Countess speak.'

The Countess's mellow contralto voice throbbed with emotion. 'I know that I was wrong to kill, and I apologise most humbly. But why did I kill them? Once was an accident, the other I confess was in the heat of the Game. Can you not see? The Game puts us in contention with each other, and in that struggle we must sometimes die!'

'The Game is all that saves us from the tedium of immortality,' said the old voice. 'Without it our endless lives would lack all meaning and purpose. Do you propose its abandonment?'

'I propose a new and better Game,' said the Countess. 'A Grand Design in which the excitement will be greater and the risks far fewer.'

'And what is this design?'

'I will tell you. But let me warn you – to achieve it we must abandon contention for a while and work together...'

'A plot,' said the male voice mockingly. 'You are losing the Game, and you seek to avoid the shame of defeat.'

'I am not losing the Game,' said the Countess, an edge of anger in her voice. 'Napoleon lives, and rules as Emperor.'

'Nelson and Wellington live too,' said the mocking voice. 'Your plan failed.'

'Only because of unforeseeable interference. It was none of your doing.'

'Nevertheless – they live! Soon Nelson will smash your Napoleon's fleet at Trafalgar. Wellington will destroy his armies at Waterloo.'

'Nelson will never reach Trafalgar, and the English fleet will be defeated. Wellington will die before Waterloo.'

'You speak of abandoning contention. Yet you still want to win the Game.'

'Only because Napoleon is the key to my Grand Design.'

'The key to your cheated victory! I will bear no more.'

'You will hear the Countess's proposal,' said the cold old voice. 'When she has spoken we will all decide – and you will abide by the group's decision. Countess?'

The Countess began to speak, outlining a plan so grandiose, so outrageous, that even her listeners were astonished. Slowly at first, then with gathering enthusiasm, they were converted to her plan.

Finally, after much wrangling, it was agreed. All other Players would retire from the Game, leaving the Countess and Valmont to lay the foundations of their Grand Design.

The Doctor and Serena sat at a table outside the Café de la Régence in the Rue Saint Honore and watched the world go by. It was a cheerful and animated scene on a fine spring evening.

People strolled along enjoying the sunshine, wagons and carriages rolled noisily by. An immaculately uniformed imperial courier galloped past with a clatter of hooves, scattering vehicles and pedestrians.

‘He’s in a hurry,’ said Serena idly. ‘I wonder where he’s off to?’

‘Probably heading for the Palais des Tuileries,’ said the Doctor.

‘What’s there?’

‘The official residence of the Emperor...’

Although it was only early evening they were drinking champagne.

When Serena protested at the extravagance the Doctor said, ‘Why not? I’ve never been on an expense account before. The Agency can afford it.’

They had been in Paris for several days now, and were fast becoming established residents. Soon after their arrival the Doctor had visited a bank in the Rue de la Paix and produced a batch of bank drafts that provided a line of credit. A very large one, judging by the obsequiousness with which the manager had bowed them from his establishment.

They had hired an elegant little town house in Rue Chantierine, which came equipped with what seemed to Serena an enormous staff of servants. They had spent a good deal of time shopping – buying muslin gowns, cloaks, shawls, fans and reticules for Serena, and fashionably cut items of day and evening wear, breeches, boots, coats and many-caped cloaks for the Doctor.

It had been, thought Serena, quite a pleasant way to pass the time. In fact she felt guilty about how much she had enjoyed it. But was she being lead astray by the Doctor’s incorrigible frivolity? Were they really fulfilling their mission by spending money at expensive couturiers and sitting outside cafés in the

sunshine drinking champagne?

The cost was weighing on Serena's conscience even more than the champagne.

'We must have spent an enormous amount of money, Doctor.'

'Don't worry, the Agency has unlimited secret funds,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'Besides, we've got to keep up appearances. After all, if we're going to enter imperial society...'

'And just how are we going to do that? We're strangers here.'

'Imperial society is pretty fluid these days,' said the Doctor. 'They'll find room for a couple of fascinating strangers like us soon enough. They had a revolution remember.'

Serena looked around the busy street. Shops, cafés, strolling passers-by – mostly prosperous-looking bourgeois citizens. Everything seemed peaceful and normal.

'Things don't look very revolutionary now.'

'That's because they're an Empire now, instead of a revolutionary republic. But ten, fifteen years ago the tumbrils were rolling along these streets.'

'Tumbrils?'

'Open carts, carrying condemned prisoners to the guillotine. They had one set up in the Place de la Concorde. King Louis the Sixteenth was executed there, Queen Marie Antoinette. Then minor aristocrats, counter-revolutionaries, anybody who looked too prosperous and respectable, anyone somebody influential had a grudge against. Had a narrow escape myself, but that was a long time ago. Three thousand heads lopped off in Paris alone.'

Serena shuddered. 'Doctor, do you have to recount all these horrors?'

'Sorry. The point is, the old society was pretty well wiped out. The people who form society today are a very mixed lot.'

'All the same, since we don't know anybody, and nobody knows us...'

'You forget, we know the Emperor himself. We helped to save his life when he was a mere general. That ought to carry some social credit.'

'If he remembers.'

'He'll remember,' said the Doctor confidently. 'And if he doesn't, I'll remind him.'

'So what's our next move, Doctor?'

‘We’re making it,’ said the Doctor. ‘Absorbing the atmosphere, watching and waiting.’

‘Waiting for what?’

‘Opportunity.’

‘But why here, why this particular café?’

‘Napoleon used to play chess here when he was a penniless young officer.’

‘He’s hardly likely to drop in for a game now that he’s Emperor, is he?’

‘You never know. Besides, we’re fairly close to the Palais de Tuileries, Napoleon’s carriage often passes –’ The Doctor broke off. ‘Aha!’

Half a dozen cavalymen in colourful uniforms and plumed helmets came trotting down the street. Behind them came a small carriage with the crest of a great gold bee on the door. Inside sat a uniformed figure. More guards rode behind the carriage.

‘Is that him?’ asked Serena, excited despite herself. ‘Is that the Emperor?’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I rather think it is. There he is, in all his glory.’

Suddenly a rickety old wagon, piled high with tied-down wooden barrels, appeared from an alleyway between the shops. It forced its way into the road behind the soldiers, cutting them off from the imperial coach. The guards instinctively reined their mounts to a halt and there was immediate chaos. The angry cavalymen were struggling to control their rearing and curvetting horses, bellowing orders to the wagon-driver to get his thrice-cursed wagon out of the way of the Emperor’s coach.

The coachman, apparently terrified at what he had done, jumped down from his driving seat and ran off down the alley.

‘He’ll be in trouble when they catch him,’ said Serena. ‘Snarling up all the local traffic and obstructing the Emperor’s coach.’

The Doctor was standing up, staring hard at the wagon. ‘Smoke!’ he said suddenly. ‘One of those barrels is giving off smoke!’ He sprang out of his chair and sprinted towards the abandoned wagon.

Chapter Twelve

The Emperor

The Doctor leaped into the driving seat, seized the reins and drove the wagon forward, ploughing through the cavalry escort, whose horses reared and bucked and neighed, nearly unseating several of the riders.

The angry cavalymen responded with an impressive variety of shouts and curses. 'Name of a dog!' they screamed. 'Son of a whore!' And more simply, '*Merde!*'

'Clear that rattle-trap heap of junk from the road!'

'Out of the way!' bellowed the Doctor. 'Get back! Get the Emperor away.'

Seizing the driving whip from its holder he cracked it about the ears of the terrified horse and sent the wagon careering down the street.

At the end of the street there was a little square. The Doctor steered the wagon towards a decrepit-looking fountain in the centre. As the wagon crashed sideways into the fountain, the Doctor leaped from the driver's seat, rolling over and over as he hit the ground. He jumped up and ran back into the Rue Saint Honoré.

Serena was running towards him. By the time she reached him, the Doctor had come to a halt. He was dusty but apparently unhurt. 'In my nice new outfit too,' he said.

'Doctor, are you all right?'

Before the Doctor could reply, a heavily moustached cavalry sergeant came pounding up to him. 'Name of a dog, what do you think you're doing, driving a horse and cart through my men? I'll have you shot you imbecile...'

The Doctor held up his hand. 'Listen!'

A tremendous explosion came from the centre of the little square. Even at this distance the blast sent all three of them staggering back. Shop windows shattered, people screamed.

The sergeant's normally red face went pale with shock and he stood staring at the Doctor in amazement. 'What the hell was that?'

'An explosion,' said the Doctor. 'Those barrels were filled with gunpowder, and one of them had a lit fuse attached.'

The sergeant crossed himself. 'The Emperor! They were trying to kill the Emperor!'

'Don't stand there gawping,' said the Doctor crisply. 'Go and make sure the Emperor is all right. Then send someone to check up on the damage in the square. People may be frightened and hurt. Reassure them that the danger is over. Some of them may need first aid, see that they get help. Move, man!'

Once again, Serena was astonished at the sheer authority, the tone of command, that the Doctor could produce when he wished.

The sergeant stared at him for a moment, then crashed to attention, saluted and bellowed, 'Sir!' He turned and pounded away.

'Come along, Serena,' said the Doctor. 'Let's finish our drink.'

When they got back to the café they found that the shock wave had tipped over their table. Unperturbed, the Doctor set it upright again, pulled up two chairs, and ushered Serena to a seat. He turned and waved to the terrified waiter, who was cowering inside the cafe. 'Waiter! More champagne.'

'How did you know?' asked Serena.

'Instinct, I suppose. A wagon blocking the Emperor's coach – it was just too convenient to be a coincidence. And when I saw a wisp of smoke coming from one of the barrels...'

There was something faintly evasive about the Doctor's manner and Serena stared suspiciously at him. 'The truth please, Doctor.'

'I checked the historical archives,' admitted the Doctor. (The TARDIS was now standing in the salon of their new residence, in the shape of a handsome longcase clock.) 'As a matter of fact an assassination attempt was recorded at this place and time.' He smiled at the look of horror on Serena's face. 'Don't look so shocked. The attempt failed. Napoleon's coach was moving too fast and it whizzed by just in time. I'm not altering history, just adjusting it a little. This may give us the introduction we need.'

‘I’m not shocked at the interference,’ said Serena. ‘Though I suppose I should be. I’m shocked by the fact that we might easily have been blown up ourselves!’

‘Nonsense,’ said the Doctor. ‘I knew what I was doing. Trust me!’

Serena gave him a dubious look. Not only was the Doctor frivolous, he was reckless as well. And quite insanely brave. After a moment she said, ‘Was it the Countess?’

‘Not unless she’s changed sides, or the rules have changed. Why try to kill Wellesley and Nelson *and* Napoleon? Surely she’d attack one side or the other?’

The waiter brought their champagne, pouring them each a glass with a trembling hand.

Serena took a sip – or rather a swig. She felt she needed it. ‘The opposing team, then? Like the man who tried to get Napoleon guillotined?’

‘Possibly,’ said the Doctor. ‘It was good old-fashioned gunpowder though. Seems a bit low-tech for that. It may well have been a perfectly genuine contemporary assassination attempt. There were quite a few, I believe.’

‘By whom?’

‘Oh, there’s no shortage of candidates.’

‘I thought Napoleon was popular.’

‘He’s popular with the mass of the people. He brought them stability and order after the chaos and slaughter of the Revolution. It’s the extremists who hate him. The Royalists, because he’s still a revolutionary, in theory, at least. And the hard-core revolutionaries hate him because he’s not *enough* of a revolutionary.’

‘Obviously not, since he made himself Emperor.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Do you know what his official title is? “Emperor of the French Republic.” And if there’s one thing a Republic can’t possibly have it’s an Emperor!’

As if to prove him wrong there was a sudden clatter of hooves and a voice bellowed, ‘Sir! The Emperor wishes to see you.’ It was the cavalry sergeant, reining in his horse in the roadway beside their table.

The Doctor grinned at Serena, rose and bowed. ‘I should be honoured. Shall we go?’

He assisted Serena to rise, and tossed money on the table.

They followed the sergeant's sedately trotting charger through the crowded street, now filled with mounted troopers and excited citizens. There was a babble of voices all around them.

'They tried to blow up the Emperor! Royalist swine!'

'No, no, it was the Jacobins!'

'It was English spies!'

'They failed. The Emperor lives!'

'Long live the Emperor!'

The sergeant led them to a small stationary carriage, surrounded by armed soldiers. The group parted to reveal the side of the coach, which was decorated with the emblem of a golden eagle, surrounded by bees.

The window was open, and looking out was a strangely familiar figure. It was Napoleon. Not the skinny, shabby young soldier they had encountered ten years ago. This was a sleeker, more prosperous Napoleon, fuller-faced and a little more thick-set. He was in uniform of some kind, a dark tunic with a high red collar and massive gold epaulettes, open over a white silk waistcoat. Stars and orders blazed at his breast. One hand was thrust inside the waistcoat in a familiar pose.

This was the Napoleon of history.

The sergeant dismounted and came to attention. 'Sire! This is the man who saved you.'

The figure in the coach beckoned them forward and they approached the window.

'I owe you my gratitude – and my life.' The voice was smoother and richer now, with only the slightest trace of a Corsican accent.

The Doctor bowed and nudged Serena. She curtsied.

'It was an honour and a privilege to be of service to Your Majesty,' said the Doctor.

'What made you suspect the cart?'

The Doctor gave the reply he had first given Serena. 'A cart loaded with barrels, blocking the path of the Emperor's carriage while the driver runs off? It seemed too unlikely a coincidence.'

'Not to my bodyguard it seems,' said Napoleon bitterly. 'You acted with great speed, I hear – and with great courage.'

'I was merely fortunate,' said the Doctor. 'Fortunate to be in the right place at the right time. Any one of Your Majesty's loyal subjects would have done the same.'

Laying it on a bit thick, thought Serena. But it seemed to go down well.

Napoleon stared intently at the Doctor. ‘One moment, sir. Surely we have met before?’

‘We have indeed, sire. Some ten years ago.’

‘That’s right. You turned up at Fort Carre when they were about to chop my head off. This is the second time you have saved my life!’

‘As I recall it was a rather mysterious lady who had that honour.’

‘It is true that it was the Countess who actually brought about my release,’ said Napoleon. ‘She has been a dear friend of mine ever since. She is at court now, she will be happy to meet you again.’

I very much doubt it, thought the Doctor. Out loud he said, ‘It will be a great pleasure to see the Countess again.’

‘And, as I recall, without your earlier intervention she would have arrived too late! The Countess returned to Paris quite recently. And now you are here too! Can it be coincidence?’

‘Perhaps it is destiny, sire,’ said the Doctor.

Napoleon looked at him strangely for a moment. He was, as the Doctor knew, a great believer in destiny, particularly his own. ‘When my fortunes improved I made attempts to trace you, sir, to give you my thanks. But you had disappeared. Moreover, no one of your name or description was known at the Committee of Public Safety.’

‘I trust Your Majesty will forgive a necessary deception. I was visiting Antibes when it came to my notice that a man was about to be unjustly executed. A man whose destiny it was to play a vital role in restoring France to greatness. I determined to intervene, and invented an identity that might help me to do so.’

Napoleon leaned forward urgently. ‘How did you know what my destiny was to be? And how did you know I was in danger – first in Antibes and now, in this street? *Who are you?*’

The Doctor paused, staring hypnotically into Napoleon’s burning eyes. When he replied it was in solemn and impressive tones. ‘I am a wandering scholar, sire, and I have travelled extensively. Over the years I have acquired much knowledge of men and fate. I am usually known as the Doctor.’

‘Are you an adept?’ whispered Napoleon. ‘One of the

Illuminati?’

The Doctor gave a mysterious smile. ‘Such matters are not to be lightly spoken of, Your Majesty – at least, not in a public street. If Your Majesty will forgive me...’

He bowed and turned away.

‘Come back!’ screamed Napoleon. He was furious. ‘We have not dismissed you!’

The Doctor turned and met his angry eyes without flinching. ‘I beg Your Majesty’s pardon. I intended no disrespect. It is simply that on certain matters I am bound by sacred vows of secrecy.’

‘I understand,’ said Napoleon more calmly. ‘I had hoped – I still hope – that you will give me the benefit of your counsel.’

The Doctor bowed. ‘How may I serve Your Majesty?’ There was no trace of fear, or even deference, in his manner or in his voice.

The Emperor forced a smile. ‘There is a reception tonight, Doctor, at the Tuileries. You will attend. Bring your charming companion. We will speak further. Coachman!’

The coachman sprang into his seat and cracked his whip, and the imperial carriage rattled away.

Chapter Thirteen

Reception

The Doctor turned to Serena and smiled. ‘There, that went pretty well, I think.’

‘What will we learn by attending a public reception?’ asked Serena, a little intimidated at the idea. ‘There’ll be hundreds of people milling around.’

‘We’ll probably meet the Countess for a start. If I can provoke her, she may let slip some clue about her plans. I hope to learn something about them from the Emperor, too. I’ve an idea he figures in them pretty largely.’

‘You won’t get much chance to talk to him at a public reception.’

‘Oh won’t I? I’ve an idea he’s going to summon me for a private chat at some point. I must try to think up some more mystic mumbo jumbo to impress him. And do try not to be so negative, Serena. It’s very depressing.’

‘I’m sorry, Doctor, I think I’m nervous. Assassinations and emperors, all in one day. I’m just not used to this sort of thing.’

The Doctor was instantly penitent. ‘No, of course you’re not. Those fools at the Agency should never have sent you.’

‘Oh, I know I’m not much use to you, Doctor.’

This was something else that was worrying Serena – the fact that the Doctor *was* used to this sort of thing. What’s more he enjoyed it, taking assassinations and emperors in his imperturbable stride. It wasn’t surprising, really. It was for the sake of a life of adventure that he had first left Gallifrey.

‘Of course you’re useful,’ said the Doctor. ‘I couldn’t do without you.’

‘Sir!’

The Doctor turned to see a handsome young officer at his elbow. ‘Yes?’

The officer saluted. ‘Captain Charles, sir, aide to His

Imperial Majesty.’

‘And what can I do for you?’

‘If you would be kind enough to furnish me with your direction, sir. And your style, and that of your companion.’

‘What?’

‘Your address sir. And both your names and titles if you please.’

‘Why? What do you want it for?’

‘So that the Emperor’s invitations may be delivered. You will need them to gain entry to the reception.’

‘Oh that,’ said the Doctor dismissively. ‘I’m not sure if I’m going.’

The officer was shocked. ‘An invitation from the Emperor is a royal command, sir. You would be wise to obey.’

The Doctor gave him an obstinate glare and it was Serena who replied.

‘We have taken a house in Rue Chantierine. Number six.’ Captain Charles produced a notebook and recorded the address. ‘And your names, if you please?’

Serena looked at the Doctor.

‘I am Jean Dupont,’ said the Doctor, choosing the French equivalent of John Smith. ‘Doctor Jean Dupont. This is the Lady Serena.’

Captain Charles noted the names. ‘Until this evening, then.’ He looked admiringly at Serena, saluted again and turned away.

‘You see?’ said the Doctor. ‘I told you we’d soon break into society.’

‘It’s a wonder Napoleon still invited us, considering how standoffish you were in the end. That’s no way to behave towards an emperor.’

‘Just standing up to him. He’s not used to that, it will intrigue him. Besides, I did a reasonable amount of grovelling before that.’

‘What was all that stuff about you being an adept – and one of the Illuminati?’

‘An adept is somebody skilled in the magic arts, usually the black ones.’

‘And the Illuminati?’

‘A mysterious, all-knowing secret society, who are really – or so it is said – the hidden rulers of the world.’

‘As you said yourself, mystic mumbo jumbo. I’m surprised you believe in it, Doctor.’

‘I don’t – but apparently Napoleon does. It’s surprising how often great men go in for that sort of thing – especially dictators. Hitler was very keen on it.’

‘Who?’

‘Never mind. The thing is, I dropped a few murky hints about hidden knowledge and Napoleon leaped on them. It’ll help no end if he thinks I’m some kind of mysterious wizard.’

As the Doctor and Serena walked away down the little street, clearing now of soldiers and spectators, they saw a shabby-looking man in a dusty black coat watching them from the other side of the road. He had a long, thin face with a beaky nose, red-rimmed eyes, rusty-red hair and dead-white skin.

Serena shuddered and hurriedly looked away. ‘Who is that Doctor? Why is he watching us? He looks like a vampire!’

‘Worse than a vampire,’ said the Doctor. ‘I rather think that’s Joseph Fouché, Napoleon’s Chief of Police – he must have been travelling with the Emperor. They say Fouché has thousands of spies in Paris alone.’

‘Why?’

‘To keep track of all the plots and counterplots. Napoleon is a very new Emperor you know. He gained power by a series of coups. He could lose it just as quickly.’

‘And Fouché protects him?’

‘For the time being. Fouché betrayed his last two political masters. He’ll betray Napoleon just as quickly if he starts to weaken. Meanwhile he does an excellent job. In Paris they say if three people gather to plot treason, one of them will be Fouché’s agent.’

‘Why is he interested in us?’

‘He’s interested in anything that concerns the Emperor. He’ll want to know who we are and all about us.’

They saw the red-haired man say a few words to a respectable-looking man in a grey coat, a man who might have been a small tradesman or a clerk, and then hurry away. The man in the grey coat stood waiting.

‘That’ll be one of his spies,’ said the Doctor. ‘He’ll follow us home.’

‘Whatever for?’

‘Just to make sure we’re who we say we are and live where we say we do. Then he’ll start questioning the neighbours.’ Serena looked worried. There was something oppressive in the thought of being under constant scrutiny. ‘What are we going to do?’

‘Nothing. Ignore him, it’s just routine. Come along Serena, we must get home and put on our glad rags...’

‘I’m really not happy about this fancy dress, Doctor,’ whispered Serena.

‘How do you think I feel? I like to be comfortable, you know.’

‘You may be uncomfortable, but at least you’re covered up!’

It was several hours later. The Doctor and Serena, surrounded by a fashionably dressed, excitedly chattering crowd, were climbing the grand marble staircase of the Tuileries Palace.

The Doctor wore a beautifully cut black coat, black breeches and a frilly white shirt with an elaborate black cravat. He looked, thought Serena, remarkably impressive in a sombre kind of way.

Serena herself was wearing a high-waisted gown of diaphanous white muslin. It was flimsy, close-fitting and low cut. Serena, used to the more modest fashions of Gallifrey, felt that she was scarcely dressed at all. She wore a cashmere shawl about her shoulders, but it was too filmy to offer much protection.

They followed the crowd up the marble staircase and along a mirrored corridor. There were huge bunches of exotic flowers and flickering candles all around. They emerged into a long gallery illuminated by five enormous chandeliers.

Two figures stood on a raised dais at the far end and the crowd turned into a receiving line and filed slowly towards them. As the Doctor and Serena drew nearer they could see that the Emperor, out of uniform for once, wore a gold-embroidered crimson coat and an ornate ceremonial sword with a huge diamond glittering in its hilt.

Beside him stood a small woman in a gown even thinner and more low cut than Serena’s. Her luxuriant black hair blazed with priceless jewels. Not classically beautiful, she had an attractive, piquant face and an air of irresistible charm as she smiled and welcomed her guests.

‘That’s the famous Josephine,’ said the Doctor in response

to Serena's enquiring look. 'They married over ten years ago when he was just a rising young officer. Now she's an empress – and lucky to be here.'

'And why is that?'

'A few years ago, when Napoleon was away fighting in Italy, she had an affair with a handsome young lieutenant, and Napoleon found out.'

'I'm surprised at you, Doctor,' said Serena severely. 'Recounting celebrity gossip.'

The Doctor looked hurt. 'It isn't gossip, it's essential historical background. Look out, it's nearly our turn.'

They reached the dais at last, the Doctor bowed and Serena curtseyed.

'Ah, Doctor!' said Napoleon expansively. 'Good of you to come.'

The Doctor bowed again. 'How could I not? An invitation from the Emperor is a royal command.'

He glanced at Captain Charles, who was standing just behind the Emperor, and saw his lips twitch in a hastily suppressed smile.

'Regard it as an invitation from an old friend,' said Napoleon, who was evidently in an expansive mood. 'You may present your charming companion.'

The Doctor bowed yet again. (Much more of this bowing and scraping and he'd be getting backache, he reflected.) 'Your Imperial Highnesses, allow me to present my companion, Lady Serena.'

Serena curtseyed, and Napoleon and Josephine smiled graciously.

'You must come to one of my informal soirees, my dear,' said Josephine. 'It will give us a chance to talk. Impossible in such a crush as this...'

'Your Highness is very kind,' said Serena.

'As you see, Doctor, I am much occupied at present,' said Napoleon. 'I should like a chance to talk to you later, in my study perhaps. My aide will find you.'

'I am at your service, sire,' said the Doctor. He bowed, Serena curtseyed, and they moved away.

A passing footman offered them champagne. They took the glasses and found a quiet corner where they could survey the

glittering crowd.

‘Who are all these people?’ asked Serena. ‘I thought they’d executed all their aristocrats during the Terror.’

‘So they did, most of them anyway. These are the replacements. The B team you might say.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘For a start they didn’t kill all the aristocrats,’ said the Doctor. ‘Some saved their necks by changing sides. The Duke of Orleans gave up his title and started calling himself Phillip Equality. Talleyrand suddenly stopped being an aristocrat and a bishop and became a convinced revolutionary.’

‘And they got away with that?’

‘Some did, and some didn’t. Poor old Phillip Equality got his head chopped off anyway, in the end. Talleyrand survived and he’s now one of Napoleon’s chief ministers. Napoleon’s about to make him a prince. He’ll be here tonight, I imagine.’

‘What about the others?’

‘Some got away in time and went into exile, in England mostly. A few were even rescued from Madame Guillotine. Some chap called the Scarlet Pimpernel was very active around that time.’

‘And now they’re back?’

‘Some of them. The Revolution is definitely over. You won’t lose your head just for having a handle to your name these days. And now that Napoleon’s a nice respectable-sounding Emperor, and he’s declared an amnesty...Quite a few of the survivors have decided to come back and take a chance on the new regime.’

‘And the rest of the people here?’

‘The new aristocracy – created by Napoleon. After all he made his wife an empress, his sister a princess, and there’s a rumour he plans to make his brother King of Italy. What are a few extra titles after that!’

‘Don’t people mind?’

‘Why should they?’

‘After all the trouble they went through to get rid of the aristocracy – here they are back again.’

‘Let’s ask them,’ said the Doctor. He waved to the nearest footman, a strapping, red-faced young man, who looked far from comfortable in his white wig and fancy uniform.

The footman hurried over. ‘More champagne, sir, my lady?’

‘Why not?’ said the Doctor. They put their empty glasses on the footman’s tray and accepted two full ones.

‘I wonder if you could help us,’ the Doctor went on. ‘We’re visitors from abroad, curious about your country and my friend has a question.’

The footman looked baffled but willing. ‘I’ll do my best sir.’

‘It’s just that you went through so much suffering to change your society,’ said Serena. ‘So many deaths. Now it’s all changed back again, as if it was all for nothing. You’ve even got an emperor, a royal family again. The only difference is the name.’

The footman said, ‘That’s where you’re wrong, miss. There’s a difference. That other lot was like forced on us, see? We chose this emperor – he’s *our* emperor.’ With that, the footman gave them a quick bow and moved away.

‘You see?’ said the Doctor.

Serena shook her head. ‘Humans are strange.’

‘Humans – not only humans but most sentient beings – like to form hierarchies,’ said the Doctor. ‘All that seems to change is the titles. Revolutionary commissioners or kings, there are always the rulers and the ruled. You should know that, Serena, you’re an aristocrat yourself.’

‘That’s quite different.’

‘Is it?’

‘Aristocracy on Gallifrey means moral obligations, public service...’

‘Combined with wealth, universal deference and the best of everything, of course.’

‘Well, if there are always aristocrats, there are always rebels – you should know that Doctor! Or have you changed sides like everyone else here?’

‘I do what I can,’ said the Doctor angrily. ‘And what seems best to me at the time.’

What looked like quite a promising quarrel was interrupted by a mellow contralto voice. ‘Doctor! And Mademoiselle...Mademoiselle...Now what was it?’

They turned and saw the Countess, resplendent in a red silk dress. Her blue eyes shone, and her dark hair, like Josephine’s, was ablaze with jewels.

‘This is the Lady Serena,’ said the Doctor. ‘And since titles are no longer out of fashion I take it that you are...?’

‘Countess Malika Treszka,’ said the Countess. ‘My friends call me Malika.’

‘Then I shall call you Countess,’ said the Doctor.

‘And so shall I,’ said Serena.

Ignoring her the Countess said, ‘Yet I should like us to be friends, Doctor – despite all the trouble you have caused me. So many promising schemes ruined.’

‘How can we be friends, Countess, when I never know where you stand?’

‘Am I such a puzzle?’

‘You were my ally in 1915 when you helped my friends to escape.’ The Doctor held up his hand. ‘On a whim, if you like, but still, you helped them. It seemed we were on the same side at Fort Carre.’ He nodded towards the figure on the dais. ‘Otherwise our imperial friend would not be here.’

‘In England,’ said Serena, ‘your associate tried to murder two of that country’s greatest heroes, presumably to ensure Napoleon’s victory.’

‘Yet this very afternoon it seems you tried to blow up Napoleon,’ said the Doctor. ‘Now here you are a guest at his reception! Why do these things?’

‘For the sake of the Game,’ said the Countess. She laughed. ‘No wonder you are confused, Doctor. The situation is confusing – and fluid. Now it has changed yet again. I have changed it.’

‘Enlighten us!’

‘To begin with, this afternoon’s explosion was nothing to do with us.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘It really was a home-grown assassination attempt?’

‘Precisely so,’ said the Countess. ‘Fouché’s men are already on the trail of the Royalists responsible.’

‘And the rest?’

The Countess paused. ‘Imagine a war as a game of chess, Doctor. Revolutionary France versus England; England versus Nazi Germany; capitalist America versus communist Russia. Leaders are pieces on the board, Napoleon against Wellington; Churchill against Hitler; Truman against Stalin.’

‘It’s not an attitude I care for,’ said the Doctor. ‘Go on.’

‘But what happens if some of the major pieces are taken

from the board? How fascinating to interfere, to play one side against the other, and see the results!

‘And this is your Game,’ said the Doctor in disgust. ‘Wanton interference with human lives, simply for sport.’

The Countess shook her head. ‘It is their game, Doctor, the humans. Wars happen, countless wars, whether we interfere or not. Why do you think we favour this planet? But all that is about to change.’

‘You’re rambling,’ said Serena. ‘What’s going to change? How?’

‘*Everything*,’ said the Countess exultantly. ‘It will no longer be the humans’ game, it will be ours. *Ours!* And all because of my Grand Design. We shall –’ She broke off, as if aware that she had said far more than she intended. ‘It is useless to explain, you will never grasp the beauty of the concept. Let me just say this, Doctor. If you and your companion wish to live, leave this time and place.’

‘And why should we do that?’

Suddenly the Countess’s voice and manner changed. ‘Because if you do not leave, you are doomed,’ she hissed. ‘We shall destroy you!’

Chapter Fourteen

Conspiracy

For a moment the threat seemed to hang in the air like smoke. The Countess looked from the Doctor to Serena to see the effect of her words. To her fury neither seemed to be in the least impressed.

The Doctor was smiling, and Serena actually laughed. ‘Really?’ she said. ‘You haven’t been doing too well so far, have you?’

With an effort the Countess regained her calm.

‘We haven’t really been trying so far,’ she said gently. She turned to the Doctor. ‘Please, Doctor, pay attention to my warning. In spite of the trouble you’ve caused, I retain a liking for you.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘That’s very kind of you,’ he said, in the tone of one humouring a fractious child. ‘But I have to agree with Serena. So far I’ve caused you at least as much trouble as you’ve caused me.’

‘That was when we were divided. You had only one team to deal with. The other might even help you, as I did at Fort Carre. But no longer. Now we are united in the Grand Design. If you interfere again we shall annihilate you.’ She turned and disappeared into the crowd.

Serena shook her head. ‘Now what was all that about?’

‘No idea,’ said the Doctor. ‘She’s up to something, though. Something new, and something particularly nasty.’

‘Her Grand Design.’

‘Whatever that means.’

‘Excuse me, Doctor?’ Captain Charles had appeared beside them.

‘It’s all go, isn’t it?’ said the Doctor wearily. ‘Yes, what is it young man?’

‘The Emperor would like you to join him in his study.’

The Doctor glanced across at the dais and saw that it was now empty. 'Very well. Come along, Serena, we're wanted.'

Captain Charles looked embarrassed. 'I am sorry, Doctor, but the invitation was for you alone.'

Serena looked annoyed and the Doctor smiled. 'Sorry Serena, they haven't invented Women's Lib yet.' He turned back to Captain Charles. 'Very well, I'll come. But I don't wish to leave my friend alone and unprotected in a mob of strangers.'

'Of course not, Doctor. If you will give me a moment.'

Captain Charles looked around the crowd and settled upon an elegant-looking man in white silk, who was standing by a pillar. He was leaning on a crystal-handled cane and surveying the crowd with a look of amused disdain. Although no longer young, he was still slim and upright. His features were not undistinguished, but just missed being handsome – perhaps because of a slightly turned-up nose, which gave him an attractively humorous air.

Captain Charles crossed over to him and spoke briefly. The elegant man turned and looked at the Doctor with mild interest. Then he looked at Serena with considerably more interest. He inclined his head, and followed Captain Charles back towards them, walking with a slight limp.

'Doctor, Lady Serena, allow me to present Monsieur de Talleyrand-Perigord –' he broke off. 'I beg your pardon sir, I was forgetting your new honours. I hear you are soon to become the Prince of Benevento.'

The newcomer waved a long white hand. 'A generous gesture of our beloved Emperor. He is gracious towards his faithful servants.' The mellow, slightly husky voice was amused. 'The appellation is somewhat cumbersome, however. Talleyrand will do very well.'

'Monsieur Talleyrand is the Emperor's Foreign Minister, as I expect you are aware,' said Captain Charles. 'He has had varied and uniquely extensive experience of Government service.'

There was an edge of malice in the last remark and Serena wondered what he meant.

The Doctor and Talleyrand exchanged bows.

'It is most kind of you to agree to entertain my ward, Monsieur Talleyrand,' said the Doctor. 'We could not have hoped for a chaperon of such distinction.'

Talleyrand looked amused. 'Me, a chaperon? With my reputation? Well, there is, they say, a first time for everything. I am honoured by your trust, sir.'

Captain Charles said, 'The Emperor is waiting. If you will excuse us?' He led the Doctor away.

Talleyrand turned to Serena and smiled. She was immediately aware of an immense warmth and charm. 'It is good of you to honour a weary old man with your company, my child.' He looked around and indicated an alcove, already occupied, which held gilt chairs and a little ornamental table. 'Shall we be seated?'

Serena looked puzzled. 'But there isn't anywhere free.'

'Oh yes, there is, my child. Believe me, there is.'

Two fashionable-looking young men were drinking champagne at the table, but Talleyrand strolled towards it as if it were empty. By the time they reached it, it was. Talleyrand held out a chair for Serena and she sat. He drew up a chair beside her. 'May I procure you some more champagne?'

'No thank you.'

Talleyrand nodded understandingly. 'A somewhat inferior brand, I agree. An ice cream perhaps? I am told the ice cream is excellent.'

'Thank you,' said Serena.

Talleyrand snapped his fingers and a footman appeared as if by magic. 'Ice cream,' said Talleyrand.

The footman vanished, and reappeared seconds later with an elaborate ice-cream confection in a silver dish, and a long silver spoon.

Serena tried the ice cream. It was delicious.

'I'm sorry to impose on you like this,' she said demurely.

'Not an imposition but a privilege,' he murmured. 'So refreshing to have the company of someone beautiful, intelligent, and *new*.'

Serena looked around the gallery. The crowd was thinning a little now that Napoleon and Josephine had departed, but there was still an array of beautiful women in revealing gowns and handsome men in lavish uniforms. 'I shouldn't have thought you'd be starved for company and conversation. With an entire imperial court to choose from...'

'A court is an assembly of noble and distinguished beggars,' said Talleyrand dismissively.

Serena looked thoughtfully at him and Talleyrand smiled lazily back at her. It seemed the conversational ball was still in her court. She remembered Captain Charles' parting shot. 'The Captain said you had extensive experience of Government service, Monsieur Talleyrand.'

'The Captain was referring, rather unkindly, to what some consider my somewhat chequered career...Tell me, my dear, is this your first visit to our court?'

The Doctor followed Captain Charles out of the Grand Salon, along the wide, mirrored corridors and into a smaller, more functional-looking corridor.

'Was that *the* Talleyrand?' he asked as they walked along. 'The one they call the Great Survivor?'

Captain Charles nodded. 'They also call him the King of Turncoats.'

'That seems a little harsh. Is it justified, do you think?'

'Judge for yourself,' said Captain Charles. 'He served the Bourbons, the Revolutionary Assembly, the Directory and the Consulate. Now he serves the Emperor – and whoever replaces the Emperor, Talleyrand will serve *him*.'

'And this is the man you chose to look after my innocent young ward?' said the Doctor in mock concern.

Privately he wasn't much worried. Serena might be relatively inexperienced, but she had quite enough self-possession to deal with unwanted advances, even from a practised old roué like Talleyrand.

Captain Charles wasn't too concerned either. 'I shouldn't worry, Doctor. Talleyrand's morals may be a bit loose, especially for an ex-bishop, but he's still a gentleman. Indeed, he's an aristocrat. And he's very powerful. No one will bother someone under his protection.'

'I see.' The Doctor hesitated to ask his next question, but as usual his insatiable curiosity got the better of him. 'Forgive me for asking, are you the Captain Charles who was once very good friends with the Empress Josephine?'

'The Empress has always enjoyed my undying loyalty and affection,' said the Captain stiffly.

'I'll take that as a "yes". Aren't you in a rather dangerous position – as Napoleon's aide, I mean?'

‘Not really. The Emperor’s wrath has cooled now. His own behaviour is far from irreproachable in that respect.’ Captain Charles grinned ruefully. ‘Besides, I act as a sort of perpetual reminder to keep the Empress in her place. I think it amuses him to see us thrown into almost daily contact and unable to exchange anything but the most formal courtesies.’

‘It must be hard for you.’

‘I got off lightly – my head is still on my shoulders!’

They turned off into a smaller corridor, which ended in a set of double doors with an armed sentry outside. The doors were covered in green leather and embossed with great golden bees.

The Doctor wondered idly why Napoleon had chosen the bee as his symbol. Maybe because he was always so busy.

Captain Charles returned the sentry’s salute and flung open the double doors.

‘The Doctor, Your Majesty,’ he announced.

Wondering how Serena was getting on with Talleyrand, the Doctor went through the doors and into the room beyond.

Serena was fielding polite, but extremely skilled, questioning from Talleyrand. It was evident that he was interested in her – and in the Doctor. No doubt he was interested in anyone who interested Napoleon. He was clearly curious about Napoleon’s reasons for summoning the Doctor. Which was awkward, since Serena had no idea what they were. It wasn’t easy to answer any of his questions, since they hadn’t really worked out a cover story for their current roles.

Serena took refuge in being mysterious, and sought for a way to change the subject. ‘You said earlier that your career could be seen as somewhat – chequered, I think was the word?’

‘Some would say so.’

‘Indeed? But you are Foreign Minister, and soon to be a prince. Your career appears to have been very distinguished.’

‘Oh, it has, it has! And as the good Captain hinted, *extremely* varied.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘If you’re sure it won’t bore you?’ Serena shook her head and Talleyrand went on, ‘As you can see, my dear child, I am very old.’

Actually he was somewhere in his early fifties, thought

Serena, and in remarkably good shape. He was still a very attractive man, as he knew full well. She sensed that it amused him to pretend to be practically decrepit. Perhaps he was trying to lull her into a false sense of security.

‘I was born into an aristocratic and important family in the time of the late Bourbon monarchy,’ Talleyrand continued. ‘Like all young men of my class, I was intended for the Army.’ He tapped his leg. ‘A childhood injury made my military career impossible so I was thrust into the Church. Thanks entirely to the influence of my noble family, I rapidly became a bishop.’

‘You don’t look like a bishop,’ said Serena frankly.

‘I never really felt like one. Or acted like one either, to be honest. When the Revolution broke out, I left the Church, joined the revolutionary cause, and became a delegate to the National Assembly.’

‘How did you survive the Terror?’ asked Serena in some surprise. Surely Talleyrand’s family background, not to mention his aristocratic air, should have made him a prime candidate for the guillotine.

‘Not without difficulty. As the Revolution became more extreme, a warrant was issued for my arrest. I went first to England, and when they expelled me went on to America. After a few rather tiresome years in exile, the revolutionary bloodlust died down, and the desire to remove my head faded away. I was able to return to France and became, once again, a Minister of State. I served the Directory, the Consulate...and now, our glorious brand new Emperor.’

Serena’s own political experience told her that a world of intrigue and danger must lie behind this light-hearted account. Talleyrand was obviously a skilled politician. Was he also a total cynic? She couldn’t resist asking the question.

‘And where do your true loyalties lie?’

‘The art of statesmanship,’ said Talleyrand, ‘is to foresee the inevitable and to expedite its occurrence.’

Serena pondered this enigmatic statement and shook her head. ‘I don’t follow.’

‘I served the Bourbon establishment until its oppressive stupidity made its fall inevitable. I served the Revolution until it collapsed from within in bloodlust and cruelty. I served the Directory till it became too weak and corrupt to control the

mob, and the three consuls until it became evident that only one of them was worthy of my service. So, I served the First Consul – who is now our Emperor.’

‘And your loyalties?’

‘To myself. To my friends. Above all, to France. I try to do what is best for France.’ He gave a sudden, disarming grin. ‘Always, of course, whilst saving my head, preserving my comfort, and feathering my nest!’

Serena was silent for a moment, considering what he had said. Despite the frivolous conclusion, the words about France rang true. She remembered what the Doctor had said earlier. ‘I do what I have to do – and what seems best to me at the time.’

Perhaps, in some strange way, the Doctor and Talleyrand were alike.

She wondered how the Doctor was getting on with Napoleon.

Chapter Fifteen

Napoleon the First

The Doctor stood looking around the room. It was a large, luxuriously furnished study, its walls lined with leather-bound books. There were green morocco chairs, ebony tables and a sofa upholstered in green taffeta to the left of the huge fireplace. There was a massive desk made of ormolu-lined mahogany, and a six-foot longcase clock.

Napoleon rose from the desk as the Doctor came in. He had exchanged his court dress for a well-worn grey tunic. He noticed the Doctor registering the change.

‘My soldier’s coat, Doctor.’

The Doctor bowed. ‘Fitting attire, Your Majesty, for the greatest soldier in Europe.’ What was it old Disraeli said, he thought? Or rather, what was it he *would* say. ‘Everyone likes flattery – and when you come to royalty, you should lay it on with a trowel.’ It seemed to be working with Napoleon, anyway. He came forwards from behind the desk, beaming a welcome.

‘Good of you to come, Doctor. Would you care for some refreshment? Wine? I have a respectable Burgundy. Or more champagne, perhaps?’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘I have already overindulged in Your Majesty’s hospitality.’

‘As you wish. You may leave us, Captain.’

Captain Charles bowed. ‘Then with your permission, Doctor? If you would extend your arms?’

The Doctor stretched out his arms and Captain Charles performed the ceremony known to a later age as ‘patting down’.

‘This is no way to treat an honoured guest,’ said Napoleon in mock protest.

‘The Captain is doing no more than his duty,’ said the Doctor. ‘I never carry weapons – but how is he to know?’

The search completed, the Captain bowed and withdrew

through a discreet side door.

‘Come and sit down, Doctor,’ said Napoleon, indicating a chair close to the big desk. The Doctor sat, and Napoleon took his seat behind the desk.

He stared at the Doctor for a moment as if at a loss how to begin. The Doctor looked placidly back at him.

‘You are a puzzle to me, Doctor,’ said Napoleon at last. ‘Many years ago you saved my head. Today you saved me again. I need to know how – and why.’

The Doctor gathered his thoughts. Time for some more mystic mumbo jumbo, he thought. When he spoke, his voice was low and solemn, throbbing with earnestness.

‘There is little I can tell Your Majesty,’ he said. ‘Little that you would find clear and satisfactory. You are a soldier, used to stern decisions based on hard facts. My sphere is dark and full of uncertainties. All I can say is this: I am a scientist and a scholar, a wandering scholar, if you will. For many years I have travelled the world in search of ancient knowledge. I have acquired certain powers, certain intuitions...’

‘Go on,’ said Napoleon eagerly.

‘Many years ago, in Antibes, these powers told me you were in danger. I acted; I tried to act, to save you. I did not succeed, not fully, but perhaps I helped. Today, here in Paris, the same thing happened. This time I was more fortunate.’

Napoleon leant forward eagerly. ‘Can you see the future?’

‘In a crystal ball, or a pool of ink?’ The Doctor smiled and shook his head. ‘Sometimes there are hints, intimations. They come when they will. But there is little clarity, and no guarantee.’

Napoleon jumped up and began pacing about the room, coming to a halt before the Doctor’s chair. ‘Why did you come to Paris?’ he demanded. ‘What do you want from me?’

‘I came to Paris because Your Majesty has made it the new centre of science, art and culture. I ask for nothing.’

‘Everybody wants something,’ growled Napoleon.

In Napoleon’s world, thought the Doctor, surrounded as he was by people with their hands out, he was probably right. It was a chance to be different.

‘I ask for nothing, sire,’ he repeated. ‘Your Majesty will recall that I did not make myself known to him after today’s incident.’

‘True, true,’ muttered Napoleon. ‘It was I who recognised

you.’ He resumed his pacing, then came to a sudden halt. ‘The Countess has warned me against you. She says you are a spy, an English agent.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘If that were true, I could have done the English great service today – simply by doing nothing!’

‘True,’ said Napoleon again. ‘Then why does she accuse you?’

The Doctor shrugged. ‘I have known the Countess some time – in a sense we are rivals. In the past I have frustrated several schemes of hers, and she bears a grudge.’

‘What kind of schemes?’

‘Certain schemes of which I did not approve,’ said the Doctor, in tones which forbade further enquiry. ‘There is another obvious motive for her enmity towards me.’

‘And what is that?’

‘Simple jealousy. She has become accustomed to enjoying Your Majesty’s confidence, being his favoured confidante. I arrive, Your Majesty is kind enough to afford me some recognition – perhaps she sees me as a potential rival, a threat to her position.’

Napoleon laughed. ‘You may be right, Doctor, a jealous woman is the very devil. The trouble I have with Josephine...’

‘I make no accusations against the Countess, but let me warn you in turn. Do not trust the Countess too completely, or take her too far into your confidence.’

‘And why not? She has given me much help, much good advice over the years.’

‘I don’t doubt it, sire. She may well do so again. But the Countess has her own agenda, and she works always towards her own ends. As long as those ends coincide with Your Majesty’s, well and good. But if ever they do not...’

Napoleon said reluctantly, ‘There may be something in what you say. She is a schemer, that is something I always felt about her.’ He paused. ‘So you cannot foretell my future, Doctor?’

‘Not in the kind of detail Your Majesty would desire. But I can sense trends, movements, possibilities. I can feel the forces of destiny swirling about Your Majesty’s head.’ And if that isn’t mysterious and pompous enough, I don’t know what is, thought the Doctor – but will he buy it?

Napoleon leaned forward eagerly. ‘Do you see success?’

'I see year upon year of success,' said the Doctor in solemn tones. 'Some setbacks perhaps, but in the main, victory follows victory.'

Which was all true enough, to begin with, he thought. Many years of unbroken success lay before Napoleon. Until the end, of course...

The end was what concerned Napoleon as well. It was almost as if he had some sort of premonition. 'And the end? The ultimate end? Do I succeed or fail?'

'The end is always shrouded in darkness, Your Majesty.'

The Doctor thought again of the problems of foreknowledge of human history. There was a great temptation to say something like, 'Why not stop while you're ahead? Make a decent peace with England and stick to it, and on no account invade Russia.' Yet to do that would be to become as bad as the Countess. Great success lay ahead of Napoleon. But so did failure, defeat and exile. That too was his destiny, and nothing must happen to change it.

Napoleon seemed to come to a sudden decision. 'Come with me, Doctor, I have something to show you.'

He led the Doctor across the room and drew back a curtain, revealing a hidden door. He opened it with a key and led the Doctor inside.

The Doctor found himself in a large, bare room, brilliantly lit by a huge chandelier. Its walls were lined with maps, and more maps were piled high on wooden tables. Napoleon led the Doctor over to the largest map. It showed a long stretch of the French coastline – the stretch that looked out over the English Channel.

Napoleon snatched up a pointer. 'My army, Doctor. The Grand Army that is to invade England. From Alprech Point to Cap Gris-Nez. Five Army corps! A hundred and fifty thousand infantry, ninety thousand cavalry, massed parks of artillery. Four camps, Ambleteuse, Wimereux, Outreau, Le Portel. Here, in the centre, my headquarters at Boulogne. Harbours all along the coast crammed with flat-bottomed barges to ferry the army across!' Napoleon stepped back, looking triumphantly at the Doctor. 'What do you say to that, hey?'

'One would say that the English are doomed, sire – once your army reaches the shore of England.'

Napoleon scowled. 'I know, I know. Getting them there, that's the problem. We must have command of the Channel, and the accursed English Navy stand in our way. What if I were to tell you that the problem is well on the way to being solved?'

'Then the English are doomed indeed.'

Napoleon moved to another, larger-scale map. 'The English fleet has been lured away to the West Indies. The English have only four line-of-battle ships – four! – to guard the length of their precious Channel.'

The Doctor nodded, his mind racing. Why was Napoleon telling him all this? It was no great secret, of course. You cannot conceal an army of over two hundred thousand men massed along a coastline, and the plan to invade England had been public knowledge for some time. But there was something else, some other factor.

Gently he pointed out the weakness in Napoleon's plan. 'Should the English fleet return, before the invasion...'

'They cannot! Admiral Villeneuve has defeated their Admiral Calder at Finisterre. His fleet is moving north, *thirty-three* French and Spanish warships! The English will be outnumbered and cut off, and the Channel will be ours!'

'*If* Admiral Villeneuve is victorious when he encounters the English fleet,' murmured the Doctor provocatively.

'*If! If! If!*' shouted Napoleon. 'His force is vastly superior to that of the English. Why should he not be victorious?'

Because Nelson will defeat him at Trafalgar, thought the Doctor. In Napoleon's terms he did know the future, some of it at least. The intended future. Yet Napoleon seemed convinced things would be different. What was making him so confident?

'Why indeed,' said the Doctor, allowing more provocative scepticism to creep into his voice. 'But warfare is always uncertain, as no one knows better than you, sire. Sadly, the Navy of France has not always repeated at sea the magnificent successes of her soldiers on land...Villeneuve is no Nelson.'

'Nelson will be dead!' shouted Napoleon. 'His ship will be sunk before the battle, his fleet will be demoralised and defeated, and England will be mine!'

'It seems Your Majesty has an ability denied to me,' said the Doctor. Deliberately he used the tone of someone who humours the unbalanced and deluded. 'He can foresee the future!'

Napoleon glared at him, clearly torn between his instinct for discretion and the desire to boast. Finally he was unable to resist speaking out. 'I have a secret weapon, Doctor. One that makes victory certain.'

'Indeed?' said the Doctor, in tones of polite boredom. Napoleon was silent for a moment. He seemed to be pondering some decision. 'You say you are a scientist, Doctor?'

'Well, I dabble a little, you know. I have studied the mechanical and physical sciences as well as the spiritual.'

Napoleon thought for a moment. 'You shall give me your opinion of my secret weapon.'

'I should be honoured,' said the Doctor, who had been angling for this all along. 'If Your Majesty could show me plans, designs...'

'I can do better. The weapon is being demonstrated for me very soon, at Boulogne. You shall come with me, Doctor, and see for yourself'

'Your Majesty is too kind. If you are sure it would not be an imposition...'

'Not at all. Captain Charles will arrange the details.'

He led the Doctor from the map room, closed and locked the door behind him and raised his voice. 'Captain Charles!'

The aide reappeared and Napoleon said, 'Escort the Doctor back to the Grand Salon. He will be accompanying us to Boulogne, make arrangements.'

'Very good sire.'

'Now if you will forgive me, Doctor, I have work to do – as always. A republic doesn't run itself, you know.'

No, thought the Doctor. You run it, from top to bottom. And very well, too. Out loud he said, 'Then I mustn't impose on Your Majesty's time any further.'

'I hope your charming companion hasn't been too bored in your absence.'

'Captain Charles was good enough to place her in the charge of your foreign minister.'

Napoleon laughed. 'Then she won't be bored. Seduced, possibly, but definitely not bored. Talleyrand is the finest conversationalist in Europe.' Napoleon's face darkened. 'He's also a shit in silk stockings, always scheming and plotting. Told him so to his face once. Still, not a bad fellow in his way.'

Napoleon returned to his desk and plunged into his paperwork. The Doctor bowed and turned away.

As he headed for the door Napoleon looked up and called, 'Oh, Doctor!'

The Doctor stopped and turned round. 'Your Majesty?'

'Don't make any plans to leave Paris in the immediate future, will you?'

'And why not?'

'Because I say so,' said Napoleon – revealing, almost for the first time, the ruthless dictator beneath the genial host. 'I haven't quite made up my mind about you, Doctor. I'd like to have you close at hand until I do.'

'Until the little chap who followed me home completes his enquiries?'

'Quite so, Doctor.'

Napoleon returned to his papers, and the Doctor bowed and withdrew.

Chapter Sixteen

Fulton's Submersible

Serena was listening to a string of mildly scandalous Court gossip from Talleyrand, fending off the gentle but persistent enquiries that came between the anecdotes, and wishing desperately that the Doctor would return before she ran out of polite evasions.

For the moment at least, she could relax. Talleyrand was recounting the story of the affair between the Empress Josephine and Captain Charles – whose first name, it appeared, was Hippolyte.

'Young Hippolyte was only a lieutenant at the time,' said Talleyrand. 'I think that stung, rather.'

'The Emperor would have preferred her to take a lover of higher rank?' asked Serena.

'He wasn't yet an emperor remember, not even a consul. He was just a general, away fighting in Italy. Still, I think he'd have preferred someone more senior. A marshal at least!' Talleyrand smiled. 'To make matters worse, Hippolyte and Josephine were in business together, selling substandard supplies to General Bonaparte's own troops at a fat profit! Of course, it all came out eventually, the swindle and the affair.'

Serena couldn't help being intrigued. 'How?'

Josephine travelled to Italy to see her Bonaparte, and actually had the cheek to take Hippolyte with her. Unfortunately for her, Napoleon's brother, Joseph, travelled in the same coach with them and he soon spotted what was going on. As soon as they got to Italy he told Napoleon – the rest of the Bonaparte family have always hated Josephine.'

'What happened then?' asked Serena. By now she was resigned to hearing the whole story.

'Bonaparte confronted Josephine, there was a terrible tearful scene and she denied everything, said it was all malicious gossip. Said his family had always been jealous of her – perfectly true, of

course. And Bonaparte believed her, at least for a time.'

'Why only for a time?'

'Soon after that, General Bonaparte left for Egypt and the affair started up again. Somehow the Bonaparte family got conclusive proof and sent it to Napoleon. He came back from Egypt, breathing fire and threatening divorce. Josephine rushed to meet him in Paris, hoping to pull off the same trick twice I suppose.'

'And what happened?'

'Napoleon reached Paris before her and when she got to their house she found he'd locked himself in an upstairs room. She hammered on the door, and begged and screamed and wept all night – and eventually he let her in.'

'So they were reconciled?'

'After a fashion. He forgave her, but he never really trusted her again. But he still needed her. Josephine is well connected you see, socially and politically. She made an ideal hostess for him while he was on the way up. She had a lot to do with him becoming First Consul. So when he became Emperor, he decided she ought to share in his success.'

'A happy ending, then?'

'Not really. These days there are fresh rumours about divorce.'

'But why?' protested Serena. 'If they survived all that...'

Despite his flippancy, there was real compassion in Talleyrand's voice. 'Josephine can't have any more children. And the one thing an emperor needs is an heir.'

Serena saw a tall, keen-looking man with a curved beak of a nose and a shock of wild brown hair approaching their alcove. Talleyrand saw him too and raised an eyebrow. 'Can I assist you, Monsieur Fulton?' he said dismissively.

The man bowed stiffly. 'Forgive the interruption, Foreign Minister. I just wondered if you were coming to my demonstration tomorrow.' There was a pronounced American twang in his voice.

Talleyrand shuddered. 'Me? Spend hours standing on a windy beach with salt corroding my lungs, waiting for some event which will probably never take place? I think not, Monsieur Fulton.'

'It will be well worth seeing,' said the man with nervous

eagerness. 'It could revolutionise naval warfare.'

'My dear Monsieur Fulton, I am a diplomat. Our aim is to avoid warfare wherever possible.'

'You really should come. The Emperor is taking a great interest.'

'Our beloved Emperor is prone to enthusiasms,' said Talleyrand. 'I am not. Now, if you will forgive me?'

Fulton's eyes flashed angrily, but he bowed his head and withdrew.

Talleyrand turned to Serena. 'I do apologise, my dear. Forgive me for not introducing you but he really is the most boring fellow.'

'I thought you were rather unkind to him.'

'Nonsense, I treated him with far more courtesy than he deserves. Nasty, grimy engineer fellows with their bangs and flashes and stinks. No wonder war is no longer an occupation for gentlemen.'

'Who is he?'

'Fulton? He's an American. Some kind of itinerant inventor. A protégé of our Countess Malika, I believe. He's pestering her now.'

Serena looked across the salon, less crowded by now, and saw Fulton deep in conversation with the Countess. She looked angry with him, and angrier still when she flashed a quick glance at Serena.

'What's his connection with the Countess?'

'He's promoting some crackpot nautical invention. Something or other. She got him an audience with the Emperor.'

'What do you make of the Countess?' asked Serena.

'She's something of a mystery. She seems to have known the Emperor in his early days, she's got some kind of claim on him. She reappeared in Paris recently, and was immediately received in imperial circles. Why do you ask?'

'Just idle curiosity.'

To Serena's vast relief the Doctor reappeared, beaming and rubbing his hands. 'Ah, there you are! Sorry to be so long. When the Emperor commands, you know.'

He turned to Talleyrand, who had risen lazily to his feet. 'Monsieur de Talleyrand-Perigord, the Emperor's Grand Chamberlain and Foreign Minister. It's an honour to meet you.'

‘Charmed,’ said Talleyrand, and they exchanged bows.

‘It’s extremely good of you to take care of my young friend like this. A man of your eminence must have lots more important things to do.’

‘A man of my eminence is frequently bored to tears by those he must engage in conversation,’ said Talleyrand. ‘Lady Serena has been a most delightful companion. Mysterious, but delightful.’

The Doctor laughed. ‘Serena? Mysterious? Not in the least. She’s just a simple girl you know, very inexperienced. Doesn’t have much to say for herself – not compared to a sophisticated chap like you.’

‘Indeed, Monsieur de Talleyrand has a wonderful store of anecdotes,’ said Serena. ‘I now know far more about the affairs of the Emperor’s court than I feel is good for me.’

‘Oh dear, I hope you haven’t been filling her head with nonsense,’ said the Doctor with mock severity. ‘She’s been very carefully brought up, you know. She’ll be shocked if you’ve been telling her celebrity gossip.’

‘My apologies,’ said Talleyrand languidly. ‘We lead such shallow lives here at court that such trivia is all we have to discuss. Now I must go and acquire the material for more gossip. Lady Serena, Doctor. We shall meet again soon, I think.’ He kissed Serena’s hand, bowed elegantly to the Doctor and strolled away.

The Doctor sat down beside Serena and accepted a glass of champagne from a passing footman. He nodded towards the departing Talleyrand.

‘Never think he was one of the finest minds in Europe would you?’

‘I can hardly be expected to judge. I’m only a simple girl!’

The Doctor chuckled. ‘That was meant as a compliment. He’s obviously been trying to pump you, and getting nowhere.’

Serena looked around. ‘Is it safe to talk here? We could be overheard.’

‘Not in this hubbub, surely, and they haven’t invented bugging yet. As long as we keep our voices down we should be all right. Did Talleyrand get anything out of you, do you think?’

‘I didn’t have anything to tell him,’ said Serena. ‘There’s very little I *could* tell him and be believed.’

‘All the same if you’ve resisted an interrogation by Talleyrand, you’ve done well. How did you get on otherwise?’

‘I like him,’ said Serena. ‘Under all that cynical frivolity he’s extremely intelligent – kind too, I think. He was telling me about his career, amongst other things. The mere fact that he’s survived...’

‘Survived and prospered,’ said the Doctor. ‘He’s held high office under the Bourbon royals, the various revolutionary governments, and now Bonaparte.’ He lowered his voice still further. ‘When the Bourbons are restored, he’ll serve them again – and when they’re eventually deposed, which they will be, he’ll hold office under their successors. If all goes well...’

‘What do you mean, if all goes well?’

‘If nobody succeeds in perverting the course of history.’

‘Well, we know who’s trying,’ said Serena. ‘How did things go with the Emperor?’

The Doctor gave her a brief account of the meeting. ‘He’s got a socking great army all ready to invade England – and there’s precious little on the other side to stop them – if they can get there...’

‘Isn’t that where the British Navy comes in? Once they defeat the French fleet...’

‘If they defeat the French fleet.’

‘I thought we’d made sure they did.’

‘So did I. But Napoleon seems very confident. He’s talking about some kind of secret weapon.’

‘Something happened while you were away, Doctor. A man called Fulton came up and talked to Talleyrand, wanted him to attend some kind of demonstration.’

‘Demonstration? Demonstration of what?’

‘I’m not sure. It was all going to take place by the sea somewhere. Talleyrand snubbed the man and sent him away. Afterwards he said he was an American, trying to promote a new invention – a sub something-or-other.’

‘Good gracious!’ said the Doctor. ‘A submersible vessel – a submarine! Someone tried to get Napoleon to finance a prototype submarine.’

‘What happened?’

‘Trials were a big disappointment and the idea was dropped.’

‘According to Talleyrand, Fulton is very thick with the

Countess. They were talking together afterwards – and the Countess was glaring at me as they talked.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘Suppose the Countess is giving this fellow Fulton a bit of technical assistance, helping him to build a submarine which really does work? A working submarine could sink half the British fleet. We’ve got to put a stop to it.’

‘How do we do that?’

‘Napoleon’s invited me to a secret weapon demonstration, presumably of this submersible. I’ll just have to see what turns up, won’t I?’

‘There’s Fulton over there, Doctor,’ said Serena.

The Doctor glanced across the room and saw a tall, beak-nosed man standing by himself and gloomily surveying the crowd.

‘Excuse me a moment,’ he said, and marched over to him. ‘Mr Fulton?’

‘That’s right.’

‘I understand you’re an engineer, an inventor. My friend Lady Serena told me about you. I’m the Doctor. I dabble a bit in the sciences myself.’

‘Well it won’t do you much good round here,’ said Fulton. ‘This crowd don’t reckon much to engineers.’

‘My dear chap it’s always the same,’ said the Doctor sympathetically. ‘They’re happy enough to profit from the scientific advances, but despise the man who gets his hands dirty producing them. Tell me about your submersible. The Emperor invited me to attend the trials, I’m really looking forward to it.’

Fulton beamed down at him, scarcely able to believe he’d discovered a fellow spirit. ‘That so, sir? She’s called the *Nautilus*. Right now I’ve got her in a workshop here at the palace. But we’re taking her down to Boulogne soon for sea-trials. The Emperor’s coming.’

‘My ward tells me you tried to get the Foreign Minister to come too.’

‘I thought it was worth a try. He’s very influential and the Emperor listens to him. But he just looked down his turned-up nose at me and gave me the brush-off...’

Watching them from across the room, Serena saw that they were engaged in animated conversation, Fulton holding forth, the

Doctor listening with keen interest, asking the occasional question.

After some little while, the Doctor looked across and gave her an apologetic smile. He said his farewells, bowed to Fulton and came back over to her.

‘Sorry about that my dear, I couldn’t miss the opportunity. Very interesting fellow.’

‘Tell me Doctor,’ said Serena, ‘are your ears burning?’

The Doctor rubbed one of them. ‘No, why?’

‘The Countess collared Fulton the moment you left him, and she doesn’t look happy. Guess who they’re talking about?’

‘Let ‘em!’

The Countess looked up and saw them watching her. She said something to Fulton, looking angrier than ever. She gave the Doctor a glare of deadly hatred.

Chapter Seventeen

Deadly Rendezvous

A footman approached the alcove with a laden tray piled high with assorted canapes. Serena shook her head, but the Doctor jumped up and beckoned him over.

‘Seems a jolly long time since dinner! Are you sure, Serena?’

‘Quite sure, thank you. I’m too tired to eat.’

‘Just let me have this little snack and we’ll be off. I’ll be as quick as I can.’

Accepting a plate from another footman – even the plate, he noticed, was embossed with golden bees – the Doctor loaded it with savoury canapes and began scoffing them down with surprising speed.

‘These little chicken pie things are really excellent,’ he said indistinctly. ‘Sure you won’t try one?’

Serena shook her head, watching him with amusement. He looked like a greedy child at a party.

What an odd mixture he was! Even the effect of his new smart clothes hadn’t lasted very long. By now he was looking slightly scruffy, a little clownish. But there was no doubt about his intelligence, his courage and the strength of his will.

She recalled Sardon’s account of his capture. If he had not sacrificed himself so that the kidnapped humans could be restored to their own places and times he would still be free to roam the cosmos in his rickety TARDIS. The Doctor, she thought, would always try to do the right thing, as he saw it, whatever the consequences.

She remembered his own words. ‘I do what I can – and what seems best at the time.’ The Doctor lived by a set of principles – his own principles. No wonder he had fled from Gallifrey, a place where principles were often in short supply. Serena felt a sudden pang of guilt at her disloyalty to her home planet. Was she being turned into a rebel – like the Doctor?

Her eyes met the Doctor's. He looked amused and she had a sudden feeling that he knew exactly what she was thinking...

'You see?' the Countess was saying. 'You chatter about your project in front of the girl, and she tells the Doctor! Then he comes and pumps you and you blab everything!'

'I didn't even speak to the girl ma'am,' said Fulton angrily. 'That snob Talleyrand made a point of not introducing me. And the Doctor already knew about the *Nautilus*. The Emperor's invited him to attend the trials. And I can tell you this, he's a hell of a scientist. Got the basic principles immediately, even made a few useful suggestions. What have you got against the Doctor anyway?'

'Never you mind. The point is the Doctor is warned. I must stop him before he stops us. I shall have to take extreme measures.'

'I don't want to know about that, ma'am. I'm an engineer, not a politician – or an assassin. Is the new engine component ready? Unless it's installed, and unless it works, the trials will be a disaster. I never got the propulsion problem licked, you know, that's down to you. And there's not much time.'

Realising she had been rather hard on him, the Countess gave him one of her brilliant smiles. 'Don't worry, Mr Fulton, the unit will be in place and it will work. Your trials will be a brilliant success. *Your* trials, remember, nothing to do with me.'

'You deserve some of the credit ma'am, and a share of the profits. I've got this deal with the Emperor, I get fifty per cent of the prize money for every ship we help to capture...Do you know he tried to fob me off with twenty per cent? I sure wasn't having that. Once this proposition really gets going, I reckon the profits will be enormous...'

'They're all yours. All I want is to see Nelson dead and the British defeated.'

'I don't much care who dies, or who's defeated,' said Fulton frankly. 'This isn't my war. All I want is to see my submersible working. If the Emperor doesn't back it, I'll take it to the British. This time next year I may be attacking Napoleon's fleet with it.'

'That wouldn't suit me at all,' said the Countess. 'You concentrate on your current project, Mr Fulton – and don't talk to anyone else. If you'll excuse me?'

She moved away, leaving the Grand Salon and passing through a series of anterooms until she reached a small empty chamber with a balcony. She went out onto the balcony and stared up at the starry night sky.

She took a small silver sphere from the bosom of her dress, activated it and waited. It beeped softly and she spoke. 'Listen carefully. Something must be done about the Doctor. He's becoming a serious impediment to my plans.' She lifted the sphere higher and listened intently for a moment before replying: 'No, we've tried and failed. *You* must provide the means to do it. Something he doesn't expect, and won't be able to deal with.' She waited for the reply, then went on: 'Yes, tonight...' She listened for a few moments more and then said, 'That sounds very satisfactory. I'll transmit his exact co-ordinates later...'

The Doctor swallowed his last mouthful of chicken pie, brushed away the crumbs and took a final swig of champagne.

'Delicious,' he said. 'You really can't beat French cuisine, you know. The flavour of those tiny little chicken pies...Exquisite!' He looked around hopefully. 'I don't suppose there are any more of them around?'

'Doctor, please,' said Serena. 'Everybody's going home and I want to go too, I'm very tired. I do not want to hang around all evening while you finish off the leftovers.'

'All right, all right, sorry! Let's be off,' he said. He stood up and leaned over Serena to help her rise.

Serena recoiled, waving her fan.

'What's wrong?' asked the Doctor, hurt.

'I'm sorry it's – well it's your breath. It must be those things you were eating.'

The Doctor laughed. 'Probably garlic,' he said. 'Always features largely in French cuisine. Eat some yourself then you won't notice it.'

'No, thank you,' said Serena firmly. 'Just breathe away from me for a bit!'

They made their way through the now-thinning crowd in the Grand Salon, along the mirrored corridors and down the great marble staircase, collecting their hats and cloaks from yet more footmen in the foyer.

They came down the steps of the main entrance and out

onto the square cobblestoned courtyard in front of the Tuileries Palace, an area so vast that Napoleon often used it to review his troops.

At the moment, the courtyard was filled with the carriages of the departing guests, driving up and collecting them as they waited in little groups at the foot of the steps.

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor. ‘Here’s something we didn’t think of – transport! We haven’t got round to setting up our own carriage yet.’

They had walked to the palace, strolling through the pleasant summer evening, but it was later now and the streets were growing dark. And Serena was tired.

‘We could walk back, I suppose,’ said the Doctor. ‘Though I don’t suppose you’d care to.’

‘Not if I can avoid it.’ She looked down at her fashionable shoes, which were really little more than slippers. ‘These shoes weren’t made for walking, it was bad enough coming here. Can’t we pick up a hansom cab in one of the streets nearby?’

‘We can try, but we’ll be lucky to get one on the Emperor’s reception night.’

‘We should have come in the TARDIS.’

‘I thought about it,’ admitted the Doctor. ‘But quite apart from the embarrassment of being seen arriving – or leaving – it seems a bit undignified to use a TARDIS like a taxi.’

Serena was getting impatient. ‘Isn’t the Emperor supposed to be the finest administrator in Europe? Surely he can administrate a carriage home for us?’

‘I’m sure he can,’ said the Doctor. ‘Not personally, perhaps, but no doubt one of his household could help. We’d better go back inside and ask one of the footmen.’

They were about to remount the steps when a small, plain black carriage pulled up in front of them. The driver, muffled, despite the heat, in a high-collared coat and soft hat leaned down from his box.

‘Doctor Dupont and Lady Serena? Special guests of the Emperor?’

The voice was throaty and gruff.

‘That’s us,’ said the Doctor.

‘Emperor’s sent this carriage for you. Thought you might be in need of it.’

‘That’s very thoughtful of him,’ said Serena.

‘Emperor thinks of everything, my lady,’ said the driver hoarsely. There seemed to be some kind of obscure amusement in his voice. ‘If you’ll be good enough to get in?’

The Doctor handed Serena into the coach and climbed in beside her, and the carriage set off, jolting over the cobbles. The Doctor reached up and pushed open the little trapdoor in the roof.

‘Rue Chantereine, please driver. Number six.’

The driver spoke over his shoulder. ‘I know where you’re going, Doctor.’

The voice seemed different somehow. Clearer – and younger this time. But how could that be?

Serena was looking out of the window. Now that they were out of range of the palace illuminations, there was little to be seen in the darkness of the Tuileries Gardens.

‘The route seems rather strange, Doctor.’

The Doctor looked out of the window and saw that instead of heading down the driveway that led to the road, they had curved around the palace, and were rattling through the huge dark gardens that were behind it.

‘Hey, driver!’ he called. ‘Where are we going?’

‘Short cut through the Tuileries Gardens,’ said the curiously altered voice. ‘Privilege of the Emperor’s guests.’

Again the Doctor and Serena had the feeling that he was laughing at them.

The carriage rocketed on at a reckless speed and soon they left the fountains and flowerbeds of the formal gardens and found themselves carried deep into a little wood. The carriage reached a clearing and pulled to a halt.

‘Out you get, Doctor,’ said the coachman. ‘This is as far as you go!’

‘See here, my man, I don’t know what you’re playing at,’ said the Doctor as he got out of the carriage.

The coachman jumped down from his box. ‘Don’t you, Doctor?’

Serena descended from the carriage and peered at the coachman’s face.

‘I thought, so. It’s him, Doctor – Valmont. The one who was waiting in the Countess’s carriage at Fort Carre. The one

who carried the bomb to the Colonial Office.'

And indeed it was. The driver threw back his collar and swept off his broad-brimmed hat, revealing petulant, sulky features. 'You'll spoil no more of our plans!'

'Won't I?' said the Doctor grimly. 'And how do you propose to stop me?'

'Oh, it won't be me, Doctor,' said the sneering voice. 'There's someone waiting to meet you.'

'You'll do for now,' said the Doctor and grasped him by the shoulders.

'Time for you to answer a few questions.'

Valmont broke free, stepped back and lashed at the Doctor with his driving whip. Dodging, the Doctor grabbed the whip and wrenched it from his hands.

Suddenly Valmont turned and leaped back up into the driving seat. Shaking the reins and yelling, he set the carriage in motion. It shot forwards and disappeared down the shadowy woodland path, leaving them alone in the clearing. The Doctor turned to Serena. 'Now what was all that about, I wonder?'

'Seems rather a petty trick,' said Serena. 'Going to all this trouble just to strand us in the woods.'

'I think there's a bit more to it than that,' said the Doctor. 'We'd better walk back...'

He broke off, realising that Serena was staring fixedly over his shoulder. Her face was frozen into a mask of unbelieving horror.

The Doctor whirled round, still holding the whip. Something stood watching him from the shadows at the edge of the clearing. Something very tall and skeletally thin, wrapped in a long black cloak. Its long cadaverous face was dead white and its eyes glowed red.

It smiled horribly, revealing long white fangs.

The Doctor wanted to turn and run but somehow he couldn't move.

Reaching out hungrily with long, clawlike hands the vampire sprang at the Doctor's throat.

Chapter Eighteen

Vampire

The ferocious speed of the vampire's attack knocked the Doctor over backwards. The vampire landed on top of him, sharp bony knees in his stomach, clawlike hands tearing open his collar, fangs seeking his throat...

Breath knocked out of him, the Doctor gasped...

The creature released him and retreated hissing.

As the Doctor scrambled to his feet it sprang forward again, and the Doctor lashed at it with the long driving whip. It fell back, but only briefly.

Vampires feel little pain.

For a moment they circled each other, the vampire poised for another spring.

The trouble with vampires is that since, in a sense, they're already dead, they are very hard to kill. Decapitation is effective, or the traditional stake through the heart. What he needed, thought the Doctor, was an axe, or a nice sharp stake – neither of them easy to lay your hands on in a crisis. He hadn't even got a crucifix.

Suddenly he realised – the solution was in his hands.

As the vampire sprang high in the air, the Doctor grasped the hickory shaft of the whip with both hands and broke it with savage force, snapping it off near the hilt. Casting aside the whip part, he lunged up at the descending vampire thrusting the jagged stump into its chest.

There was a crunch of splintering bone. The vampire gave a high scream and collapsed onto its back, clutching at the protruding hilt.

A fountain of blood gushed from the creature's shattered chest, its limbs twitched spasmodically and then it was still. The Doctor turned to Serena, who stood statue-like, frozen with fear, staring down at the remains of the vampire. He put an arm

around her shoulders. 'It's all right, it's over.'

She shuddered. 'Is it dead?'

The Doctor nodded. 'The poor thing was never really alive.'

'I'm sorry, Doctor, I should have tried to help. I was so frightened I couldn't move.'

Awkwardly the Doctor patted her on the back. 'That's all right, I understand. For a moment I was pretty paralysed myself.'

Not many things frighten Time Lords – but vampires do. The legends of the long-ago vampire wars, when they fought the Great Vampire's swarming hordes with bow-ships, had implanted an atavistic fear.

'It had you by the throat, Doctor, then it let go,' said Serena wonderingly.

'I wondered about that myself...yes, of course!' The Doctor leaned forward, breathed gently into Serena's face and she smelt the spicy tang.

'It was the garlic!' said the Doctor. 'The stuff you objected to at the reception. Vampires hate it for some reason. I was saved by Napoleon's chicken pies!'

The Doctor began singing softly to himself. 'Who ate all the pies? You ate all the pies!' He smiled. 'And a good thing too, in this case.'

Serena was staring down at the vampire's body. 'Look, Doctor!'

The twisted, bloodstained figure was slowly fading away.

Seconds later it had completely disappeared, leaving only the bloodstained whip hilt on the ground.

'I thought they were supposed to crumble away into dust,' said Serena.

'So they do, usually,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'I think there was something very peculiar about this particular vampire. Come along, Serena, let's head back to the palace.'

Serena looked round at the dark surrounding woods. A night breeze rustled the leaves and, to her still-fearful imagination, the trees seemed to be closing in on them.

'Suppose there are more vampires in the forest?'

'I doubt it. I think this vampire was a specially imported one-off! Transported here at great expense, especially for our benefit. Anyway, no need to worry, Serena.'

'There isn't?'

‘If any more vampires turn up, I’ll just breathe on them!’

‘I wish I’d taken your advice at the reception, Doctor.’

‘What advice?’

‘To try a few of those pies. Just keep breathing on me, will you?’

As they trudged back towards the palace, its lights still visible through the trees, the Doctor was wondering how the importing had been done. It was remotely possible that there was a colony of vampires somewhere in Paris, and that his opponents had some means of controlling them.

The only other possible explanation was so horrifying that he didn’t really want to think about it...

When they climbed wearily up the palace steps, they were fortunate enough to find Captain Charles standing at the top, supervising the last of the departing guests. He surveyed their bedraggled appearance with amazement.

‘Doctor, Lady Serena! What’s happened to you?’

‘Our coach driver tried to rob us,’ said the Doctor. ‘I fought him off, but he drove away and left us stranded.’

Captain Charles was shocked. ‘On the Emperor’s very doorstep! Napoleon will be furious when he hears about this. He’ll have the villain hunted down and guillotined! Old Fouché is a nasty, creepy cadaverous little swine, but by God he’s efficient! Can you give me a description, Doctor?’

‘We didn’t really get a good look at him,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘Don’t worry about finding him, he’ll be miles away by now. But I should be very grateful if you could provide us with some more reliable transport.’

‘I’ll see to it at once, Doctor. And please accept my apologies. I should have arranged transport for you myself. I would have thought of it, but in this crush, with all these guests...Aha!’

An empty coach rattled by, presumably returning to the imperial stables. Captain Charles raised his hand, signalling the coachman to stop.

‘One more trip for you, Rastignac. This lady and gentleman are the Emperor’s honoured guests. See that they have a safe and comfortable journey home. Don’t look so sulky you old rogue, you’ll be well rewarded.’

The burly, heavily moustached driver touched his hat-brim with his whip. 'Right you are, Captain,' he wheezed.

'One of the Emperor's Old Guard,' whispered Captain Charles. 'Musket ball through the lungs at Marengo. You'll be all right with him.'

He handed them into the coach, which was small but luxurious, with a golden bee emblazoned on the door.

The driver cracked his whip and they rattled away.

From the top of the steps the Countess watched him go.

'Ever resourceful, Doctor,' she murmured. 'Something else will have to be arranged...'

The Doctor and Serena both slept late the next morning. They were drinking coffee at a table in the rose garden behind the house when a smartly uniformed courier arrived with an invitation.

The Doctor studied it. 'It's from Mr Fulton,' he said. 'Apparently he's got the latest model of his submersible vessel in a workshop pavilion somewhere behind the Tuileries Palace. He's inviting me "as a fellow scientist" to take a look at it. He'd like us to arrive at precisely three o'clock. You're invited too.'

He turned to the courier, who was waiting patiently for a reply.

'Tell Mr Fulton we'd be delighted to attend.'

The courier bowed and withdrew.

'Is that wise?' said Serena.

'Why not? Mr Fulton is a very interesting fellow.'

'He also seems to be a close associate of the Countess. It could be a trap.'

'Of course,' said the Doctor. 'But you can learn a lot from traps.'

'Even so, Doctor...'

'I think the Countess will lay low for a bit. I don't think she'd actually dare to attack us on imperial premises. And I don't think Fulton wants to harm me. After all, we're fellow scientists!'

Fulton's workshop turned out to be a converted stables at the back of the Tuileries Palace. Two sentries guarded the door. It was a mild spring afternoon as the Doctor's carriage, a smart berline hired for the occasion, deposited them outside and

Fulton came hurrying out to greet them.

‘Doctor, Lady Serena, good to see you.’

‘Good of you to invite us,’ said the Doctor, with equal cordiality.

Fulton pushed open the stable doors and ushered them inside. They found themselves in a vast stone-flagged room, lit by an enormous skylight. The stable furniture had been removed and workbenches loaded with tools lined the walls to their left and right. At the rear was a small forge and behind it a vast straggling pile of crates, boxes and barrels. Dominating the room was a set of heavy trestles. Resting upon them was a huge cigar-shaped object, covered with a massive tarpaulin.

‘Well there she is,’ said Fulton proudly. ‘The latest model. We had some sea-trials with an earlier model, but the Emperor wasn’t impressed. So I came up with this version, lots of improvements. I’m taking her down to Boulogne for sea-trials soon, but the Countess thought it would be safer for me to work on her here.’

‘I should have thought Boulogne was pretty safe,’ said the Doctor. ‘You’ll be surrounded by the Emperor’s armies.’

‘Apparently we’ll also be surrounded by English spies,’ said Fulton. ‘Don’t want the British getting wind of her – or trying to blow her up.’

‘I gather the Countess is your associate in this venture?’ asked Serena.

‘She’s been invaluable, especially financially,’ said Fulton. ‘It’s a hell of a job getting any actual money out of His Imperial Majesty. He provides facilities but precious little cash.’

‘Is the Countess providing technical help as well?’ asked the Doctor casually.

‘Well, some,’ admitted Fulton. ‘She’s quite a scientist herself.’

‘Won’t she mind us coming here like this?’ asked Serena. ‘She and the Doctor are old rivals.’

‘So I gather,’ said Fulton. ‘When she learned about our little chat last night she was pretty mad. I guess she must have had a change of heart overnight. She sent me a message early this morning and suggested I ask you both.’

‘How very kind,’ said Serena. She looked hard at the Doctor, who shrugged.

‘Is she coming herself?’ he asked.

‘Maybe later,’ said Fulton. ‘Well, let’s take a look at my *Nautilus*.’

He went over to the trestles, unfastened the ropes and, helped by the Doctor, pulled away the heavy tarpaulin. The *Nautilus* was revealed.

She was an impressive sight, thought the Doctor, especially for the year 1805. She was a copper-coloured, cigar-shaped cylinder about twenty feet long. A smaller half-cylinder of almost equal length was attached to the bottom of the hull forming a kind of keel. There was a small domed conning tower with a glass-covered porthole and a flat horizontal rudder.

It didn’t look antiquated and comic at all, thought the Doctor. It looked sleek and streamlined and modern. And deadly.

They walked around it admiringly, as the Doctor fired questions. He gently rapped the sides. ‘Construction?’

‘Copper sheets over iron ribs. She has to be strong to withstand the pressure.’

‘How does she submerge?’

‘She’s fitted with ballast tanks. She holds enough air to stay down three hours – and that’s with a one-man crew, burning two candles. She’ll carry up to three men at a pinch, but that cuts down the submerged time.’ He nodded to a row of cylinders against one wall. ‘I’m planning to add a tank of compressed air to increase her underwater range when there’s a bigger crew.’

‘How does it move?’ asked Serena.

Fulton clambered onto the trestles, pulled on a set of guyropes and a fan-shaped sail rose slowly above the hull.

‘Sail for when she’s travelling on the surface.’ He lowered it again.

‘And how does she move underwater?’ asked the Doctor.

‘That’s the one snag,’ admitted Fulton. ‘There’s a propeller operated by an inside hand-crank, but that’s hellish slow to be honest; she just creeps along. I tried to rig up an engine using steam power, but that’s pretty tricky underwater.’

‘Can’t the Countess help?’

‘She has – at least, she’s tried. She’s come up with some kind of newfangled propulsion unit, something totally revolutionary. But it’s so advanced I can’t work out how to install it. To be honest, I’m getting worried.’

‘How about armaments?’

‘Latest thing,’ said Fulton proudly. ‘Torpedoes, air propelled. Travel two hundred yards underwater. My own invention.’ He pointed to a row of slender cylinders. ‘There’s a rack of them over there.’

‘Very impressive, Mr Fulton,’ said the Doctor. ‘Very impressive indeed.’

‘Thanks a lot,’ said Fulton. ‘Of course, it all depends on how she performs on the sea-trials,’ he went on. ‘Out at sea things are very different from inside a nice safe and dry workshop.’

‘This new system the Countess has come up with,’ said the Doctor casually. ‘What’s its operating principle?’

‘Beyond me,’ said Fulton frankly. ‘She mentioned atomics, whatever that means...’

‘Fascinating,’ said the Doctor. ‘I know a little about atomics myself and...’

The door swung open and an elegant figure appeared. It was the Countess.

‘Not giving away our secrets, I hope, Mr Fulton?’ There was a distinct edge to her voice. ‘Forgive the interruption but I bear an urgent message. The Emperor wishes to see you – now!’

‘Then I guess I’d better go – now!’ said Fulton. ‘He doesn’t care to be kept waiting.’ He turned to his guests. ‘You’ll have to excuse me.’

‘Don’t worry, Mr Fulton, I’ll take care of our guests,’ said the Countess.

Fulton set off at a run and the Countess glided gracefully towards them.

‘Doctor, Lady Serena! How nice to see you.’

‘And how unexpected?’ suggested the Doctor.

‘I’m sorry?’

‘After the little surprise you arranged for us, in the woods last night. How did you manage that, by the way?’

‘That’s the least of your worries, Doctor,’ said the Countess dismissively.

‘On the contrary, I fear it may be one of the greatest.’

‘Your night visitor doesn’t seem to have given you too much trouble.’

‘Traditional methods,’ murmured the Doctor. ‘Always best with vampires. They’re very conventional creatures.’

‘We must try to find you something more formidable.’

‘I gather Mr Fulton’s invitation was really your idea,’ said Serena. ‘Why did you want us here?’

Ignoring her, the Countess spoke to the Doctor.

‘I thought you might like to see what you are up against – and to hear what we intend to do with the *Nautilus*.’

‘It’s a very impressive piece of work, for its time. Mr Fulton deserves great credit. But his ideas are in advance of the available technology. It’s not really a very formidable weapon, compared to a British ship of the line. Of course, with an atomic drive...’

‘Precisely. The engines of the *Nautilus*, and its armaments, are going to be – augmented. It will intercept the British fleet on its way to meet Admiral Villeneuve, and blow the *Victory* out of the water, killing Nelson before the battle. It will go on to sink as many British ships as it can, before mysteriously blowing up – destroying more British ships in the process.’

‘Is Mr Fulton aware of this?’

‘Of course not. I’m afraid he’ll never see his prize money. But since he’ll be steering the submersible when it blows up, he won’t really miss it, will he?’

‘Suppose we tell him?’ said Serena.

‘I’m afraid you won’t get the opportunity. And in any case, he wouldn’t believe you. I warned him that you were a jealous rival, Doctor, and that you’d try to discredit me in his eyes. So, you see what will happen? Villeneuve will be victorious at Trafalgar, and the Channel will be undefended for the crossing of Napoleon’s invading army. Napoleon will conquer England, and, in due course, the world.’

‘And that’s what you want?’

The Countess’s blue eyes gleamed fiercely. ‘Oh yes, Doctor, that’s what I want.’

‘Have you no conscience at all?’ demanded the Doctor fiercely. ‘An atomic drive, in this century! Suppose one of Napoleon’s brighter scientists gets hold of it, works out the principles? It’s a short step from that to Napoleon with an atomic bomb. And he’s quite capable of using it!’

‘It won’t happen, Doctor. The drive will self-destruct when it has served its purpose. The mechanism is already built in.’

‘Think of everything, don’t you?’

‘I try, Doctor.’

‘Why are you doing all this?’

‘You wouldn’t understand.’

The Doctor sighed. ‘No, perhaps I wouldn’t. Then let me repeat Serena’s question. Why are we here?’

‘Your interference can no longer be tolerated, Doctor. You are here to die.’

The Countess turned and walked swiftly through the open door, slamming it closed behind her. They heard her commanding voice. ‘Sentries! The man and the woman in there are spies. I am going for help. Do not let them leave.’

‘Let’s get away from here,’ said Serena.

The Doctor saw a strange shimmering in the air. A shape was beginning to form between them and the door.

‘No,’ he shouted. ‘No time. Get under cover.’

Grabbing Serena’s arm he pulled her into the shelter of a pile of crates, pushing her down and crouching beside her.

‘Don’t raise your voice above a whisper – and above all don’t move.’

The shimmering patch solidified and became a human-shaped silvery metal figure. Its body and limbs were smooth and featureless and its head was round and perfectly blank like a silver egg. It swung gently to and fro as if scanning the area around it.

‘What is it?’ whispered Serena.

‘It’s a Raston Warrior Robot,’ the Doctor whispered. ‘The most efficient killing machine in the cosmos.’

Chapter Nineteen

The Killing Machine

Serena peered at the silvery apparition from behind her crate.

She had seen robots before and wasn't particularly impressed.

'It doesn't look all that dangerous to me, Doctor. It's not very big, and it isn't even armed. Why don't we just throw a barrel or a crate at it and knock it over?'

But she had spoken too loudly. The robot swung around, 'pointing' like a hunting dog, focusing on the spot where she was hiding. Serena was uncomfortably cramped, crouching down, and she shifted her position. Her gown rustled, only a little but it was enough.

The robot's arm flashed out and a silver javelin thudded into the crate beside her. Serena would have screamed had not the Doctor clapped his hand over her mouth.

He put his lips close to her ear and breathed, 'Don't move or you're dead.'

Absurdly, Serena noticed that there was still a faint whiff of garlic about him.

'Don't talk unless you must,' the Doctor continued softly, 'and then only in a whisper. It reacts to sound, and, above all to movement – and what it finds it kills!'

He took his hand away and Serena whispered, 'Where did that spear come from?'

'Its weapons are built in. It can extrude whatever it needs – lance, sword, garrotte, anything.'

'But what's it doing here?'

'Somebody brought it here as a little surprise for us.'

'The Countess?'

'Or one of her associates.'

The robot had begun to patrol up and down the workshop. 'What's it doing now?'

‘Checking out the terrain. Its primary function is to guard.’

‘Guard what? Against whom?’

‘Anything – against anybody. It doesn’t know or care. It’ll kill anyone who turns up.’

‘So what do we do? We can’t stay here forever, I’m getting cramp.’

‘I’m trying to think. Maybe we can distract it.’

The Doctor looked round and saw a pile of rusty iron bars on the ground nearby. Moving slowly and carefully, he picked one up.

‘Move when this lands, try to get nearer the door.’

Choosing a moment when the robot had its back to them, he lobbed the bar into the far corner of the room.

It landed with a clang on the stone-flagged floor. Instantly the robot whirled and fired a javelin at the source of the sound. The Doctor and Serena dodged into better cover behind a stack of barrels near the entrance.

Suddenly the robot vanished, reappearing in the corner from which the sound had come. It scanned the area, found nothing and resumed its patrol.

‘Right,’ whispered the Doctor. ‘One more time.’

‘Will it fall for the same trick again?’

‘I hope so. It’s super-sensitive and very conscientious, but it’s not all that bright.’

The Doctor threw another bar, into a different corner this time.

The robot reacted to the clang in exactly the same way, a swiftly fired javelin and a flashing move to inspect the corner. Then it resumed its patrol.

The Doctor and Serena, meanwhile, had gained the shelter of a workbench close to the front door.

‘Now, last go!’ whispered the Doctor.

There was a small barrel of nails beneath the workbench. Moving slowly and carefully, the Doctor picked it up. There was, thought Serena, a surprising amount of sinewy strength in that unimpressive frame.

Choosing his moment, the Doctor rose and hurled the barrel into the middle of the workshop. As it rumbled across the floor the robot spun round and fired javelin after javelin into it, until the barrel looked like a hedgehog and came to a clattering halt.

The robot flashed across the workshop to inspect it.

The Doctor and Serena sprinted to the door, flung it open and dashed out – straight into the patrolling sentry.

‘Prisoners escaping!’ he bellowed. Spreading his arms he shoved them both back into the workshop.

‘Out of the way, man!’ bellowed the Doctor. ‘You’ll get us all killed!’

He grabbed Serena and pulled her to one side.

The sentry was staring in utter astonishment at the robot, which was standing by the barrel. Instinctively he raised his musket – and staggered back from the open door with a javelin through his chest. He screamed, his dead finger pulled the trigger as he fell and the shot went high.

The second sentry ran up, raised his musket and fired. He was sure, absolutely sure, that he hadn’t missed, but the heavy musket ball had no effect. There was no time to reload, and the second sentry, showing considerably more courage than sense, fixed his bayonet and charged.

Perhaps for the sake of variety, the robot allowed him to come close. Then it stepped aside, and raised its right arm, extruding a long silver blade. The blade flashed, blood spurted and the sentry’s head rolled across the workshop floor.

The headless body fell to its knees and then slumped over sideways.

Serena screamed and the robot whirled and fired a javelin. It missed by a millimetre as the Doctor knocked her aside and dragged her behind the shelter of a workbench.

The robot focused on their hiding place and the Doctor prepared for the attack. ‘When it finds us, I’ll run,’ he whispered. ‘When it comes after me, you make for the door.’

‘And suppose you don’t make it?’

‘Take the TARDIS and go back to Gallifrey. Tell them I tried.’ The Doctor knew he would never make it – but Serena might.

The arrival of the soldiers saved their lives.

Unfortunately it condemned many of the soldiers to death.

The sound of the shots and the screams of the dying sentries had attracted the attention of a squad of guards returning to the palace barracks after musket practice. They were under the

command of Sergeant Lebrun – a *vieux moustache*, a veteran of several campaigns. He saw the crumpled body of the first sentry outside, placed his men in a half-circle and cautiously approached the workshop entrance from the side.

Peering round he saw the silver figure, blade still in hand, standing over the headless body of the second sentry. His eyes widened at the horrific sight, but he wasn't afraid. He'd seen far worse crossing the Alps with the little corporal. He'd seen off the Italians, the Prussians and the Russians, and no mechanical monster was going to frighten him.

A javelin thudded into the doorframe by his head and he leaped aside.

'Fire at will, lads,' he called. 'There's some damn tin man inside. It's speared Lamar and chopped off poor Durand's head. There's only one of them so let's finish it off.'

A hail of musket fire came in through the open door. The robot staggered a little but it didn't fall. Instead it advanced, stationing itself in the centre of the doorway. Soldier after soldier fell, transfixed by the deadly javelins, but the attack went on.

With suicidal bravery two soldiers bayonet-charged it at once. The silver blade extruded and flashed left and right...Two heads rolled in quick succession, two headless bodies slumped to the floor spurting blood.

From inside the workshop the Doctor and Serena watched the slaughter in horror.

'It'll kill them all,' whispered Serena. 'Why don't they give up?'

'The Guard dies, but it doesn't surrender,' said the Doctor. 'We've got to help them while they're keeping the robot busy. It's our only chance.' He looked around the room for a weapon. 'All we've got is a submarine, not too useful on dry land.'

'There are the torpedoes...'

'That's it!' said the Doctor. He looked around. 'Torpedoes, torpedoes, torpedoes! There they are!' He hurried over to the rack and lifted down one of the long metal cylinders. He could hold it, but only just. Laying it down on the nearest bench he studied it for a moment. On one end was attached a bulbous cylinder, from which projected a lever.

'According to Fulton they work by compressed air – which is presumably packed into this cylinder on the blunt end. So to

fire it, you must pull this lever here...’ He touched it gently and brooded for a moment. ‘Here’s what we must do, Serena. I can carry and aim this thing, but I can’t fire it. You’ll have to do that. These things are meant to work in water, not air, so we’ll have to get close. When I shout “Now!” you pull the lever. Can you do that?’

‘Of course I can,’ said Serena – sounding far more confident than she felt. Privately she thought it was a mad scheme – but it seemed to be the only one they had.

The Doctor picked up the heavy torpedo, tucking it under his right arm and supporting and aiming it with his left hand.

Stealthily he advanced towards the robot, which was standing in the doorway ignoring the steady crackle of musketry. It was scanning the ring of soldiers, who had taken what cover they could find.

The Doctor crept silently forward, Serena close behind him. It was like a deadly version of that game they played here on Earth. Grandmother’s Footsteps, that was it...

They crept close, closer, until they almost reached the doorway. Some sound, some instinct warned the robot and it swung round.

The blank metal head seemed to focus on them and the silver arm rose...

Chapter Twenty

Torpedo

‘Now!’ yelled the Doctor and Serena pulled the lever.

There was a great whoosh of compressed air and the body of the torpedo shot forward. It struck the robot in the chest at point-blank range and exploded. The robot disintegrated into a shower of silvery fragments.

The Doctor and Serena were bowled over, blown backwards by the blast. A few moments later they staggered to their feet, faces grimy and ears ringing.

The Countess came running into the workshop and stopped in amazement at the sight of the Doctor and Serena.

‘It didn’t kill you!’

‘No, it didn’t kill us,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘It killed two sentries and a lot of the Emperor’s soldiers, but it didn’t kill us.’

‘But how – what did you...?’

‘Blew it up with one of Mr Fulton’s torpedoes.’

Serena grasped the Doctor’s arm. ‘Doctor, look!’

The area around the threshold of the workshop was sprinkled with silvery droplets. As they watched they started to roll together with incredible speed assembling into a silver puddle. More and more droplets rolled in and the puddle grew larger and larger. A shape began to appear, an arm, an oval head...

‘It’s reforming,’ gasped Serena.

‘Oh yes, it’s reforming,’ said the Doctor. ‘It’s indestructible, you see. It’ll be as good as new before very long.’ He turned to the Countess. ‘Send it back.’

She glared wildly at him. ‘Why should I? It can still kill you.’

‘Oh yes, it’ll kill me,’ agreed the Doctor calmly. ‘And Serena, and lots more of the Emperor’s soldiers. Then it will kill you, and Fulton when he arrives and Napoleon himself if he turns up here. What good will that do you? *Send it back!*’

The Countess drew a deep, sobbing breath. 'I'm beginning to think you're the one who's indestructible, Doctor.'

She moved away a few paces, took a small silver sphere from the bosom of her dress and spoke into it in a low, urgent voice. The Doctor and Serena stood looking at the shape in the silver puddle. It was more completely formed now, a torso, arms, the beginning of legs...

The Countess returned to them. 'It may take a little time.'

Her voice was rather unsteady.

'Not too long, I hope,' said the Doctor.

All three stood silent, looking at the re-forming silver shape. Serena wondered afterwards why they didn't all run, prepare another torpedo, do something, anything...Everyone, even the Countess, seemed in the grip of a strange fatalism.

The shape was almost complete now. It became a kneeling figure, crouched, head bowed. Then, slowly, it began to rise. Finally it stood upright, head raised. It was still a little blurred, a little unformed, though its shape was beginning to harden.

It turned and looked – if an eyeless head can look – at the Doctor. Slowly it raised an arm, pointing towards him – and then it shimmered and vanished.

'Cutting it a little fine,' said the Doctor mildly.

Sergeant Lebrun came cautiously into the room, followed by two soldiers with a litter. He nodded towards the headless body and they put down the litter and lifted the body on to it.

They looked around the floor till they found the head, picked it up and arranged it tidily on the corpses lap, picked up the litter and carried it out.

The headless corpses by the door had already been removed, and the javelin-wounded soldiers were being carried away.

Sergeant Lebrun looked round. 'Has it gone? We heard an explosion...'

'It's all over,' said the Doctor.

'The Doctor blew it up,' said Serena. 'With a torpedo!'

'We've been waiting for reinforcements – and for field cannon,' said Sergeant Lebrun. 'Muskets didn't do any good. Musket balls just seemed to bounce off it.' He shook his head. 'Them spears – and that sword. And the speed it moved...What was it, sir?'

'How are your men?' asked the Doctor.

‘Six dead, ten wounded, sir,’ said Lebrun. ‘What was it? What happened here?’

‘Some English terrorists made an attempt to blow up Mr Fulton’s submarine,’ said the Doctor. ‘Fortunately their bomb went off too soon and they blew themselves up.’

‘But that metal thing, sir?’ protested Sergeant Lebrun. ‘I saw it!’

‘It didn’t exist,’ said the Doctor. ‘Some kind of group hallucination. Or maybe one of the terrorists was wearing some kind of armour.’

‘And what about poor Durand laying there with his head clean off? And them other two...’

‘Freak effects of the blast.’

‘And the javelins?’

‘Tell me, Sergeant, did you find any of the javelins?’

‘Well, no sir. They all seem to have vanished.’

‘There you are then, no evidence. Saboteurs and a bomb. Believe me, Sergeant, it’s far better to tell a story that will be believed.’

The sergeant looked hard at him. ‘Daresay you’re right, sir,’ he said woodenly. He paused. ‘And thank you, sir. We lost some good men and we’d have lost more if...Well, I heard what the lady said, about the torpedo.’ He saluted and marched off.

Fulton came dashing into the workshop. ‘I heard there was trouble. Is she all right?’

‘Lady Serena or the Countess?’ asked the Doctor.

Fulton looked at him as if he were mad. ‘*Nautilus*, of course. Has she been damaged?’ He began walking around the coppery hull of the submarine, examining it carefully.

‘I don’t think there’s any harm done,’ said the Doctor.

Satisfied, at least for the moment, that his precious craft was unharmed, Fulton said, ‘So what happened? The place is surrounded by soldiers, half of them dead or wounded...’

‘There was an attempt to destroy your submarine,’ said the Doctor. ‘Fortunately the attackers blew themselves up with their own bomb. Isn’t that what happened, Countess?’

‘Yes,’ said the Countess. ‘That’s exactly what happened.’

Fulton looked sceptical. ‘If you say so, Countess. So long as there’s no damage. The Emperor wants the trials brought forward. Tomorrow.’

‘But we’re not ready.’

‘That’s what I told him. He said, “Be ready.” You know what he’s like. Unless we get the new drive system installed she’s going to perform like an ancient snail...The Emperor’s not going to buy a craft that won’t arrive till a week after the battle!’

The Countess cut across him. ‘We can talk about that later. We mustn’t detain the Doctor and Lady Serena with our technical problems. They must want to rest after their ordeal.’

‘You’re too kind,’ said the Doctor, accepting dismissal. ‘Come along, Serena.’

The Countess waited until they were gone and then closed the door.

‘How are you getting on with installing the drive, Mr Fulton?’

‘I’m not.’

‘Can you be ready by tomorrow?’

‘Not a chance.’

‘You’re supposed to be a scientist –’

‘I am a scientist. I know as much about steam power as anyone in the world. But this drive of yours is way beyond me.’

‘You don’t have to know how it works. You just have to make it move the submarine.’

Fulton’s American twang became more pronounced. ‘Sure. And to do that I have to fix up a connection between the power source and the crankshaft of the propeller.’

‘A simple task, surely?’

Fulton gave a sigh of exasperation. ‘Sure – but I just can’t make one that will hold up, they all shatter. Your damn drive’s just too powerful and –’ He broke off. ‘Say!’

‘Say what, Mr Fulton?’ said the Countess coldly.

‘The Doctor said he knew something about atomics. Maybe he could help.’

‘That’s out of the –’ The Countess too broke off. ‘You may be right, Mr Fulton. Perhaps the Doctor could help. But he’d have to be asked in exactly the right way.’ She smiled. ‘You’d better leave that to me...’

Chapter Twenty-one

Kidnap

The Doctor and Serena sank gratefully into the carriage cushions as they jolted back towards the Rue Chantereine.

Serena was still pale and shaken after her ordeal. ‘That – thing, Doctor!’

‘The Raston Warrior Robot? Nasty piece of work, wasn’t it? Sooner face a Cyberman or a Dalek any day.’

‘Where did it come from? Who made it?’

‘Nobody really knows, not for sure. According to the ancient legends it was the work of an alien super-race, who died out millions of years ago. They were dedicated to war, and they were so efficient at it that they wiped themselves out. Unfortunately they left a few of their weapons behind.’

‘And the thing still functions, after all that time?’

‘It’s powered by the atomic radiation in the atmosphere, so it never runs down. It can convert energy into matter.’

‘How did it turn up in Mr Fulton’s workshop?’

‘That’s the thing that really worries me. It means the Countess has an ally on Gallifrey.’

Serena was shocked. ‘Surely not!’

‘I’m afraid so. I suspected as much after the vampire attacked us. Now I’m certain of it.’

‘How can you be so sure?’

‘The one place you can be sure to find a Raston Robot, or a vampire – along with a number of other nasties – is in the Death Zone on Gallifrey. It’s a sort of monster supermarket. And the only way someone could deliver one of them to Earth on order is by the use of a Timescoop.’

‘A what?’

‘A forbidden piece of apparatus from the Dark Times. Our more unscrupulous ancestors used it to kidnap ferocious alien life forms and set them to fight each other in the Zone.’

Serena frowned. 'I vaguely remember the stories. I thought they were only legends.'

'All true enough, more's the pity.'

'Wasn't the Timescoop supposed to have been destroyed after Rassilon's Reformation?'

'*Supposed* is the word. There have always been rumours that the Agency had one in its possession. They hate to lose control of a possible dirty trick. So there's no possibility of going back, or even reporting back until this is over. As it is, the enemy seems to know our every move.'

Serena was silent for a moment. 'You know that the Agency recruited me for this mission, Doctor?'

'To be my supervisor?'

Serena smiled, remembering their first clash. 'Assistant, if you prefer! Not that I've been of much assistance.'

'You control the new TARDIS.'

'Which you could learn to do in a matter of minutes. Probably already have learnt, if the truth were told. I've seen you watching me operate the console.'

'I was just taking an interest.'

'Apart from that I'm more of a handicap than a help. I wonder why they sent me at all!'

The Doctor paused before answering. 'Two reasons, I imagine. Firstly because they don't trust me – they never trust anyone – and they hope you might be more loyal to them than to me.'

'They might be wrong about that. And the other reason?'

'Window-dressing, I'm afraid – to show that this rather dubious mission has been carried out under the supervision of a respectable and responsible Time Lady! That's if it succeeds. If we fail they'll disown us both.'

Serena nodded. 'I'm afraid you're right. You know why I accepted this mission?'

'Either you've got a sordid past and the Agency know about it –'

Serena looked shocked. 'Certainly not!'

The Doctor smiled. '- or the Agency promised you something you wanted.'

'Help and support in my political career.'

'It's an old story,' said the Doctor. 'They own half the High

Council one way or another, blackmail or bribery.’

‘I’ll get a lot further with the Agency behind me,’ said Serena defiantly.

‘Get where?’ asked the Doctor gently. ‘There are lots of old proverbs here on Earth, Serena. There’s one about touching pitch and being defiled, another about using a long spoon when you sup with the devil.’

‘You’re working for the Agency.’

‘Well, I didn’t have much choice, did I?’ said the Doctor indignantly. ‘Between the Agency and extinction, I’ll take the Agency every time. They’ll get more work out of me too before they let me go. But I’ll do it on my own terms or not at all!’ With an effort he calmed himself. ‘You mustn’t think you’re a burden to me, Serena. In our short acquaintance we’ve been through a lot together. I may not show it much but I’ve come to value your companionship.’

‘And I yours, Doctor.’

They looked at each other for a moment – two self-contained Time Lords embarrassed by a moment of intimacy.

‘Tell you what,’ said the Doctor, ‘we deserve a treat. Let’s go home, remove the traces of battle and go out for a good dinner. I suggest the Grand Vefour in the Rue de Beaujolais.’

‘An excellent idea,’ said Serena. ‘I’ve had quite enough excitement for one evening.’

They carried out the Doctor’s plan, dining in style in the restaurant’s splendid candle-lit *salle*, their images reflected in hundreds of sparkling mirrors. They talked of Serena’s life on Gallifrey and her political plans, and the Doctor told astonishing tales of Daleks, and Cybermen and other horrors, encountered during two adventurous incarnations.

It was late by the time the carriage pulled up in the driveway of the little house. The Doctor jumped out of the carriage and handed Serena down.

He looked up at the driver. ‘You can go back to the livery stable now, old chap. Tell them I’ll retain the carriage for the week, they can send their account.’ He fished coins out of his pocket. ‘Here, this is for you. I’ll let you know when we need you again.’

The driver took the money and touched his hat with his

whip. 'Thanks very much, sir. Goodnight.'

The coach drove away.

The front door opened, but it wasn't their newly hired butler who confronted them. It was a tall, elegantly dressed young man with a sulky face. It was Valmont, the Countess's companion. He had a double-barrelled pistol in his hand.

The Doctor stared at him in indignant astonishment. 'What do you think you are doing here?'

'Waiting to welcome you home, Doctor.'

Before the Doctor could stop him, Valmont sprang forward and clapped the pistol to Serena's head.

'Don't move, Doctor,' he warned. Grabbing Serena by the arm he dragged her inside the house and slammed the door, bolting it behind him.

The Doctor pounded on it furiously.

'Open this door!'

There was no response. He was still banging and yelling when a big travelling carriage drove up the drive.

A familiar voice called, 'Over here!'

The Doctor turned round. The Countess was looking out of the carriage window.

'Get in, Doctor.'

'Why should I?'

'For the sake of your charming companion. She is in the hands of my friend and unless you do exactly as I say, things will go badly for her.'

The Doctor hesitated, his mind frantically seeking a way out.

The door opened and Valmont reappeared in the doorway. He was standing behind Serena, left arm curled about her neck, right hand holding the pistol to her head. 'Is he being sensible, Countess? Or do I kill her?'

'Well, Doctor?' said the Countess.

The Doctor moved closer to the door. 'See that no harm comes to Lady Serena,' he said. 'I hold you personally responsible. Do you hear me?'

Valmont recoiled before the fury in his voice. He jerked Serena backwards and slammed the door.

'He hears you Doctor,' said the Countess. 'Nothing will happen to her if you continue to co-operate. Now, get in!'

The Doctor got into the carriage and sat facing the

Countess. The carriage drove away.

‘Well?’ said the Doctor coldly.

‘We need your help, Doctor, with the atomic drive. The *Nautilus* is already on its way to Mr Fulton’s workshop in Boulogne. So are we. There you will assist Mr Fulton to install it – tonight.’

‘Then you’ll let Serena go?’

The Countess shook her head. ‘We will release her, and you, after a successful trial of the *Nautilus*. One more thing, Doctor. You will say nothing of our arrangement to Mr Fulton. He thinks you are helping us out of the kindness of your heart.’

The carriage rattled on.

Serena sat in an armchair in the ornately decorated little salon and looked at Valmont. He sat in a chair at the other side of the room, the pistol in his lap.

‘Where are the servants?’ she asked coldly. ‘I hope you haven’t harmed them?’

‘Dismissed until tomorrow, given the night off by a generous employer. The Doctor and his companion are spending the night with a friend.’

‘And where is the Doctor, really? Where is the Countess taking him?’

‘To Fulton’s workshop in Boulogne. The Doctor’s scientific and engineering skills are required.’

‘And when he’s finished whatever he’s going to do you’ll let us go?’

‘So the Countess says. Personally, I’d kill you both, but she has a sentimental streak.’

‘How long are you going to keep me here?’

‘Until I hear from the Countess that the *Nautilus* has successfully completed her trials.’

‘And what am I supposed to do meanwhile?’

‘Anything you like. You might care to prepare us a meal.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Serena – who had never cooked a meal in her life.

‘You can even go to bed if you want to – anything you feel like, except leave. If you try to escape, I’ll kill you.’

‘Then you’ll have no hold over the Doctor.’

‘Ah, but he won’t know that, will he? I could kill you now,

and he'd still carry out his task. As long as he *thinks* you are alive...So don't tempt me.'

Serena sat back in her chair and contemplated her captor. Would he carry out his threat? Yes he would, she decided. There was a hint of callous cruelty in the handsome, petulant face. It was the face of someone who cared for nobody's fate but his own.

Nevertheless, she was going to have to escape somehow. Not only escape, but reach the Doctor and let him know that she was free. Only then would the Countess's hold on him be broken. It was unbearable to think of the Doctor being forced to bring about the historical catastrophe he was determined to prevent.

Somehow she had to escape. She had to...

Chapter Twenty-two

Demonstration

The carriage rattled on through the night, and the Doctor dozed in his corner.

At intervals through the night they came to a halt at staging posts where fresh horses were harnessed. Once someone thrust a tin mug of rough red wine into his hand. Towards the end of the night they ran into a summer storm, howling winds and lashing rain.

The big coach bucketed on. The Doctor became aware of the presence of rows of tents, and columns of marching men all around them. More than once they were delayed by the passage of a column of artillery.

Just before dawn they came to a long, low shed on a shingled beach. There was a wooden jetty beside it. Fulton was there, supervising the transfer of the *Nautilus* from a long flat-bed carriage pulled by half a dozen horses.

A couple of brawny, sweating labourers were manoeuvring the little craft on rollers into the choppy sea.

'Labiche! Lapoint! Be careful there!' yelled Fulton. 'Treat her gently, like you do your wives in a bad mood!'

The two men grinned and went on with their work.

The Doctor climbed stiffly out of the coach and stood watching as the submarine was towed into deeper waters at the end of the wharf and made fast. When the task was done to his satisfaction, Fulton turned and saw them.

'Countess, Doctor,' he called. 'Good to see you. Don't stand out here in the rain, come into the workshop.'

He led them into the long shed. Brightly lit by oil lamps and innumerable candles, it was a smaller version of the one in the Tuileries. Fulton produced coffee from a battered tin pot on a glowing stove and handed it round.

'It's good of you to come and help us, Doctor.'

The Doctor glanced at the Countess. 'It was the least I could do. So what's the problem?'

'This!' said Fulton. He produced a complicated-looking assemblage of metal rods and cogs, and put it on the workbench before them. 'It's the latest version of the reduction gear assembly. I rigged it up to connect the Countess's motor to the submersible's propeller.'

The Doctor took the device and studied it, turning it over and over in his hands.

'Yes, I see. Very ingenious, Mr Fulton.' He looked up. 'In fact I can't see anything wrong with it. It ought to work.'

'I know it ought to work,' said Fulton exasperatedly. He produced another, very similar piece of apparatus, the rods and cogs horribly twisted and fused. 'This is what happened to the previous version – and all the versions before that! I've made the new one stronger, but I haven't much hope. If this cracks up we'll be back to using the hand crank – and the Emperor will get bored and go home before anything happens.'

The Doctor examined and compared the two assemblies. 'Well, it's obvious what your problem is, isn't it? Your propulsion engine is throwing out too much power on the first surge.'

'I figured that out for myself, Doctor,' said Fulton. 'But since I don't understand the new engine and daren't tinker with it...'

'Let's have a look at it!'

'Is that really necessary?' said the Countess quickly. 'Can't you just improve that – that connecting thing so it works?'

'No I can't,' said the Doctor crossly. 'Mr Fulton is an excellent engineer and I certainly couldn't do any better. The problem isn't with the connecting shaft, it's as good as can be made in the present age with the available materials. The problem is the power control of the new propulsion engine. Let me look at it and I may be able to help.'

'Very well,' said the Countess reluctantly. She nodded to Fulton, who went to a locker and produced a small dome-shaped object made of silvery metal. Set into the dome was a tiny control panel, with various dials and levers.

'Good gracious, an Omega drive,' said the Doctor. He looked at the Countess. 'You really do have friends in high places, don't you?'

‘Don’t discuss it, Doctor, fix it,’ said the Countess.

Fulton looked up in surprise at her peremptory tone.

‘Sorry,’ said the Countess, ‘I’m a little nervous. Do make the adjustments if you can, Doctor. It really will be best – for everybody.’

‘Do you really know how that thing works?’ asked Fulton.

‘Don’t worry, Mr Fulton, these things are common as candlesticks where I come from.’

‘Is that so, Doctor?’ said Fulton curiously. ‘You must tell me about where you come from some time. Can you fix it?’

‘Yes, I can,’ said the Doctor. He fished in his pockets and produced a complex-looking pen-shaped device.

‘What’s that?’ asked Fulton.

‘It’s called a sonic screwdriver,’ said the Doctor absently. ‘Sort of a multi-purpose tool. Lucky I brought it along.’

He switched on the sonic screwdriver and slid it around the base of the Omega motor. A panel slid back, revealing a deck of incredibly complex circuitry.

‘You will be careful, won’t you Doctor?’ said the Countess.

The Doctor ignored her, studying the circuitry.

‘How’s Lady Serena?’ the Countess went on. ‘I hear she hasn’t been too well. I do hope she isn’t going to take a turn for the worse. These things can be very sudden.’

The Doctor swung round on her. ‘Now see here,’ he said fiercely. ‘I am attempting a reasonably complex scientific task and to complete it I shall need peace and quiet and undisturbed concentration.’

Watched in fascination by Fulton, and with suspicion by the Countess, the Doctor set to work.

Serena woke up with a start – despite all her determination to escape she must have fallen asleep in the armchair. She yawned and stretched. She looked across the room and saw Valmont, clearly wide awake, still covering her with the double-barrelled pistol. Perhaps his kind didn’t need sleep.

Furious with herself for losing time, Serena looked round the room yet again, seeking some means of escape. Her eyes fell on the handsome clock in the corner. It was a longcase clock, sometimes called a coffin clock because of its shape. (Many years later, when somebody wrote a song about one, it would be called

a grandfather clock.)

Serena gave a little gasp, quickly concealed. There was the escape she sought, right before her eyes. Could it be as simple as that? Why not? She rose and began wandering aimlessly around the room.

‘What are you doing?’ snapped Valmont.

‘Stretching my legs – I got cramp sleeping in that chair. Don’t worry, I’m not going far.’

‘No, you’re not.’

Serena wandered round the room, followed by the eyes of Valmont and the twin barrels of his pistol. She drifted across to the grandfather clock. ‘Is that the right time? I think it’s stopped.’ She reached for the dial.

Suddenly she whirled round, staring over Valmont’s shoulder at the window. ‘Doctor!’

Just for a moment Valmont glanced away, but a moment was enough. He looked back at Serena, but she was gone.

He heard a faint, musical humming sound and looked wildly around the room.

When he looked back the clock was gone as well.

Bending his head in the cramped stuffy confines of the submarine the Doctor said, ‘There, that should do it.’ He turned to Fulton, who was looking over his shoulder, bent almost double because of his height. ‘The connection’s complete now, and it’s working perfectly. Just be careful with the drive – it contains almost unlimited power. You touch this panel *here* to start it, and adjust this lever *here* to increase power. That’s all there is to know. Got it?’

‘Got it, Doctor.’

‘Good. Let’s get some air.’

The Doctor stood up and squeezed through the conning-tower hatch, followed by Fulton. They clambered carefully over the copper hull and jumped down onto the wharf, blinking in the sunlight.

The Countess was waiting at the end of the wharf. ‘Have you done it? Is it finished?’

‘All finished and ready to go,’ said Fulton cheerfully.

‘Just as well,’ said the Countess grimly. ‘The Emperor is arriving.’

She pointed to the road that ran along the coast. Two coaches, guarded by cavalry before and behind, were rumbling towards them. Even at this distance they could see the giant 'N' surrounded by gold bees embossed on the door of the first.

'It's too soon,' protested Fulton. 'I wanted another trial run before the demonstration.'

'The demonstration will have to be your trial run,' said the Countess. 'Are you ready?'

'Nearly. I only have to load the torpedo.'

Fulton sprinted for the workshop, yelling for his workmen. 'Labiche, Lapoint, the torpedo! Look lively now!'

The Doctor and the Countess moved back to the beach, watching as the two brawny labourers carried one of the long steel cylinders from the shed and passed it down to Fulton inside the submarine.

The coaches pulled up on the road by the beach, the cavalry escort formed a protective cordon and the Emperor descended from the first and strode towards them. His entourage of high-ranking army and naval officers descended from the second coach, and formed into a little chattering group. They looked bored.

Napoleon was wearing the uniform of his favourite regiment, the Mounted Guard – a grey tunic with a high red collar and heavy gold epaulettes. He was in a brisk, no-nonsense mood, acknowledging the Countess's curtsy and the Doctor's bow with a nod.

'My time is limited. I am reviewing a practice attack by my troops later this morning. Is everything ready?'

'Almost, Your Majesty. The brig is just anchoring.'

The Countess pointed to the opening out of the bay, where a smallish ship was lowering her sails and dropping anchor. They saw her lower her boats and the crew row hurriedly for shore.

'You are here early, Doctor,' said Napoleon.

Before the Doctor could reply the Countess said quickly, 'The Doctor has been here all night, sire. He has been helping us with preparing the submersible.'

Napoleon gave the Doctor a satirical look. 'All rivalries forgotten in the sacred cause of science, Doctor?'

Again it was the Countess who answered. 'Forgotten in the service of Your Majesty. The Doctor and I are old rivals, it is

true, but we are also old friends.'

'And where is our inventor?'

'On board the submersible, Your Majesty.'

Fulton's head popped out of the conning tower and gave a cheery wave. 'Good morning, Your Majesty. We're all set.'

'If you will excuse us, Your Majesty?' said the Countess. 'Come, Doctor.'

They walked along the wharf to the submarine, where the two workmen stood ready to cast off.

'Well, wish me luck,' said Fulton.

'You're going alone?' asked the Doctor.

Fulton nodded. 'Couldn't ask anyone else to take the risk – even if any of my men were willing, which they're not.'

The Countess drew the Doctor aside. 'He's not going alone, Doctor, you're going with him.'

'Why should I do that?'

'As a guarantee of good faith. How do I know you haven't sabotaged the submersible?'

'And if I refuse?'

'I'll send orders to Valmont to kill the girl. If he fails I'll kill her myself.'

The Doctor paused, considering various options. 'Very well,' he said calmly. 'Perhaps it's best this way.'

They moved back to the boat and the Countess called, 'The Doctor's coming with you.'

'Are you sure, Doctor?' said Fulton. 'I'd be glad of your help.'

'He insists, don't you Doctor?' said the Countess.

The Doctor climbed onto the hull and Fulton ducked down inside, helping the Doctor through the hatch. Moments later his head appeared again. 'Cast off!' He ducked down and the conning-tower hatch slammed shut.

The workmen cast off the mooring ropes and the submarine moved slowly away from the wharf. The Countess left the wharf and went back up the beach to stand by the Emperor. Napoleon was watching the submersible's departure with interest. 'When does it go underwater?'

'Soon, Your Majesty, when they fill their ballast tanks. They won't submerge until they are closer to their target.'

Slowly the submarine sank between the waves, until only the

tip of the conning tower could be seen moving steadily away from them.

‘Why don’t they go right under?’ demanded Napoleon.

‘They need the conning tower to see where they’re going,’ explained the Countess. ‘It’s very small and would hardly be seen from a ship.’

Suddenly a cloaked figure ran onto the beach. To the Countess’s surprise and rage it was Serena. She gave the Emperor a hasty curtsey, grabbed the Countess by the arm and pulled her aside.

‘Where’s the Doctor?’

The Countess pulled her arm free and pointed. ‘Out there, in the submersible. He’s crewing for Mr Fulton. Don’t worry, they’ll be back before very long. Unless anything goes wrong, of course...’

In the cramped, stuffy darkness of the submersible, Fulton manipulated the controls while the Doctor stood in the conning tower guiding their course.

‘Steady as she goes,’ he called, feeling surprisingly nautical.

‘Aye, aye, sir,’ called Fulton, his voice booming hollowly in the thin copper hull. After a moment he called, ‘How close are we?’

‘Pretty close. About a hundred yards.’

‘Dead in line?’

‘Dead in line,’ confirmed the Doctor.

The world’s first submarine attack, thought the Doctor – in 1805! He felt guilty about how much he was enjoying it – though it eased his conscience considerably to know that the brig ahead was deserted.

‘Right, stand by. I’m about to fire the torpedo.’

Suddenly the Doctor heard the ‘Whumph’ of the torpedo and moments later the submersible vibrated in the shock wave.

The watchers on shore saw the brig explode in flame. Burning debris showered down upon the sea.

‘Excellent!’ cried Napoleon, and all the generals cheered and clapped.

‘There goes Nelson and his *Victory*, eh, Countess?’ cried the Emperor.

‘And the rest of his fleet as well, Your Majesty!’

They saw the conning tower describe a wide circle as the submarine headed back towards shore.

‘Is that it?’ asked Napoleon. ‘Is it all over?’

He sounded almost disappointed.

‘There was only one brig, Your Majesty, so they only carried one torpedo,’ said the Countess. ‘Under battle conditions they could carry many more. A whole fleet could be destroyed.’

‘I see,’ said Napoleon. ‘A very impressive demonstration, Countess. We must use this remarkable vessel against the English fleet as soon as possible. I shall congratulate our returning mariners, then I must go.’

They watched the little blob of the conning tower come steadily nearer.

Suddenly there was a great dull thud and a column of water shot high in the air. It was followed by a fiery pillar of smoke – smoke that took the form of a mushroom-shaped cloud...

Chapter Twenty-three

Aftermath

Napoleon watched the horrifying spectacle dispassionately. You could almost see him dismissing the submersible as a factor in his battle with the British fleet.

‘Unfortunate,’ he said. ‘But this is war, and in war men die.’ He went over to discuss the rest of the morning’s programme with his entourage. The sideshow was over.

Serena moved close to the Countess. Her usual detachment had totally disappeared. ‘You’ve killed the Doctor! Somehow I’ll make you pay for this.’

‘Nonsense! The Doctor killed himself through his own incompetence. He installed the new drive system and clearly he botched it. Believe me, my dear, I’m as distressed as you are.’

‘I very much doubt that.’

‘It’s true, I promise you. I was quite fond of the little fellow, despite all the trouble he caused me.’

Serena had the oddest feeling that she was sincere in her way. The feeling did nothing to diminish her own sense of rage and grief.

The Countess shaded her eyes and peered out to sea. ‘There’s something floating out there. Wreckage, perhaps. Or a body.’

‘Whatever it is, it’s moving,’ said Serena, following the Countess’s gaze. ‘Moving towards us.’

She turned and ran to the little group by the coaches, snatched a telescope from under the arm of an outraged admiral and ran back to the beach. She focused the telescope on the distant shape and saw that it was not one form but two, one towing the other.

As the two shapes came closer she saw that one was the Doctor, towing Fulton in a lifesaver’s grip.

She turned to Labiche and Lapoint, Fulton’s two workmen,

who were still standing on the jetty.

‘Don’t just stand there! Take a boat out and help them.’ She pointed to a dinghy with oars, moored at the end of the wharf.

The two men scrambled into the dinghy, cast off and rowed out to sea.

The Countess and Serena watched from the shore as the dinghy reached the two men, Labiche and Lapoint hauled them on board and turned and rowed back to shore. It was a hard pull in the choppy seas with the tide against them, but they reached the beach at last. The two men jumped out of the boat and dragged it up the shingle. Serena ran up to it and saw Fulton stretched out in the bottom, spluttering and semiconscious, and the Doctor crouched dripping on the seat.

The Doctor jumped out of the boat and turned to the two workmen. ‘Don’t just stand there! Get Mr Fulton into the workshop and out of those wet clothes. Wrap him in a blanket by the stove and give him some hot coffee. Rum too, if you’ve got any.’

Labiche and Lapoint heaved Fulton out of the bottom of the boat and carried him towards the workshop.

Serena turned to the Doctor and hugged him.

‘Steady,’ said the Doctor. ‘You’ll get soaked.’

The Countess came up to them and surveyed the Doctor’s soggy form with mild amusement. ‘Well, Doctor, you win again. I suppose I should congratulate you.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ protested the Doctor. ‘The whole thing was an unfortunate accident, I was lucky to survive.’

‘Accident be damned,’ said the Countess, eyes flashing. ‘You sabotaged the Omega drive and blew up my submarine.’

‘It was a beautiful machine,’ said the Doctor regretfully. ‘But it had no place in this century. Neither have you. Won’t you give up all these mad schemes now, and let Earth work out its own destiny? Human history is quite bloody enough without your intervention.’

‘No, Doctor, I will not give up,’ said the Countess furiously. ‘And you needn’t think you’ve won.’

‘Haven’t I? The British will win at Trafalgar now, and England won’t be invaded.’

‘Perhaps so. But the last battle has yet to be fought. When it is over Napoleon will be master of Europe. Soon after that, we

shall be masters of the world.'

'And how do you propose to achieve that?'

'That's the fascinating thing about this Game. Remove one piece from the board and the consequences are catastrophic. It has to be an important piece, of course. Now, I think I'll join the Emperor for the day.' She turned away. 'I should get out of those wet clothes, Doctor. Even a Time Lord can catch cold.'

'What about Mr Fulton?' called Serena. 'He half killed himself trying to help you. Don't you want to see how he is?'

'Mr Fulton is of no more use to me, and of no more interest.'

The Countess joined the little group by the coaches and was soon surrounded by a crowd of admirers. The Doctor and Serena made their way to the workshop.

'Did you really sabotage the drive system?' asked Serena.

'I had no choice. I couldn't let the Countess turn an effective submarine loose in this time period. I had to stop her – even though it meant risking your life.'

'It was your duty, Doctor.'

'My only hope was that you would escape – as you obviously did – or that I'd be able to rescue you in time. How did you get away?'

Serena explained her use of the TARDIS. 'It's in a little wood nearby, disguised as a tree. Wasn't sabotaging the drive terribly dangerous for you?'

'It was a bit tricky. I half suspected the Countess would make me go on the trip, so I activated the Omega drive's self-destruct circuit with a built-in time delay. As soon as the alarm sounded I warned Mr Fulton the drive was going to blow and we abandoned ship. Unfortunately, he couldn't swim! Good job I took my Gallifrey Lifesaver's Certificate at the Academy.'

They went into the workshop and found Fulton sitting by the stove with a blanket around him, sipping hot coffee from a tin mug.

'I guess I owe you my life, Doctor.'

'The least I could do,' said the Doctor, a little guiltily. 'I'm sorry about what happened.'

'Not your fault, Doctor. I never trusted that damn drive of hers. Should've stuck to steam. I'll work something out for my next submersible.'

The Doctor accepted a mug of coffee laced with rum from Labiche. ‘You know what I think, Mr Fulton? Why don’t you abandon submersibles, at least for a time, and concentrate on surface craft? A steam-driven boat would be really useful, particularly back in America. Lots of rivers and lakes there, you know!’

‘I guess submersibles are a bust here in France right now – I might try the British. Anyway, I’ll think about it, Doctor. Don’t you want to get out of those wet clothes? I’m sure we can find another blanket.’

‘I think I’d better be on my way,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’ve got transport nearby. Goodbye Mr Fulton – and good luck.’

The imperial coaches had gone when they came out of the workshop. In another bay, further down the coast, cursing troops were climbing in and out of flat-bottomed barges, watched by an increasingly gloomy Napoleon.

‘What was all that about steam?’ asked Serena as they walked along the coast road towards the little wood.

‘Just giving history a nudge – in the right direction. Mr Fulton built a new submarine and tried it on the British, but they wouldn’t bite either. So he went back to America and built one of the first reliable steamboats, on the Hudson river. He built lots more steamboats after that, ended up rich and famous.’

‘Nice to know there’s a happy ending for someone,’ said Serena.

Very soon they came to the little wood. Shortly afterwards a musical humming filled the air, and one of the trees disappeared.

The Doctor and Serena were sitting in their little salon at Rue Chantierine. The Doctor was dry, the servants had returned, and the longcase clock was back in its place in the corner. They were discussing their next move.

‘Doesn’t that depend on the Countess?’ asked Serena. ‘Until we know what she’s planning to do...’

‘Surely she made that pretty obvious,’ said the Doctor. ‘She was boasting about it the last time we saw her in Boulogne.’

‘She said the last battle had yet to be fought,’ said Serena remembering. ‘When it was over Napoleon would be master of Europe. Then she and her friends would be masters of the world.’

The Doctor said, 'The last battle has got to be Waterloo.'

'She was going to make sure Napoleon won by removing one important piece from the board.'

'Waterloo was a very close-fought battle,' said the Doctor. 'It could have gone either way. As for the one important piece that ensured Napoleon's defeat, there's only one candidate. She's going to have another go at assassinating the Duke of Wellington.' He rose, and began pacing about the room. 'But when? Where? How?'

'We'll just have to find out, won't we, Doctor?'

The Doctor stopped his pacing. 'Well we won't find out here and now. We must move on.'

'Where to?'

'Not where but when. Waterloo doesn't happen for another ten years – 1815.'

'Ten years?' said Serena. 'Nothing simpler.' She rose and headed for the longcase clock.

'Steady on,' said the Doctor. 'I must visit the bank, make arrangements to resign the tenancy, pay off the servants and the coach hire and the bills. Don't want to leave any loose ends...'

Some time later they were entering the TARDIS control room.

The Doctor watched Serena move over to the TARDIS console. He was already beginning to get the hang of the new controls. As Serena had said, it wouldn't be too hard to master them if he put his mind to it. On the other hand, it was rather nice to be chauffeur-driven.

'Hold on a minute,' he said, 'I've been thinking. There's only one way to discover what the Countess intends to do, and that's to let her do it.'

Serena looked baffled. 'Say that again, Doctor.'

'Don't you see? It's only when she actually does it that we'll know what she's done!'

'So what are you suggesting?'

'Take us to Paris in mid *July* 1815, a month after the battle. If things are as they should be, we'll know the Countess failed. If they're not – then we'll have a chance to find out where they went wrong.'

'If you say so, Doctor. But what about the Blinovitch Limitation Effect? If the Countess has already changed things,

will we ever be able to put them back on their proper course?’

The Doctor considered, tapping his finger against his chin. ‘When you play for high stakes, you have to take some risks,’ he said quietly. Their eyes locked for a moment, and then he grinned: ‘You’d better fix us a small spatial displacement as well. If we come out of the clock in the salon in ten years’ time we’ll give the next set of tenants a nasty shock!’

Serena’s hands moved over the controls. Ten years is the blink of an eye to a time-travelling TARDIS. The only difficulty lay in the very shortness of the transition. In a matter of minutes, measured in the subjective time inside the TARDIS, Serena stepped back from the console.

‘We’re here, Doctor. Paris, July 1815.’

The Doctor drew a deep breath. ‘Splendid! Splendid! Now, if history is on the right path, Paris will be under Allied occupation, Louis the Eighteenth will be back on his throne and Napoleon will be a prisoner on board HMS *Bellerophon*.’

‘And if there’s been interference?’

‘Then we’ll see, won’t we?’

The Doctor and Serena came out of a small ornamental park, leaving behind them a musical hum and a little fountain with a tasteful statue of a water nymph. They made their way to the Champs Elysees. It was lined with cheering crowds.

‘What’s happening?’ asked Serena. ‘It sounds like some sort of parade.’

‘I don’t know, but it doesn’t look too good,’ said the Doctor. ‘If history is unchanged, the Parisians of 1815 haven’t too much to cheer about.’

Edging through the crowd they got near enough to the boulevard to peer between the ranks of guards lining the kerb.

A procession was passing by, squad after squad of marching soldiers and then an open carriage. From inside the carriage a familiar figure waved to the cheering crowds, to cries of ‘*Vive l’Empereur!*’

The Doctor turned to his neighbour, a prosperous-looking man in a high-crowned hat. ‘Excuse me, sir, we are travellers, newly arrived in Paris. Can you tell us the reason for this splendid procession?’

The man stared at him in astonishment. ‘You must have

travelled far, sir, not to know that! It's a victory parade – to celebrate Emperor Napoleon's fabulous victory at Waterloo!

'Splendid,' said the Doctor. 'So he finally defeated the English and their so-wonderful Wellington.'

'He would have defeated him I'm sure,' said the enthusiastic citizen. 'You know they had never been directly opposed in battle? However, it was not to be. The Duke of Wellington died mysteriously just *before* the battle.'

Chapter Twenty-four

Questions

The Doctor looked at Serena. 'Well, now we know, don't we?' He turned back to the patriotic citizen. 'That is astonishing news, sir! Is it known exactly how the Duke died?'

The citizen lowered his voice. 'Not for sure. There are many rumours. If I might offer a word of advice, sir, since you are strangers in Paris?'

'Yes, of course.'

The man's voice was still hushed. 'You would be wise not to ask such questions in public. The Emperor has forbidden any speculation on the matter – and the spies of Monsieur Fouché, our Minister of Police, are everywhere. Two friends of mine were arrested recently. They have not been seen since.' He raised his voice. 'The Emperor of course, has denied any connection with the affair. He would not stoop to such means.'

'Naturally not,' said the Doctor. 'I thank you sir.'

He and Serena moved away.

'Let's find somewhere quiet to sit down,' said the Doctor. 'I need to think.'

They walked away from the crowded Champs-Élysées and made their way to a quiet back street with a pavement café. They sat down and ordered coffee.

Once the coffee had arrived and the waiter had gone back inside, the Doctor said quietly, 'I don't like the sound of all that.'

'All what?'

'Public discussion forbidden, secret police on the streets, people disappearing. It has an all too familiar smell.'

'What kind of smell?'

'Fascism, repression, state terror. Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, Mao's China. Napoleon seems to have invented it early.'

'Or the Countess,' said Serena. 'What next?'

'We need to find out who assassinated the Duke.'

‘The Countess, surely?’

‘Yes, but not in person. Her kind always move through human agents, they never act directly. I think it’s one of their rules.’

‘What about the vampire – and the robot?’

‘She was dealing with an exceptional opponent – me!’ said the Doctor modestly. ‘And you, of course,’ he added hurriedly. ‘Exceptionally dangerous enemies call for exceptional methods.’

Serena thought for a moment. ‘We have to remember we’ve been away ten years. What’s been happening?’

‘I can tell you what ought to have happened.’ The Doctor paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts. ‘Well, for a start Napoleon abandoned his idea of invading England. He started to go off it even before Trafalgar, and the defeat at Trafalgar clinched it.’

‘That’s something we achieved,’ said Serena. ‘With no atomic submarine to sink his fleet, Nelson won.’

‘He won,’ said the Doctor. ‘But he was killed – though not till the battle was as good as won.’

Serena was silent for a moment, thinking of the little admiral, of the extraordinary force and charisma within that frail and wounded body.

‘I expect he died happy,’ she said.

‘I’m sure he did. Nelson always wanted glory – and nobody earned more.’

‘And Napoleon?’

‘He decided the Russians and the Austrians were the real menace, so he marched his armies east and defeated them at Austerlitz. He invaded Spain and Portugal, he defeated the Prussians and entered Berlin – a whole string of victories one after the other. It lasted for years – until it all went wrong.’

‘How?’

‘He over-extended himself, and made a disastrous attempt to invade Russia, losing millions of men. In the end there were just too many other countries ranged against him. England, of course, but also Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Spain and Portugal in perpetual revolt. Everybody ganged up on him. In the end the Allies marched on Paris, Talleyrand did another quick change of sides and negotiated peace, and Napoleon abdicated in 1814.’

‘If Napoleon was defeated in 1814, how did Waterloo

happen in 1815?’

‘That’s the twist in the plot,’ said the Doctor. ‘The Allies sent Napoleon into exile, let him be ruler of Elba, a little island off the west coast of Italy. He had a staff, a little army, everything. Bit of a comedown of course, after ruling most of the world.’

‘So he didn’t stay there?’

‘No indeed. A year later he lands in France with his little army. When the French Army arrives to capture him, Napoleon throws open his arms and cries, “Let him that has the heart, kill his Emperor!” Naturally they all rally round cheering and shouting “*Vive l’Empereur!*” and the whole country does the same. The restored king runs for his life and Napoleon’s back in charge. They call it his Hundred Days. He reassembles his Grand Army, the Allies gather their forces...’

‘Then Waterloo.’

‘Then Waterloo – which Napoleon loses again, and he gets sent to St Helena, an even smaller island, where he eventually dies in exile.’

‘But not here and now. And Sir Arthur Wellesley – Wellington? What happened to him?’

‘Wellesley had a long hard slog. He was sent to Portugal, in charge of an expeditionary force, and fought his way up through Portugal, into Spain and eventually into France. He defeated most of Napoleon’s marshals, one after another, battle after battle, victory after victory. It took him ten years, and he ended up England’s greatest soldier. They made him Duke of Wellington in 1814. When Napoleon made his comeback they made him supreme commander of the allied armies. After winning Waterloo he was Prime Minister for a while and died in 1852, in Queen Victoria’s time.’

‘But not here and now,’ said Serena again.

‘No, not here and now. We’ve got to find out what went wrong and put it right.’

‘Where do we start?’

‘We ask the man who knows.’

‘Who’s that?’

‘Need you ask, Serena? However much history has been altered, I’m willing to bet that there’s one man who’s still around and in charge. And luckily, he’s an old friend of ours.’

Prince Talleyrand, now Minister of Foreign Affairs to the newly restored Emperor, naturally had a suite of offices at the Tuileries Palace. When the Doctor and Serena sent in their names he received them immediately, and with his usual charm. He showed them into a small private salon, luxuriously furnished in the ornate Empire style.

‘Doctor, Lady Serena! I had no idea you were back in Paris. And after so long.’

‘It’s very good of you to see us,’ said the Doctor. ‘I feel I am presuming on a very brief acquaintance.’

‘Not at all, Doctor. How may I serve you?’

‘I was forced to leave Paris very suddenly, and for a very long time. I have inevitably missed many momentous events. The Emperor’s temporary...setback, his triumphant return. Above all the great victory at Waterloo.’

‘It has been an eventful period certainly, particularly recently.’

‘If anyone knows the truth behind events, particularly recent events, it is you, Prince Talleyrand. If I might ask one or two questions?’

‘I shall be delighted to answer them – if I can.’

‘I am happy to see that you have once again risen above all these changes,’ said Serena.

‘Oh, I was out of favour for a while. The Emperor was extremely displeased that I had negotiated with the Allies when he was forced to abdicate. What else could I do? The situation was hopeless. However, when the Emperor had seized power again...’ Talleyrand smiled. ‘He discovered he still needed me.’

‘I am particularly interested in the untimely death of the Duke of Wellington,’ said the Doctor.

There was a sudden change in Talleyrand’s attitude. ‘That is a subject on which it would be wiser – and safer – not to enquire.’

‘Some public account must have been given, surely?’

‘Even the English are saying little. Apparently it occurred on the very eve of battle. Someone close to him became crazed...’

‘Not a French assassin then – hired by the Emperor?’

Talleyrand looked alarmed. ‘Don’t go around saying that, Doctor – not if you value your head. The Emperor is most anxious to dissociate himself from this crime. The harm to his

reputation could be incalculable. He has forbidden any speculation about – indeed, any mention of – the Duke’s death.’

‘So we’ve heard,’ said Serena. ‘He seems very sensitive on the subject – for an innocent man.’

‘It’s a matter of self-esteem, I imagine,’ said the Doctor. ‘He wouldn’t want people going round saying that he only won Waterloo because he got rid of Wellington first.’

‘Don’t even think such things,’ said Talleyrand. ‘He was genuinely looking forward to facing Wellington. He feels cheated that they never met on the field of battle.’

‘Not an agent of the Emperor then,’ said the Doctor.

‘Certainly not,’ said Talleyrand.

‘How about an agent of the Countess?’ asked Serena.

Talleyrand seemed to freeze for a moment. He looked from one to the other of them, a look of piercing intelligence. ‘How much do you know?’

‘I know a good deal about the Countess,’ said the Doctor. ‘I believe she meddles in the affairs of France for her own amusement, and that her influence upon the Emperor is evil.’

‘You know, Doctor,’ said Talleyrand. ‘I am inclined to agree with you.’ He resumed his seat and began speaking in measured tones. ‘Over the years I have seen her influence upon Napoleon grow stronger. She has become the Emperor’s confidante, his unofficial adviser. A position I once used to consider exclusively my own. There are rumours that he plans to divorce Marie Louise and marry her.’

‘Marie Louise?’ asked Serena. ‘What happened to Josephine?’

Talleyrand waved a dismissive hand. ‘Oh, she went a good five years ago. The Emperor needed an heir – and a suitably aristocratic wife to provide one. He divorced Josephine and married the Princess Marie Louise of Austria, who duly obliged. Now she may soon be ousted in her turn, by the Countess.’

‘And Napoleon follows the Countess’s advice rather than yours?’ asked Serena.

‘On most occasions. Oh, he still relies on me for practical details, the negotiation of the different clauses of a treaty. But on broader matters, questions of policy, he listens to her.’

‘And what sort of advice does she give?’

‘Always to attack, to expand, to be aggressive. It’s what the Emperor wishes to hear, so he tends to follow it. My own advice

tends always to moderation. To give a defeated enemy generous terms can turn him into a future ally. These days I am seldom listened to.'

'This matter of the assassination...,' said the Doctor.

Talleyrand paused for a moment, then evidently decided to speak. 'She came to me with the proposition some time ago. She hinted at her plans, just a few enigmatic clues. She enjoyed shocking me I think, and she wanted to boast. I told her that I wished to know nothing about it. I advised her not to suggest it to the Emperor. She went away laughing. Soon afterwards the Duke of Wellington was dead.'

The Doctor leaned forward urgently. 'Will you tell me those hints, all that she told you?'

'Why?' asked Talleyrand bluntly.

'So that I can undo the harm she has done.'

Talleyrand shook his head. 'No, Doctor, I will not. What is done is done. We can't change the past.'

'Suppose that wasn't true? Suppose the past could be changed?'

Talleyrand laughed. 'Then you would be a magician indeed, Doctor. But I still wouldn't tell you.'

'Why not?'

'Because the death of the Duke of Wellington meant victory for Napoleon and for France. However much I deplore the method, I would not wish to change the result. But this is idle talk.'

'No,' said the Doctor, 'it is not. If I could convince you, give you absolute proof, that the Countess's actions will do nothing but harm to France, to the world, now and in the future – and that the evil she has done can indeed be undone – would you tell me then?'

Chapter Twenty-five

Arrest

There was a moment of silence while Talleyrand considered. ‘I might,’ he said at last. ‘But since no one can really know the future, and certainly no one can change the past, what you suggest is impossible.’

‘It is not impossible,’ insisted the Doctor. ‘I can *show* you the future –’

He broke off as not one but two familiar figures came into the room. The first was Napoleon, still wearing the colourful uniform he had worn during the morning’s victory parade. Behind him was the Countess, as graceful and elegant as ever, in a sumptuous velvet gown. Jewels sparkled in her cloud of black hair. Just as they had once sparkled in Josephine’s, remembered Serena.

Talleyrand leaped to his feet, and bowed. The Doctor and Serena stood up too. The Doctor bowed, Serena curtsayed.

Napoleon ignored them. In fact he didn’t even seem to see them. He had altered little over the years, a little stouter, the hair a little thinner. The main change was in his bearing. He was glowing with confidence – the confidence, thought the Doctor, of the victor of Waterloo. He believed he was invincible.

Napoleon said, ‘Talleyrand I need you – the Countess has suggested a most excellent plan. A diversionary attack on Austria – and the main thrust of the Grand Army in an invasion of Russia. We shall attack in spring, not winter, take them by surprise and avenge the disaster of my retreat from Moscow! What do you say to that?’

Talleyrand looked appalled. ‘I should respectfully urge caution, sire. Your later victory was achieved at tremendous cost. The Grand Army suffered many losses, and the people are weary of war. We need a period of peace and stability.’

‘Give our enemies peace and they will use it to recover and

rearm. We must catch them off balance –’ He broke off, seeming to notice the Doctor and Serena for the first time. ‘Who are these people?’

‘Surely you recognise the Doctor and Lady Serena, my dear?’ said the Countess. ‘Old friends, from many years ago.’

Napoleon stared at the Doctor and frowned. ‘I thought for a time you had been killed, Doctor, but I learned that you left Paris very suddenly – against my orders, as I recall.’

The Doctor bowed again. ‘My humble apologies, sire. Urgent business called me away. May I congratulate you on your splendid victory at Waterloo?’

Napoleon nodded in acknowledgement. Losing interest in the Doctor – much to the Doctor’s relief – he turned to Talleyrand. ‘Come to my study and we’ll discuss the Countess’s plan.’

‘If Your Majesty will permit me a moment to say farewell to my guests?’

Napoleon nodded again and strode from the room.

The Countess lingered for a moment. ‘Well, Doctor? I told you I would win the last battle.’

‘Indeed you did,’ said the Doctor sadly.

Serena said angrily, ‘You haven’t –’

The Doctor held up his hand, silencing her. ‘It’s no use, Serena, we must admit defeat.’ To the Countess he said, ‘I’m sure you understand. I just had to see for myself.’

‘And now you have seen? What will you do, Doctor?’

‘Go back and report my failure, I suppose. I’m not looking forward to it.’

The Countess studied him thoughtfully. ‘Yes, go back, Doctor. Go back to wherever you came from. Don’t cross me again, or I shall crush you. Don’t keep the Emperor waiting, Prince.’

She turned and swept out in a rustle of velvet skirts.

‘Likes a good exit line, doesn’t she?’ said the Doctor.

Serena said, ‘I only wanted to tell her she hadn’t won yet.’

‘I know you did, that’s why I stopped you. We can only win in the end if the Countess is convinced that we’ve lost. Well, Prince Talleyrand, what do you think of the Countess’s plan?’

‘Disaster,’ said Talleyrand. ‘Total disaster! She’ll bring the Empire crashing down in ruins. Napoleon doesn’t realise how

fragile was his victory. England still commands the seas. He's still got every power in Europe ranged against him, all determined to bring him down. He can only survive if he takes time to consolidate his gains.'

'But the Countess won't let him,' said Serena.

'She'll urge him into one mad scheme after another, till it all ends in disaster,' Talleyrand agreed sadly.

'Then help me to stop her!'

Talleyrand paused, considering. 'You were talking of proof, Doctor. I must go to the Emperor now, but perhaps later...'

'There's a little park called the Parc Montsouris.'

'I know it, I think.'

'Could you meet us there later tonight – about dusk?'

'Very well. Your proof is in a park, Doctor?'

'It is indeed, Prince Talleyrand. A positive fountain of truth!'

The Doctor and Serena sat on a stone bench by the little fountain in the Parc Montsouris. Dusk was falling, but the summer evening was still mild and pleasant.

They had enjoyed an excellent dinner in a quiet little backstreet restaurant.

'The big famous places will all be full tonight,' the Doctor had said. 'And I think it might be sensible to keep out of sight. I didn't like the look in the Countess's eye when she left us.'

Now they were waiting for Prince Talleyrand.

'Do you think he'll come?' asked Serena.

'I think he might. I already had him about halfway convinced. That little performance by Napoleon and the Countess was the clincher. Talleyrand's a brilliant diplomat, remember. All his instincts warn him that the Countess is leading the Emperor to disaster.'

Serena looked baffled. 'I've been thinking about that. Why? When she went to so much trouble to make Napoleon a winner, why does she want to ruin everything?'

'I've been thinking about that myself. It's all part of a bigger scheme, I think. What did she call it? Her Grand Design.'

'How are you going to convince Talleyrand?'

'I've been thinking about that too. That's why I asked him to meet us here – and here he is!'

A big, black, closed carriage was drawing up outside the park

gates.

‘Odd looking coach for him to use,’ said Serena.

‘Perhaps he’s just being discreet.’

Serena frowned. ‘It looks more like a police van.’

Which is exactly what it was. The back doors burst open and half a dozen very big men leaped out and ran into the park. They wore plain black clothes and carried truncheons. The Doctor and Serena jumped up but it was too late. They were already surrounded.

Another man walked up to join the group. He was smaller but better dressed and carried an air of authority. There was some kind of document in his hand.

He consulted it. ‘You are the man known as Doctor Dupont? And you are the woman calling herself Lady Serena?’

‘We are not calling ourselves anything,’ said the Doctor with dignity. ‘This is Lady Serena and I am the Doctor. What is your business with us?’

‘I am Inspector Mercier and I have a warrant for your arrest. Issued upon the authority of Monsieur Joseph Fouché, the Minister of Police.’

‘On what charge?’

‘Information has been laid that you are English spies. You will come with me.’

‘Come where?’ demanded the Doctor.

‘To the headquarters of Monsieur Fouché in the Quai des Augustins. There you will be interrogated. As soon as you have confessed you will be shot.’

Chapter Twenty-six

Future Shock

His official duty over, the inspector turned away. 'Bring them along!'

Two of the plain-clothes policemen stepped forward and grabbed hold of the Doctor and Serena.

A cold and commanding voice said, 'Release my friends immediately.'

Immaculate as ever, Prince Talleyrand was strolling into the park. Recognising the voice of authority the policemen released their captives and stood back.

Outraged, Inspector Mercier bustled forward. 'What is the meaning of this interference? My men are carrying out their lawful duties.'

Talleyrand looked at him as if he was something you scraped off a shoe.

'Do you know who I am?'

Mercier stared at him, and then stepped back. 'Prince Talleyrand! I had no idea...'

'This lady and gentleman are personal friends of mine. I vouch for them.'

'But there is a warrant...'

'Show me.'

Mercier produced the warrant and handed it over. Talleyrand gave it one contemptuous glance then ripped it in two, dropping the pieces in disdain. 'You will tell Monsieur Fouché that he has been misinformed. You will also tell him that if my friends are troubled any further he will incur my displeasure – my severe displeasure. As will you. Now, be off with you.'

Mercier and his men hurried out of the park, climbed into their wagon and drove away.

'A very timely arrival,' said the Doctor. 'I can guess who arranged that little visitation for us. I told you she had a nasty

look in her eye, Serena.'

'I am afraid the Countess has poisoned the Emperor's mind against you,' said Talleyrand. 'She told him she'd long suspected you were English spies, that you'd sabotaged Fulton's submersible and then fled Paris.'

'Thank you for saving us from arrest,' said Serena.

Talleyrand sighed. 'I can't protect you for long, I'm afraid. Fouché will complain to the Emperor, another warrant will be issued – and I shall be rapped over the knuckles and ordered not to interfere. If I were you, I should leave Paris as soon as you can and go as far away as possible.'

'We will,' promised the Doctor. 'But first we must give you your proof.'

'Very well. Do we have far to go? My carriage waits nearby.'

'We're already here.'

Talleyrand looked at the little fountain with its water nymph. 'Ah yes! Is this the fountain of truth, Doctor?'

'In a way. Serena?'

Serena produced the TARDIS key and leaned towards the fountain. Suddenly, impossibly, a door appeared, as if hovering in space.

The Doctor waved Talleyrand forward. 'If you please...'

Looking a little dazed, Talleyrand stepped through, followed by the Doctor and Serena. The door disappeared.

Talleyrand stood in the TARDIS control room, looking around him with surprise and delight. 'Now I understand, Doctor. You are a disciple of Doctor Mesmer, the fellow who died just recently. Animal magnetism, that's it, isn't it? You've mesmerised me!'

'I've done no such thing,' said the Doctor indignantly. 'Have you noticed me gazing deep into your eyes and making mystic passes? Have I swung a watch and chain in front of you, or urged you to stare into a crystal ball? No, this is all quite real, I assure you.' He rapped the TARDIS console. 'Real and solid, try for yourself.'

'A theatrical illusion then,' said Talleyrand desperately. 'There are restaurants in Paris where one dines surrounded by glittering mirrors and candles, seeing oneself reflected a thousand times. Walls and ceilings melt away and half-naked

nymphs descend on velvet swings.'

'I know, we've dined in one,' said the Doctor. 'Though I don't recall any naked nymphs. I promise you, this is neither a mirage nor an illusion. This is real.'

'Then what is it?' asked Talleyrand helplessly.

'It's a ship,' said Serena. 'A ship that travels through Space and Time.'

'A ship inside a fountain?'

'A ship concealed by what appeared to be a fountain,' said the Doctor. 'The fountain was an illusion, in a way. The ship is real.'

'But it's impossible.'

'I'm going to ask you to believe several impossible things, Prince Talleyrand.'

Talleyrand waved a hand. 'No titles, please. They seem meaningless here. Please go on.'

'Serena and I come from another world, another time.'

'And the Countess?'

'I'm not sure what she is,' admitted the Doctor. 'I think she is another kind of being altogether. Not human, certainly, perhaps not even truly physical. She can assume human shape, but that's all it is, an assumption – it's not the real her.'

Talleyrand shook his head wonderingly. 'You're saying she's a ghost – or a goddess?'

'If you like. What I do know is that she and others of her kind like to interfere in human history for their own amusement. For some reason she has chosen the time of Napoleon. She's protected him from harm, boosted his career, stage-managed this victory at Waterloo. Now she is urging him on to new excesses, more and more wars and conquests.'

'But why?' asked Talleyrand desperately. 'What's her final aim?'

'I have a theory about that,' said the Doctor. 'We're about to test it. Serena, I want you to take us forward fifty years in time.'

'Only fifty years?'

'If my theory's correct, fifty years will be enough.'

'No physical displacement?'

'It's not necessary. I want our friend Talleyrand to see the Paris of the future – to see what the Countess has made of it.'

'Very well, Doctor.'

Serena busied herself at the console and the central column began its rise and fall. The Doctor turned to Talleyrand.

‘This is going to be very hard for you, I know. I’ve hit you with too many new things all at once, and even someone of your intelligence will find it hard to take in. All I ask you to do is trust the evidence of your eyes and ears – and accept my assurance that I haven’t altered your perceptions in any way.’

‘Very well, Doctor. I’ll do my best.’

The central column came to rest. ‘We’re here, Doctor. Paris 1865.’

‘Right,’ said the Doctor. ‘In 1865, Paris should be peaceful and prosperous under Napoleon the Third – a nephew of your Napoleon by the way. Lots of new buildings, Manet and Monet painting away, Offenbach at the opera. Let’s see, shall we?’

Serena opened the TARDIS doors, and they went outside.

They were still in the pretty little park that they had left – but it wasn’t pretty any more. It was a patch of rubble, surrounded by shattered buildings. Even the fountain from which they’d emerged was shattered and broken now. The stone nymph was headless and had lost one arm as the TARDIS adapted to its new surroundings.

Talleyrand looked round in unbelieving horror. ‘What’s happened?’

‘Take a good look, Prince Talleyrand,’ said the Doctor. ‘This is the Countess’s brave new world.’

Chapter Twenty-seven

War World

‘Let’s see a bit more of it, shall we?’ said the Doctor.

They went out into the rubble-strewn streets. There was nobody about, no evening crowd out for a stroll. No cafés, no shops. Most of the houses were in ruins, though one or two seemed to have been patched up to make them habitable.

It grew darker as they walked on. There didn’t seem to be any lights anywhere, except for flames lighting the sky somewhere in the distance.

After a while they came to a vast open space. It, too, was strewn with rubble. At its centre stood part of a great broken arch, only half of it left now, arcing upwards to the night sky.

‘The Emperor’s triumphal arch,’ said Talleyrand sadly. ‘Started in 1806, still not finished.’ He laughed harshly. ‘Well, someone’s finished it now. Let us go back, Doctor, I have seen enough.’

As they retraced their steps, someone called to them from the porch of a ruined building. ‘Here, you lot!’

‘Who are you?’ called the Doctor. ‘What do you want?’

‘Be careful, Doctor,’ warned Serena.

‘This is the first sign of life we’ve seen. Maybe he can give us some useful information,’ the Doctor told her. He went over to the doorway and saw a ragged old man crouched on a pile of filthy blankets. The pile was tucked away inside a barrier of broken boxes and bits of timber. Like a rat’s nest, thought the Doctor. The old man scrambled to his feet.

‘What do you think you’re doing? Call your friends over quick before they’re seen. Don’t worry, there’s three of you and only me here.’

‘It’s all right,’ called the Doctor. Talleyrand and Serena came over, looking at the old man with some distaste.

‘What are you doing, wandering down the middle of the

street after curfew?’ he asked. ‘There’s patrols about you know. You’ll get took up. Keep to the shadows like I do, dodge from one bit of cover to another.’

‘There’s a curfew?’ asked Talleyrand bemusedly.

‘Course there is, they see you, they’ll pick you up.’

‘What for?’ asked Serena.

‘Army, labour battalions, depends how fit you are.’ He leered at Serena. ‘They’d have other uses for you.’

‘Listen, my good man,’ said Talleyrand. ‘We’ve been away – away from Paris. Can you tell us what’s been happening here?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘All this damage – what caused it?’

The old man looked at him as if he were mad. ‘That’s the rockets innit? Bloody great rockets. Listen, there’s one now!’ They heard a great whistling sound high overhead. It stopped, there was a distant explosion and a flicker of flame on the skyline.

‘It’s all right so long as you hear them,’ said the old man philosophically. ‘They say you never hear the one what gets you.’

‘War always speeds up technology,’ muttered the Doctor. ‘Who sends these rockets? Where do they come from?’

‘Marseilles, I think.’

‘We’re at war with *Marseilles*?’ said Talleyrand incredulously.

‘Course we are. I heard tell Milan was getting the rockets as well. Or was it Barcelona?’

‘We’re at war with Italy – and Spain? How many others?’

‘We’re at war with everybody,’ said the old man, as if stating a self-evident truth. ‘Everybody’s at war with everybody. That’s how it is.’

‘How long has this been going on?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Forever, far as I know. All my life, that’s for sure. Course, it’s not all rockets you know. There’s the enemy artillery as well, when their troops can get close enough. Boulogne gave us a fair old pasting the other day. Still we’re supposed to be getting our own rockets any day now, they raised a special tax to afford them. Then we can pay the buggers back.’

‘Let me see if I understand,’ said Talleyrand wearily. ‘French cities are at war with other French cities – and with other countries as well?’

‘Well, bits of them, like. Other city states like us. Not all the

time of course. Sometimes they're allies, at least for a bit. It all keeps changing.'

'Well, thank you for talking to us,' said the Doctor. 'We must be on our way.'

The old man clutched his arm. 'Haven't got any food, have you? Haven't had a bite since yesterday. I found a dead cavalry horse – well part of it anyway.'

Gently the Doctor freed himself. 'No food, I'm afraid. Here, take this.' He gave the old man a silver coin. 'Maybe you can buy some food – if there's anything left for sale in Paris.'

The old man stared at the coin in amazement. 'You got money? Silver? You really want to be careful, mate. There's gangs in these ruins would kill you for a lot less than this. Kill you and eat you, some of them.'

Talleyrand turned to the Doctor. 'How can all this have happened?'

'I told you,' said the Doctor. 'It's the Countess's brave new world. Somehow or other she's brought all this about.'

Suddenly the old man whispered, 'Hush! Patrol coming.'

A squad of black-helmeted, black-uniformed guards came marching down the street, looking suspiciously around them. They carried what looked like primitive automatic rifles, the Doctor noticed. More war-driven technology.

Suddenly the old man rushed out into the road shouting, 'Patrol, over here! Strangers – three of them, in that doorway. They been asking all sorts of questions. I reckon they're spies.'

The squad broke ranks and flooded into the doorway, dragging the three strangers out of hiding.

The old man capered about them shouting. 'I turned them in. I ought to get the reward. They got money, I deserve a share.'

One of the soldiers gave him a casual cuff around the ear and he fled squalling.

'How could he?' said Serena. 'You were kind to him, you gave him money.'

'Think of the life he's led,' said the Doctor. 'A life like that doesn't do much for your ethical standards.'

The squad surveyed their prisoners. One of them, whose sleeve chevrons denoted some sort of rank, said, 'All right, we'll take them to HQ.'

A weedy-looking young guard stared hungrily at Serena. 'Do

we have to take 'em straight away? Couldn't we just...'

'No we couldn't,' said the leader firmly. 'Standing orders. No prisoner to be – interfered with before interrogation.' He laughed. 'After's a different matter. You'll get your chance. Come on, you three.'

Forming a square around their prisoners, the squad marched them away.

Headquarters turned out to be the Tuileries Palace, or what was left of it. Most of it had been knocked down, or blown up, but one wing of the enormous building still survived. They were taken through a basement entrance, thrown into a bare stone cell and left to their own devices.

'Can you get us out, Doctor?' asked Serena.

The Doctor shook his head. 'If it was an electronic lock it would be simple. Sonic screwdrivers don't work on heavy iron bolts. Anyway, there's a guard outside the door.'

Talleyrand said nothing at all. He seemed stunned into silence. 'How long will they leave us here?' asked Serena.

The Doctor, who had known quite a few cells in his time, shrugged resignedly. 'There's no telling. Until somebody in authority gets round to dealing with us. Could be hours, could be days.'

But the Doctor was wrong. In a surprisingly short time there was a clatter of boots on the stone flags outside and the door clanged open. It was the squad leader.

'Outside, you three. Commandant wants you.'

'That's a bit quick, innit?' said the guard. 'Usually leave 'em for a day or two to soften up.'

'Sent for 'em as soon as I gave the description,' said the squad leader. 'Come on, you three.'

Flanked by the squad leader and the guard they were marched up some stairs, along a corridor and up yet more steps, emerging at the foot of a great marble staircase. It was, Serena realised, the same staircase they had climbed on the night of Napoleon's reception.

The mirrors were all cracked and broken now, and there were no candles. Instead dim gas lamps spluttered on the walls, and yet more rubble strewed the steps. At the top of the steps they turned into the Grand Salon. It, too, was worn and shabby

and its walls were lined with huge maps.

Studying one of the maps was a tall figure in black leather with its back to them.

'Prisoners as ordered, Commandant,' barked the squad leader.

The figure swung round.

With no particular surprise, the Doctor saw that it was the Countess.

Chapter Twenty-eight

Grand Design

She seemed delighted to see them.

‘Doctor! Lady Serena! And you, Prince Talleyrand. Now that I really do find unexpected.’

With an effort, Talleyrand recovered some of his usual suavity. He bowed. ‘Believe me, Countess, it is far more unexpected to me.’

‘The Doctor brought you in his time machine, I suppose?’

Talleyrand glanced quickly at the Doctor who shook his head. Talleyrand made no reply, and the Countess laughed.

‘I shall require to know all about that machine, presently, Doctor. But there’s no hurry. You’ll tell me all I want to know in time.’

‘I shouldn’t rely on it.’

The Countess turned to the two soldiers. ‘You two – stand by the door. Shoot if they give any trouble.’

The two guards took positions flanking the door.

The Countess looked thoughtfully at her three prisoners. ‘Why did you come here?’

It was the Doctor who replied: ‘I wanted to see something of this new future of yours. We all did.’

‘You really do suffer from insatiable curiosity, don’t you, Doctor? And what do you think of it, now you’re here?’

‘From the little I’ve seen so far, I’m appalled.’

‘Ah, but you haven’t seen the whole picture,’ said the Countess. ‘Come and see, all of you.’

She led them over to one of the big wall maps, snatching up a pointer. ‘Here’s the city state of Paris, you see – of which I am Commandant, naturally. Here are our neighbours: Normandy, Aquitaine and so on. With some we’re at war, others are allies. It’s the same all over France – or what used to be France. Over the rest of Europe too: Spain, Italy, Germany. Soon it will be the

same all over the world!

‘And how did you achieve this result?’ asked the Doctor.

The Countess seemed eager to talk, indeed to boast. ‘To begin with, by securing the victory of Napoleon at Waterloo. Then by encouraging him to expand his empire, country after country, until he ruled most of the world.’

‘Why pick on Napoleon?’ asked Serena.

‘He was the conqueror I needed, the only man who could have pulled it off. He invaded England, he even conquered Russia. In fact he died of pneumonia, contracted during his victory parade in Moscow. On his death, the Empire collapsed.’

‘As you had foreseen?’ suggested the Doctor.

‘As I had foreseen. On the collapse of Napoleon’s World Empire, the conquered countries split up into separate mini-states – discreetly encouraged by some of my colleagues. Most of them had started out as separate little kingdoms that gradually unified – Germany, Italy, Spain. They simply reverted to type. Take England for example. It split into three separate kingdoms, England, Scotland and Wales – any two of them usually at war with the third.’

‘Why?’ asked the Doctor simply. ‘Why do all this?’

The Countess’s blue eyes were shining with excitement. ‘Don’t you see, Doctor? For the sake of the Game! For the sake of a hundred Games!’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Games which you and your kind control. I’m beginning to understand.’

‘I had a sudden inspiration during the Napoleon-Wellington Game. Why settle for an unwieldy boring contest, with hundreds of thousands of men on either side? The First and Second World Wars were no better. But the same excitement and intrigue could be gained from a hundred little wars. Attack and defence, victory and defeat, espionage and treason, alliance and betrayal, all on a miniature scale. Each of these mini-kingdoms is controlled by one of us. We form alliances and break them. We compete against each other.’

‘You don’t seem to be doing very well at the moment,’ said Serena. ‘As far as I can tell this little kingdom of yours is starving and in ruins.’

‘Several neighbouring states combined against me,’ said the Countess. ‘Unfortunately, they had superior technology. But I’ll

recover.’ She turned to the Doctor. ‘What do you think of my Grand Design?’

The Doctor paused for a moment before replying. ‘It’s ironic, really,’ he said at last. ‘I owe my present position to the fact that I encountered another totally unscrupulous race – small beer compared to your lot, but evil enough in their own little way. They called themselves the War Lords, and they, too, were aided by a renegade from my own people.’

‘Really?’ The Countess sounded bored. ‘And what did they do to arouse your disapproval?’

‘They kidnapped human soldiers from different time zones on Earth, brainwashed them, and set them down on an empty planet to continue, as they thought, fighting their own wars.’

‘An interesting concept, Doctor,’ said the Countess. ‘What’s your point?’

‘The War Lords had a purpose – to form an army to conquer the galaxy. It was an evil purpose – but at least it was a purpose. Whereas you...’

‘What about us, Doctor?’

‘You are more evil than the War Lords ever knew how to be. They played war games with kidnapped soldiers. You’re playing war games with the whole world. You know the worst thing about you and your kind?’

‘I’m sure you’ll tell me, Doctor.’

‘You have no purpose. None at all. You do evil just for the fun of it. Death and destruction, slaughter and suffering, poverty and starvation – all to keep you amused.’

‘We have to do something,’ said the Countess mockingly. ‘Immortality can be so boring. To manipulate human affairs, to risk death by taking human form relieves the monotony.’

‘What are you?’ whispered Talleyrand. ‘A ghost or a goddess?’

The Countess laughed. ‘I have been called both in my time. We are transcendental beings, Prince Talleyrand – we exist on another plane. We can interact with your world, but we are not of it.’ She surveyed the little group before her. ‘Now then, what am I to do with you?’ She paced up and down for a moment. ‘You, Prince Talleyrand, can be of use to me. I have need of a skilled diplomat. There are strategies to plan, alliances to forge.’

Talleyrand looked hard at the Doctor for a moment, then he

bowed. 'I should be honoured to serve you, Countess.'

Serena was horrified. 'You're really going to help her? Help to maintain this horrible world she's created.'

'You forget my past history, Lady Serena.'

'Someone once told me you were the King of Turncoats,' said the Doctor. 'I thought it harsh then, but I see now that it's true.'

Talleyrand spread his hands. 'It has always been my policy to serve the winner – the regime that is actually in power. Since this future world seems to be ruled by the Countess and her friends, I really have no alternative.'

The Countess turned to the Doctor. 'There is a place for you too, Doctor, if you are prepared to earn it. To begin with, you will deliver to me your time machine, and explain its workings. Our time-travel ability is limited. Your machine may be of use to us.'

'Is that all?'

'By no means. Your sabotage of the submersible's atomic drive shows you are a scientist of some ability. I need a scientist to devise weapons for me to counter those of my enemies. Superior rockets, more efficient guns, more powerful explosives...What do you say, Doctor?'

'You want me to give you my TARDIS, reveal its secrets, then manufacture weapons for you? Is that all?'

'Precisely. What do you say?'

The Doctor's tone was utterly matter-of-fact. 'I should sooner die.'

'Don't be hasty Doctor. That is precisely the alternative.' The Countess contemplated Serena. 'As for you, my dear...I'm afraid I really don't have any use for you.'

'Or I for you,' said Serena contemptuously.

'Mind you,' said the Countess thoughtfully, 'I daresay my men would see things differently.' She raised her voice. 'How about it, Squad Leader? Could you and your lads find this young lady a good home?'

The squad leader gave a broad grin. 'Be a pleasure, Commandant.'

'If you dare harm her –' began the Doctor furiously, and then broke off.

The Countess smiled. 'Ah, perhaps I was wrong. I do have a

use for you, Lady Serena. I'm sure you could resist any amount of pressure yourself, Doctor. But suppose the pressure was applied to Lady Serena? Could you bear *her* suffering?

'Yes he could,' said Serena furiously. 'The Doctor will do his duty, just as I will.'

'We'll see,' said the Countess. 'I'll give you some time to think it over. Squad Leader! Take these two back to their cell.' She indicated the Doctor and Serena. 'We'll give them a few days to cool off.'

'Yes, Commandant. Feed 'em, Commandant?'

The Countess considered. 'Usual bread and water. Tomorrow. When you've locked them up, inform my chef that the other gentleman will be dining with me tonight. Tell him to lay on something extra special in food and wine. Prince Talleyrand is used to the very best.'

'Very good, Commandant.'

'And send a squad to search around the area where the prisoners were captured. They're to look for any kind of alien machine.'

'Right away, Commandant.'

The Doctor wasn't too worried. The TARDIS was some way from the area where they'd been picked up, and the soldiers wouldn't recognise it if they found it.

As they were marched away, the Doctor and Serena heard the Countess saying, 'You don't know what a pleasure it is to have you here, Prince Talleyrand. I've been starved for good company. My men are fine fellows, but even their officers are pretty uncouth. There's just nobody worth talking to.'

'I have frequently made the same complaint at the Emperor's court,' said Talleyrand. 'I'm sure we shall have many stimulating discussions...'

The Doctor and Serena were marched down endless stairs and thrust back into their cell.

'You stay here on guard,' said the Squad Leader to the other soldier.

'How long?'

'Till I send someone to relieve you – if I remember.'

The cell door slammed shut behind them.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Turncoat

The Doctor sat on the stone bunk, contemplating the long night before him. Not that the days to follow promised much more. He was pretty sure he could resist any personal pressure. Time Lords have great control over their own physiology. He could put himself in a coma where he would feel no pain. If all else failed, he could stop both his hearts and die. But Serena...

Somehow she seemed to pick up on his thoughts. 'Don't worry about me, Doctor. There's a way out for both of us if we have to use it. what galls me is the idea of letting her win.'

'She hasn't won yet,' said the Doctor. 'Don't forget Talleyrand.'

'Talleyrand's gone over to her, surely? You heard him. Turned his coat again just as he always does.'

'It was the logical thing to do,' said the Doctor.

'You didn't do it.'

'The logical thing for him. Everyone expects Talleyrand to be treacherous. It's his great advantage.'

They made themselves as comfortable as they could on the stone bunk and the long hours crawled slowly by. The Doctor was half dozing when Serena jabbed an elbow into his ribs.

'Someone's coming!'

'Maybe it's the bread and water,' muttered the Doctor. 'That's not till tomorrow.'

They heard voices in the corridor outside the cell. To Serena's astonishment, one of them belonged to Talleyrand.

'You there!' it said authoritatively. 'Stop dozing at your post. The Commandant wants to see the prisoners again. You're to take them up to her, at once. Look alive!'

Then the guard. 'Why'd she send you?'

'I have no idea. Because I was there, I suppose? Do you want to argue with her about it? Fetch them out!'

They heard the heavy bolts drawn back and the door was flung open.

‘Outside, you!’ the guard growled – then shot into the cell as someone gave him a hearty shove from behind. The Doctor tripped him and wrestled him to the ground, Talleyrand leaped into the cell and landed on top of him and they both struggled to pin him down.

It was Serena who grabbed the struggling guard by the ears and banged his head hard onto the stone-flagged floor of the cell.

‘Non-violence can be carried too far, Doctor,’ she said as the guard went limp.

They disentangled themselves and made for the door.

‘Wait a moment,’ said Talleyrand. He stripped off the guard’s baggy tunic and pulled it on over his own coat, and grabbed the guard’s rifle.

‘Doctor, Lady Serena, please go in front. I’ll be your escort.’

They hurried down the corridor, retracing the route by which they’d been brought in. When they got to the basement door through which they’d entered, there was a sentry on duty. As they hurried down the corridor towards him the guard said, ‘Here, where you off to?’

‘The prisoner is taking me to his hide-out,’ said Talleyrand. ‘Out of the way!’

The guard stood aside, then stared suspiciously at Talleyrand.

‘Here, you’re not –’ He collapsed with a grunt as Talleyrand slammed the rifle butt into his forehead.

They fled into the night.

Thanks to the Doctor and Serena’s Time Lord topographical sense – a path once trodden is never forgotten – they managed to re-trace their steps through the ruined Paris without much difficulty. Once they had to hide from a marching patrol, and once skulking figures in the ruins seemed about to attack – until a warning shot from Talleyrand’s stolen rifle scattered them.

At last they reached the desolate stretch of rubble-strewn open space that had once been a park. Talleyrand stripped off the tunic and threw both it and the rifle away.

Serena produced her key, the door opened in the ruined statue, and they were back in the TARDIS.

The Doctor leaned panting against the console. ‘I don’t think

I've ever been so glad to be back. Please, Serena, return us to the time and place where we picked up Prince Talleyrand.'

Once again the transition seemed incredibly short. The door opened and they came out into the peace and tranquillity of the Parc Montsouris. The place and the time were exactly the same as when they had left for the nightmarish future.

Talleyrand sank onto the stone bench and looked around him. He breathed in the warm summer air with its heavy scent of flowers, and stared almost unbelievably at the untouched buildings all around the park.

'Well,' said the Doctor. 'You've seen the future and it doesn't work. Are you willing to help us change it?'

'That terrible world,' said Talleyrand. 'And that terrible woman! Yes, Doctor, I'll tell you anything I can.'

Sitting on the little park bench, he told them all he knew of the plot that had ended in the successful assassination of the Duke of Wellington.

Chapter Thirty

Waterloo Ball

The Doctor and Serena sat at a pavement café table in the Grande Place in Brussels and watched the world go by. It was a pleasant sunny morning in June 1815 on the eve of Waterloo. The battle was still unfought, history still unchanged.

‘This mission seems to involve a great deal of sitting in cafés,’ said Serena.

‘It’s the Continental lifestyle,’ said the Doctor. ‘Think yourself lucky, we might have had to go to Moscow!’

Serena surveyed the bustling crowd in the huge square. There were officers of many nations – English, Dutch, Belgians and Prussians – in gorgeously colourful uniforms: scarlet, blue, green, black. But the scarlet and gold of the English seemed to predominate. There were pretty young girls, flirting with the soldiers. There were family groups: parents, grandparents and children out for a morning stroll.

There were numbers of what obviously looked like tourists, strolling around in little groups, gazing at the baroque towers and turrets of the imposing buildings around the Grande Place. To Serena’s surprise, most of them also seemed to be English.

She said as much to the Doctor. ‘You’d never think we were on the brink of a major battle. Brussels seems more like a holiday resort for English tourists.’

‘Well it’s hardly surprising, is it? The English have been confined to their own little island by years of war, they’re starved for foreign travel. When Napoleon abdicated in 1814 and went into exile on Elba, they all flocked abroad. Then he spoiled it all by escaping and staging a comeback.’

‘And now he’s bearing down on Brussels with a massive army.’

‘That’s right. Over seventy thousand troops – cavalry, infantry and artillery.’

‘This lot don’t seem very worried about it.’

‘Some were. Quite a few shot back to England when the news broke that Boney was back. But plenty of them stayed on.’

‘What makes them so confident?’

‘The Allies have got an even bigger army, over one hundred thousand men. English, Dutch, Belgians, Prussians...Above all, there’s the Duke of Wellington – Sir Arthur Wellesley that was.’

‘Who’s never fought Napoleon before.’

‘Ah, but he beat six of Napoleon’s marshals, in Portugal and Spain. Everybody trusts the Duke to see Boney off. The Duke’s the most confident of all. In fact he’s so confident he’s going to a ball tonight. And so are we!’

‘This is no time for frivolity, Doctor,’ said Serena severely.

‘Believe me, this is business,’ said the Doctor. ‘You remember what Talleyrand told us?’

‘Precious little, as I recall.’

And indeed, considering what they had gone through to persuade him to tell it, Talleyrand’s information had been disappointingly thin. He insisted that the Countess had given only shadowy hints of her plans. Only two things had lodged in his memory. The Countess had spoken of Wellington ‘treading his last measure’. And she had finished by saying that, ‘She who pays the piper calls the tune.’

‘You remember I spent ages studying the TARDIS archives – after we left Talleyrand?’ the Doctor said. Well, I kept thinking about that “treading his last measure“ bit. Then I saw that on the eve of the battle, the Duke attends the Duchess of Richmond’s ball.’

‘It still seems an extraordinary thing to do,’ said Serena. ‘Isn’t anyone taking this battle seriously?’

‘It makes a good deal of sense actually. Wellington’s already given all his orders to his troops, there’s nothing more he can do for the moment. Attending the ball will boost public confidence. And all his senior officers will be at the ball as well, close at hand if there’s an emergency.’

‘And why are we going?’

‘Because the Countess has a taste for the dramatic. It’d be very like her to do something spectacular at the very last moment. And what could be more dramatic than killing the Duke in a crowded ballroom?’

‘It would be easier to do it on the battlefield,’ objected Serena.

‘Yes, but much less fun. We must never forget that the Countess’s main aim is to amuse herself. And think how it would demoralise the Allied troops ahead of the battle. Right, finish your coffee, Serena, we’ve a busy day ahead.’

‘What are we going to do?’

‘First of all, have lunch. There are some excellent restaurants in the Rue Boucher, close by. Then we’re going shopping. If we’re going to attend the most fashionable ball of the season we must look our best.’

The Doctor stood in the TARDIS control room, waiting for Serena. He was wearing black breeches, a black evening coat, a frilled white shirt and a white waistcoat. He looked, he thought, rather distinguished.

Serena entered wearing a white satin gown with silver-net drapery. She had been rather alarmed by its flimsiness, but the couturier had assured her it was the latest fashion.

She looked, thought the Doctor, absolutely stunning, and he told her so.

Serena blushed.

The Doctor headed for the door and then stopped suddenly. ‘Botheration!’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘Invitation!’

‘What about it?’

‘We haven’t got one.’

‘Can’t we get one?’

‘Not this late. Apparently they’ve been like gold dust in Brussels for weeks.’

‘Aha!’ said Serena. ‘I think I can help.’

She opened a locker in the TARDIS console and rummaged inside, emerging with a piece of square white card, which she handed to the Doctor.

He looked at it. ‘What’s this?’

‘Whatever you want it to be. Look hard at it and concentrate.’ The Doctor stared hard at the blank white square and concentrated. The card seemed to blur before his eyes – and suddenly he was holding a gold-edged, heavily embossed

invitation card to the Duchess of Richmond's ball.

'Latest Agency technology,' said Serena. 'Psychic paper – gets you in anywhere!'

'Splendid!' The Doctor tucked the square into his frock coat and they set off.

They emerged into yet another park, this time the Parc de Bruxelles. The Doctor reflected that parks seemed to be Serena's preferred TARDIS parking place. Or perhaps the new TARDIS itself preferred them.

They picked up a hansom cab in the Rue Royale.

'Rue de Blanchisserie, please driver,' said the Doctor and handed Serena into the cab.

'Rue de Blanchisserie means Laundry Street you know,' said the Doctor. 'Apparently the Duke has christened the Duchess's mansion the Wash House! He's got a simple schoolboy sense of humour in some ways.'

In fact, of course, the Duchess of Richmond had hired a large and splendid house in the Rue de Blanchisserie and there was a long queue of carriages before the door.

When they finally reached the door, the Doctor handed his square of white card to the magnificently liveried footman, staring at it and concentrating hard. The footman blinked at the card, bowed and waved them through.

Neatly the Doctor twitched the card out of his white-gloved fingers. 'Think I'll hang on to that, actually. Souvenir!' He tucked the card back into his coat. A thing like that could come in useful some day.

The ballroom formed a whole wing of its own on the left of the hall. There were French windows on either side, open to the hot summer night. The scene was brilliantly lit with innumerable candles and there were banks of flowers everywhere, adding their heady scent to the night air. An orchestra played in an alcove at the far end.

The ball was well under way by the time they arrived, and it was packed with all the diplomatic and aristocratic celebrities of Brussels. There were many elegantly gowned beautiful women, but the blues and greens and lilacs of their muslin gowns were put in the shade by the gorgeous uniforms of the soldiers. There were dozens of generals, each with his own elegant aide-de-camp, smartly uniformed cavalry officers, officers from foreign

regiments. There were blue uniforms and green ones and black ones, but the scarlet and gold of the English dominated the scene.

Serena herself created quite a sensation, but since nobody knew who she was, and nobody knew the Doctor either, nobody was able to ask for an introduction – the necessary preliminary for asking her to dance. All around the ballroom hopeful young officers were searching for somebody who knew the new arrivals, but without success.

The Doctor and Serena accepted glasses of champagne from a passing footman and stood watching the colourful swirling throng.

‘I don’t think he’s here yet,’ said the Doctor. ‘Lots of very important people here, but no Duke.’

‘How can you tell who’s important?’

‘They’re the ones with little entourages around them.’

Serena nodded. ‘Who’s that skinny young one in the fancy uniform? He seems to be holding court.’

‘That must be the Prince of Orange, son of the king of the Netherlands. He’s second-in-command of the Army, under the Duke.’

‘Why? He’s only a boy.’

‘Because he’s the Prince of Orange.’

‘What about all the others?’

‘Oh they’re nobody,’ said the Doctor. ‘Dukes and earls and ambassadors and so on. The only one who really counts in Brussels at the moment is the Duke.’

‘What makes you so sure he isn’t here? In a crush like this...’

‘Believe me, when he’s here, you’ll know it.’

A few minutes later, Serena realised the truth of his words. A little party of senior officers in elaborate dress uniforms entered the ballroom. At the centre of them was a well-set-up middle-aged gentleman in a plain evening-dress coat in which glittered a handful of decorations. He had close-cropped brown hair, emphatic eyebrows, cold blue eyes and a distinctive beak of a nose.

It was, Serena recognised, the Duke of Wellington. He had changed little in the ten years since their last meeting. As far as she could tell his rise to immense fame and fortune had made little difference in his manner. The most important man in

Brussels, and indeed in Europe, was cheerful and affable, shaking hands with the various dignitaries presented to him, laughing heartily when somebody cracked a joke.

Yet somehow the elaborately uniformed generals, the high-ranking dignitaries, the whole glittering ballroom were no more than a brilliant backdrop for his dominating personality. People crowded around him, eagerly seeking news and reassurance. Was Boney really on the move? Was the Allied army going to give battle? Were the rumours true?

‘True enough,’ said the Duke. ‘We are off tomorrow.’

The news ran rapidly around the ballroom, producing wild excitement in some, fear in others. Officers began saying farewell to their partners and slipping away to rejoin their regiments. Others, stationed in Brussels itself and with more time in hand, seized their partners and hurled themselves back into the dance.

Mingled with all the fear and the excitement was a sense of relief. The waiting was over at last, the battle was about to begin. The most cheerful and unconcerned person in the room seemed to be the Duke himself. He had already given the orders that would set his army on the move, and for the next few hours there was nothing more he could do. For the moment, at least, he proposed to enjoy himself.

The Doctor turned to Serena. ‘Somehow I’ve got to manage a private word with the Duke.’

‘That won’t be easy. Look at the crowd round him.’

‘All the same, it’s got to be done. I need to warn him he’s in danger.’

‘What makes you so sure?’

‘Because he’s still alive – for the moment. He may well be about to dance – to “tread a measure”, as they say. And this is the eve of Waterloo.’

Chapter Thirty-one

Paying the Piper

Serena looked at the crowd of dignitaries pressing about the Duke.

‘How are you going to get to him?’

The Doctor smiled. ‘I’m not, you are.’

‘How am I going to do that?’

‘Simple. Just march up and present yourself. I’ll be close behind you.’

‘Why should he be willing to talk to me?’

‘Don’t be offended, Serena but...’

‘But what? Well, Doctor?’

The Doctor drew a deep breath. ‘If the Iron Duke has one weakness, it’s a liking for the company of a pretty woman. Believe me, Serena, he’ll want to talk to you.’

The Doctor was right.

The Duke was chatting cheerfully to a serious-looking group of senior officers.

‘Oh, the French Army is a wonderful machine,’ he was saying. ‘But I don’t care for machines. I make my campaigns with string. If something snaps, I tie a few more knots and carry on!’ In response to another general’s anxious question he said testily, ‘Plans? I have no plans. I shall be guided by circumstance.’

The Duke became aware of a stir in the crowd around him. He looked up and saw a vision in white satin and silver net bearing down on him. A tall, aristocratically beautiful young woman with green eyes and golden hair was sweeping through the crowd. Behind her came a little fellow with a mop of dark hair who looked vaguely familiar.

Come to think of it, the girl looked vaguely familiar as well. But the Duke, who had known many beautiful women in his life, couldn’t quite place this one.

Serena came up to him and curtsayed. 'I must apologise for breaking in upon you, Your Grace.'

'Not at all, not at all,' said the Duke enthusiastically. 'Delighted, my dear.'

'I can claim only a brief acquaintance, and that many years ago,' Serena went on. 'Allow me to present my friend Doctor John Smith. We both met your lordship on the same rather momentous occasion.'

The Duke was not best pleased at the introduction of the Doctor into what looked like a very promising encounter. He looked down his beaky nose at him.

'I'm afraid, sir, that I cannot recall...'

'I am well aware that I am not as memorable as Lady Serena,' said the Doctor. 'If I might remind your lordship of his first, and I think only, meeting with the late Lord Nelson.'

The Duke stared hard at him. 'By God it's Smith – John Smith! The fellow who warned us about that dammed courier with his bomb. Saved both our lives! How long ago was it?'

'Ten years,' said the Doctor. 'I come today with another warning. Can I beg a few minutes of your lordship's time?'

The Duke wasn't too pleased – he cast a longing look at Serena – but he was fair-minded too. 'I suppose you've earned it. Dammit, you earned it ten years ago.' He looked round and beckoned a distinguished-looking middle-aged man standing nearby. 'Richmond! Will you lend me your study for a moment?'

'Of course, Your Grace.'

A slender young man in an elegant uniform came hurrying up to them.

'Your Grace!'

The Duke frowned. 'Your Royal Highness?'

'All evening we have been seeking the one man who can introduce us to this mysterious beauty.' He bowed to Serena. 'I might have known it would turn out to be your lordship. If I might beg the favour?'

'Of course,' said the Duke resignedly. 'Your Royal Highness, allow me to present –'

'Lady Serena,' whispered the Doctor.

'Lady Serena, of course,' said the Duke. 'Lady Serena, His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange.'

Serena curtsayed and the Prince bowed over her hand. 'May

I beg you to favour me with the next waltz?’

‘I’m afraid I don’t know the dance, Your Highness.’

‘I will teach you!’

‘Doctor?’ said Serena.

The Doctor nodded and the Prince led her away.

The Duke of Richmond led the Duke of Wellington and the Doctor out of the ballroom and along the corridor to his study, showed them in, and discreetly retired.

‘Well Mr Smith?’ said the Duke. ‘No, it’s Doctor Smith now, is it? One of your disguises I suppose. What have you to say to me?’

‘I have received information that there is to be another attempt on your lordship’s life.’

The Duke gave one of his cracks of laughter. ‘Is that all? Won’t be the first you know! Never come to anything.’

The Doctor sighed. This wasn’t going to be easy. ‘The attempt is to take place this evening, “on the eve of battle”. Most probably at this very ball.’

‘They’ll have to look dammed sharp about it,’ said the Duke. ‘I’ll be away pretty soon.’

‘I do wish you would take this seriously,’ snapped the Doctor. ‘You were pretty sceptical in London remember – if I hadn’t got rid of that parcel you and Lord Nelson would have been scattered all over the Colonial Office!’

The Duke of Wellington wasn’t accustomed to being addressed in such tones. His jutting chin went up and his frosty blue eyes looked down the beaky nose at the incongruous little figure before him. ‘Now see here, Doctor whatever-your-name-is, I have a battle to fight and –’

There was a rap on the door and the Duke of Richmond appeared. Looming behind him was a tall, pleasant-faced soldier.

‘Colonel Grant, bearing dispatches,’ said Richmond.

The officer came into the room, saluted and handed a sealed packet to the Duke, who took it and began ripping it open. ‘This is Colonel Grant, Doctor, in charge of Intelligence,’ he said coldly. ‘I suggest you confide your suspicions to him.’

He began studying the dispatches.

The Doctor and Colonel Grant moved aside and the Doctor repeated his story.

‘The woman behind this planned attempt is determined and

cunning,' he said.

Grant was astonished. 'A woman?'

'She calls herself the Countess, and she's a close associate of Napoleon. Don't underestimate her.'

Grant gave him a sceptical look. 'Nothing concerning such an attempt has reached me. May I enquire as to the source of your information?'

Prince Talleyrand probably wouldn't go down well as the source, thought the Doctor. 'I'm sorry, I'm not at liberty to tell you.'

'The Doctor is a highly mysterious fellow, Grant,' said the Duke. 'On the other hand, it's only fair to warn you that his predictions have proved accurate in the past. Richmond, have you a good map here?'

The Duke of Richmond produced a map from a drawer in the big desk. The Duke unrolled it, pinning it down with an inkwell and a paperweight. He stared down at it broodingly for a long moment.

'Boney has humbugged me, by God,' he said abruptly. 'He has moved faster than I would have thought possible. He has gained twenty-four hours' march on me.'

His tone was perfectly calm and matter-of-fact, almost unconcerned.

'What do you intend doing?' asked the Duke of Richmond anxiously.

'The army is concentrating at Quatre-Bras but we shan't stop him there.' The Duke pointed a bony forefinger at the map. 'I must fight him *here*.' He indicated the countryside just south of the little village of Waterloo.

He rolled up the map and handed it back to Richmond.

'I must be off. I'll make my farewells to the Duchess and be on my way.'

The two Dukes strode off down the corridor towards the ballroom and the Doctor and Colonel Grant followed. The Doctor realised that he had been largely forgotten.

'Please, remember what I told you,' he said urgently. 'This is the moment of greatest danger. See that the Duke is guarded at all times.'

'It is no easy matter to protect the Duke,' said Colonel Grant wryly. 'On the battlefield or off! He is totally fearless and he will

tolerate no restriction upon his movements. But I will do my best, Doctor.'

They entered the ballroom and saw that the dancing had temporarily come to a halt. The room was buzzing with speculation as people tried to work out the meaning of the Duke's abrupt departure, and equally sudden return.

The Doctor saw Serena surrounded by a group of admiring young officers, all begging her for the next waltz. She left them as soon as she saw the Doctor had returned, hurrying across to him.

'Well, Doctor?'

'I've warned him, but I don't think he's paying too much attention. He's got a lot on his mind at the moment of course.'

'Maybe we were wrong and this isn't where the attempt happens.'

'Perhaps. He's leaving any moment now. We must just keep our eyes open.'

The Duke, meanwhile, was saying farewell to a pretty middle-aged woman in a tiara. Or rather, trying to.

'Duke, you cannot go yet,' she pleaded. 'You will spoil my surprise. I have arranged an entertainment far more impressive than that wretched Italian soprano Catalini, who caterwauled at your last ball.'

'I can refuse you nothing, Duchess. Ten minutes then, no more.'

The Duchess raised her hand and a weird wailing sound began outside the main doors to the ballroom. A troop of Highlanders in full regalia marched into the ballroom, white sporrans swinging before their kilts, tartan plaids flung over their shoulders, red-chequered stockings on their brawny legs.

Forgetting their worries the crowd of officers and their ladies greeted them with wild applause. They watched delightedly as the pipers played and the soldiers performed strathspeys, reels and sword dances.

The Doctor stared hard at the colourful gyrating dancers. 'The piper,' he muttered. "'She who pays the piper'...'

Serena sprang forward, pointing. 'Doctor, look!'

There was the crash of a musket shot...

Chapter Thirty-two

Waterloo

As Serena shouted, the Doctor saw the piper training the cunningly disguised weapon at the Duke.

In the same split-second, Serena leaped forwards, her arm raised, pointing.

The musket shot rang out. Beneath Serena's raised arm, blood flowered red on the white satin of her gown and she fell to the ground.

The Doctor knelt beside her and grasped her hand.

The brilliant green eyes opened for a moment and held his own.

'I did something useful at last, didn't I Doctor?'

The eyes closed.

The Doctor straightened up. He heard the Duke's urgent shout. 'Get John Hume. Someone fetch Doctor Hume.'

The Doctor turned and saw that the piper assassin had disappeared beneath a pile of outraged Highlanders. He saw Colonel Grant run over to the struggling group.

'Don't kill him, we need him for questioning.'

As the man was led away, the Doctor caught a glimpse of the handsome, but now somewhat battered, features of Valmont, the Countess's companion.

Satisfied that the prisoner was secured, Colonel Grant returned to the Duke.

'Are you unharmed, your lordship?'

The Duke was looking down at Serena's body. 'Oh yes,' he said. 'I'm untouched – thanks to her.'

A grave-faced, middle-aged man appeared and knelt by Serena. After a moment he rose, shaking his head. 'I am sorry. She is quite dead, killed instantly.'

The Doctor already knew. The heavy musket ball, fired at close range, had passed sideways through Serena's body,

shattering both her hearts. There would be no more lives for her, no regenerations.

Time Lords are not immortal.

Suddenly he became aware of a cloaked figure hurrying towards the door.

He seized Colonel Grant's arm. 'That's the Countess, the woman behind this. Stop her!'

Grant's voice rose in command. 'That woman, hold her.' Two armed sentries by the door grabbed the Countess, and the Doctor and Colonel Grant hurried over to her.

She threw back the hood of her cloak and glared defiance at them.

'Is this her?' demanded Grant.

The Doctor studied the aristocratically beautiful face, the dark hair sparkling with jewels, the incongruous deep blue eyes. 'Oh yes, that's her.' To the Countess he said, 'I thought you wouldn't be able to resist coming to see your triumph. Instead you witnessed a tragedy.'

'A tragedy indeed, Doctor. If the fool couldn't manage to shoot the Duke, he might at least have killed you instead of that useless girl!'

The Doctor stepped closer to her. 'I am very tempted to kill you myself?' he said quietly, and reached for her throat with two strong and sinewy hands.

The Countess recoiled before the fury in his face. She appealed to Grant.

'I am your prisoner. Will you stand by and see me murdered?'

Colonel Grant was shocked. 'Steady on, Doctor. Proper procedures, you know. There'll have to be a trial – then we'll shoot her!'

The Countess managed to recover her poise. 'I'm surprised at you, Doctor,' she said mockingly. 'I thought your race was mild and civilised.'

The Doctor lowered his hands, a little abashed. 'Not always. Once we used to set other races to slaughtering each other for our amusement. It seems the old instincts haven't entirely died out.' He turned to Colonel Grant who had been listening to this exchange in some bafflement. 'Colonel Grant, while this woman lives she is a danger to the Duke and to his victory. She must be

kept under close guard. Not just locked up but watched every moment until the battle has been won.'

'I'll see to it,' promised the Colonel. 'She won't escape us.'

'Don't be too sure of your victory, Doctor,' hissed the Countess.

'Why don't you just give up?' said the Doctor wearily. 'You've lost. It's all over.'

'Oh no it isn't, Doctor. Not quite yet.' She leaned forward and whispered, '*What if it's night after all?*'

At a sign from Colonel Grant the sentries took her away.

'What did she mean?' asked Grant.

The Doctor sighed. 'Who knows? She has a taste for enigmatic taunts.'

Taunts with a purpose and a meaning, he thought, remembering her jibe about paying the piper. Was this another clue? '*What if it's night after all?*'

Serena's body had been lifted onto a stretcher and covered with a white tablecloth. The Duchess of Richmond, who had been supervising the process, came up to him. 'Do you want to see her again, Doctor?'

'Thank you, no. I've said my goodbyes. I know it's an imposition, but –'

'We will take care of everything,' said the Duchess. 'The funeral, too, if you wish. We all owe her a great deal. Are there any other friends, relatives, who should be notified?'

'Unfortunately, they are all too far away. I'll attend the funeral if I can, but in the present circumstances...'

'I understand. What should be engraved on her tombstone?'

'Just her name – Serena.'

'Nothing else?'

'Nothing else.'

The Duchess held out her hand, a small gleaming object in the palm. 'We found this on her, Doctor. It seemed to be her only possession.'

The TARDIS key. 'Thank you,' said the Doctor. 'It was the key to something she treasured. I'll take good care of it.' He took the key and tucked it away. 'Many thanks, Duchess. I'm most grateful for all your kindness.'

His grief was obvious and the Duchess looked sympathetically at him. 'Was she a close friend – or a relative?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Neither. She was a colleague – a relatively recent acquaintance. But I'd grown very fond of her. Thank you again.' He bowed and turned away.

'Doctor!' called a commanding voice. He turned and saw the Duke of Wellington standing nearby with Colonel Grant. He went over to them.

The Duke cleared his throat, his voice unexpectedly diffident. 'What can I say, Doctor? For the second time, I owe you my life.'

'Not me,' said the Doctor, his voice bleak.

'You tried to warn me at least, though I failed to listen. And your young friend sacrificed her life to save me.'

'It was a noble act,' said Colonel Grant.

'She had a strong sense of duty,' said the Doctor.

'If there is anything I can do to assist you, Doctor,' said the Duke. 'Anything at all...'

'There is one thing.'

'Name it.'

'I am by no means convinced that the danger is over. Something the Countess said makes me fear she may have laid further plots before her capture. If I could accompany you, on the battlefield...'

The Duke laughed. 'A ringside seat, eh, Doctor? Can you ride?'

'After a fashion.'

'Find the Doctor a good patient horse, Grant. We leave at eight tomorrow morning, from my headquarters in the Rue Royale. Now, I'm off for a few hours' sleep.' He strode briskly away.

Grant made to follow him but the Doctor put a hand on his arm. 'You'll be careful?'

'From now and for the foreseeable future the Duke will be surrounded by an army of soldiers who would gladly die for him. Until tomorrow, then, Doctor.' He paused. 'Do you need a bed for the night? I can find you a billet.'

'Thank you, but no. I don't think I'll sleep much tonight.'

'I don't think any of us will,' said Colonel Grant. 'Except for the Duke, of course. Nothing keeps him awake.'

He hurried away.

The Doctor joined the throng of departing guests and made

his way into the streets.

Although it was almost dawn, the streets of Brussels were as busy as if it were midday. The air was full of drumbeats, and soldiers spilled out of the houses where they were billeted, obeying the summons to war, slinging on their knapsacks and buttoning their greatcoats as they ran.

The Place Royale was crowded with gun carriages, supply wagons and milling crowds of soldiers gradually forming into their regiments and marching away. The Doctor wandered on as if in a trance, drifting gradually towards the Parc de Bruxelles.

He reached the little pavilion that concealed the TARDIS and his fingers touched the key in his pocket. He could use it, return to Gallifrey and report Serena's death and the accomplishment of his mission. But he wasn't absolutely sure that his mission really was accomplished. If Napoleon – and the Countess – won after all, Serena would have died for nothing.

Should he go inside the TARDIS for food and sleep? He wanted neither. He sat on the stone bench by the pavilion until daylight, and then began walking towards the Duke's headquarters.

By eight o'clock that morning Brussels was empty. One after the other, the regiments had marched away; infantry, cavalry and artillery.

At eight o'clock precisely a little cavalcade set off from the Duke of Wellington's HQ in the Rue Royale. In the lead was the Duke himself, riding Copenhagen, the powerful chestnut that had carried him through several campaigns. Copenhagen had an ugly temper, but he was the reverse of gun-shy. He actually seemed to enjoy the sounds of battle.

The Duke wore a blue frock coat, a short blue cloak, white breeches and tasselled riding boots. His neat plain attire formed a marked contrast to the colourful scarlet uniforms of his aides, and the positively gorgeous uniforms of the rest of his entourage, representatives of the corps diplomatique of Spain, Austria, Prussia and the Netherlands.

In the rear of the procession, an inconspicuous little man with a mop of untidy black hair clung desperately to the saddle of a plump and placid grey mare. Very reluctantly, the Doctor was riding off to battle.

It was the next day and the Emperor Napoleon was at breakfast in the farmhouse at Le Caillou, his temporary headquarters. He was in a mood of overweening confidence – a confidence by no means shared by his marshals. They were all experienced commanders, with many battles behind them. Moreover, many of them had been soundly defeated by Wellington during the Peninsular War.

‘Because you have been beaten by Wellington, you consider him a great general,’ Napoleon told Marshal Soult. ‘I tell you now, Wellington is a bad general, and the English are bad troops. The Countess has often told me this, and I believe her.’

Marshal Soult did not share the Countess’s opinions. ‘The English infantry are excellent,’ he growled. ‘Face to face, they are the very devil.’

Napoleon would not listen. ‘You know my plan, and it is going well. Already I have attacked the Prussians, driving them back and separating them from the rest of the Allied forces. Wellington was forced to retreat, so as not to lose contact with them. Now we shall smash Wellington’s forces by direct frontal assault. It will be over by lunchtime.’

Chapter Thirty-three

The Ruse

But it wasn't. Many hours later, near the end of a very long day, the Doctor was standing on the ridge at Waterloo, with the little group around the Duke of Wellington. The battle still raged on all around them. It seemed to have been going on forever, and the Doctor was wondering how much more he could take.

It had been an exhausting two days, and even the Doctor's Time Lord resilience was beginning to flag. He had ridden with the Duke to Quatre Bras and discovered that, as Wellington had foreseen, the Prussians had been forced to retreat under Napoleon's attack. Wellington too had been attacked, and had made his own planned retreat to Waterloo.

There they had spent the night at a tiny inn. It had been a night of torrential rain. 'Wellington weather' the soldiers called it. Wellington had stationed much of the army behind the slope of the long ridge that crossed the Brussels road. Only the front rank were visible to the advancing enemy.

At nine o'clock the first of the enemy troops started to appear, rank upon rank of cavalry and infantry. At eleven o'clock the French cannonade began, longer and heavier than anyone had ever known. Some of Wellington's troops were sheltered by the ridge but elsewhere men and horses died beneath the hail of fire.

Then the French infantry charged, and the deadly musket fire of the English muskets drove them back. Then came the cavalry. The British formed squares, each square a little fortress of muskets and bayonets on all sides. The French cavalry surged around them but could not break them.

So it went on all day: cannon fire, infantry attacks and cavalry charges from the French; counter-fire, counterattacks and countercharges from the Allies. On both sides men and horses died in their thousands. As far as the eye could see, the

ground was strewn with dead and wounded.

The Doctor was sick of the carnage and wished desperately to be elsewhere. What could he hope to achieve? It seemed ridiculous to think that he could have any effect on this scene of mass slaughter.

Wellington was as imperturbable as ever, riding up and down the line and rallying his troops. He seemed totally immune to either worry or fatigue. The mere sight of his blue coat and hook nose seemed to give the men courage.

The only anxiety the Duke showed was in an occasional enquiry as to the arrival of the Prussian troops.

‘No sign of them as yet,’ reported an aide. ‘Do you think they’ll come, my lord?’

‘General Blucher was forced to retreat, but the bulk of his forces are intact,’ said the Duke confidently. ‘He will come to my aid as soon as he can.’

The Doctor realised that both sides, attackers and defenders, were almost exhausted, each waiting desperately for the other to collapse.

The Duke was depending upon General Blucher and his Prussians to tip the balance in his favour. He looked up at the sky. ‘Well, it’s night or Bliicher, gentlemen,’ the Duke said.

The Doctor swung round. ‘*Night or Blucher...*’ He remembered the Countess’s final words. ‘*What if it’s night, Doctor?*’

Had she found some way to prevent the Prussians from coming? But how could she, she was still a prisoner? He saw Colonel Grant ride up to the group, dismount and talk urgently to the Duke.

He hurried over to them. ‘Colonel Grant, is the Countess still your prisoner?’

‘I have just received a report from Brussels. She escaped, several hours ago.’

‘I asked for her to be placed under continual guard.’

‘Believe me, she was. The soldier guarding her is facing court martial. He told some ridiculous story about her fading away before his eyes.’

‘I underestimated her powers,’ said the Doctor. ‘Don’t court-martial your soldier, Colonel, the poor fellow was telling the truth! I take it the would-be assassin has disappeared too?’

Before Grant could reply, the Doctor turned to the Duke.

‘Am I right in thinking that the arrival of the Prussians is a matter of some urgency?’

Wellington nodded. ‘At this stage, their presence would be more than welcome.’

‘Then may I urge you to send the Prussian commander a message immediately, urging him to hurry. I fear your previous orders may have been tampered with, perhaps even cancelled.’

‘Well, Grant?’ said Wellington.

‘I doubt if it’s possible, my lord. The French are between us and the Prussians at every point. It would take days for a man to ride round them, even if he survived.’

Wellington frowned. ‘I don’t expect negative talk from you, Grant.’

‘Oh, I can find you a volunteer, my lord. I’ll even go myself. But it’s a forlorn hope. It’d take Boney himself to pass through French lines.’

‘Wait a minute,’ said the Doctor. ‘Colonel Grant, you may just have found the answer.’

‘I don’t follow you.’

‘Well, look at me!’ said the Doctor. ‘Who do you see?’

He stuck one hand inside his coat, and frowned at them under his mop of hair.

It took a moment for Colonel Grant to realise what he meant. ‘You’d never do it,’ said Grant. ‘Oh, there’s a resemblance, but it’s only very slight.’

‘So how close does the average French infantryman ever get to his Emperor? He sees him somewhere in the distance, reviewing a parade or waving to the crowds.’

‘You might strike someone who happens to know him really well.’

‘And I might not! It’s worth a try, isn’t it?’ said the Doctor. ‘Change the hair style a bit, get me one of those silly hats he wears and a nice long black cloak. With night falling, under cover of the approaching darkness, under fire...’

The Duke of Wellington gave him a frosty glare. ‘Do I understand that you are proposing to impersonate Napoleon Bonaparte?’

‘Why not?’

‘Because it’s suicide.’

‘Better than mass murder, isn’t it?’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m sick

of standing here uselessly watching you humans slaughter each other. If the Prussians arrive, will it bring this bloody battle to an end?’

‘Yes,’ said the Duke instantly. ‘The French are very near to cracking.’ He lowered his voice. ‘To speak plainly, so are we. The arrival of the Prussians will tip the balance in our favour.’

‘Then I’ll do it,’ said the Doctor. ‘Be good enough to write the Prussian general an urgent dispatch. Colonel Grant, I rely on your assistance in the transformation.’

‘Come this way, Doctor.’

The Duke snapped his fingers and an aide produced paper, pen and ink from a bulky satchel, then turned his back so that the Duke could use it as a desk. Hurriedly the Duke began to write.

He finished the brief dispatch, handed it to the aide, and returned his attention to the battle.

Some time later he heard movement behind him and turned. Napoleon was striding towards him through the gloom. Behind the Emperor strode a tall French officer, a lieutenant of the cuirassiers.

The Doctor was wrapped in a voluminous black cloak, a cocked hat jammed sideways on his head in the characteristic Napoleonic style.

The Duke peered at the Doctor. ‘By God, sir, you might just pull it off!’ He looked hard at the cuirassier and saw to his amazement that it was Colonel Grant. ‘What the devil do you think you’re doing, sir?’

‘The Emperor must have an escort, sir,’ said Grant cheerfully. ‘By rights he should have a troop of cavalry, but even just one cuirassier lieutenant will help.’

‘Where did you get the uniform?’

‘Dead French cuirassier, sir, fell just inside our lines. I’ve got his horse as well.’

‘And the hat?’

‘I bought it off a Belgian officer in Brussels. Souvenir. He swore it had been worn by Boney himself. Apparently he’s got hundreds of them – Boney, I mean.’

‘You realise it’s spying,’ said the Duke abruptly. ‘If you’re captured in French uniform behind their lines you’ll be shot out of hand. They’ll probably shoot the Doctor for sheer

impudence.’

Colonel Grant was unperturbed. ‘They’ve been trying to shoot me all day, sir.’

The Duke chuckled. ‘True enough.’ He snapped his fingers and the aide produced the dispatch. ‘Here’s your message, Doctor. Get it to General Blucher if you can. You can’t miss him. Fat old fellow with a bushy moustache.’ He handed the dispatch to Grant. ‘Oh, and get the Doctor a good horse, Grant. The Emperor can’t be seen riding that fat old mare. Boney favours a white charger, I believe. Get the Doctor the best one you can find. Goodbye, gentlemen, and good luck. And pray God that our own troops don’t shoot you before you reach the French lines!’

He turned and gazed down into the valley below, where the battle raged on. French infantry supported by cavalry was attacking the English squares. The squares were fewer now and more ragged, but still they held. From both sides of the lines, batteries of cannon roared and thundered.

‘Dammed hard pounding, gentlemen,’ said the Duke. ‘We shall see who can pound the longest!’ He turned to an aide and began scribbling a note. ‘Tell Lambert to bring his brigade forward in support...’ Soon he was issuing a stream of orders, the Doctor and Grant forgotten.

Chapter Thirty-four

The Impostor

The Doctor and Colonel Grant were riding down the side of the valley towards a little wood. The Doctor was mounted on a spirited white charger, which he was just about managing to control. Grant wore a cloak over his cuirassier uniform and the Doctor had tucked his bicorn hat inside his coat. As Wellington had pointed out, there was no point in being captured, or even shot by their own side.

‘Boissy Wood,’ shouted the Colonel. ‘It lies right across our route. Temporarily in French hands. We’d better put on the fancy dress!’

He took off his cloak and folded it away in a saddlebag and the Doctor resumed his Napoleonic hat. The Doctor in the lead, they trotted down the little path that led into the shadowy wood.

It was dark and gloomy between the trees and they hadn’t penetrated far into the wood before they were challenged. As they rode into a little clearing, a huge, blue-coated, heavily moustached French infantry sergeant loomed up before them, musket trained on the Doctor.

‘Halt! Who goes there? Answer or we fire!’

There was a rustle of movement, and more soldiers appeared around the edge of the clearing. They were surrounded.

The Doctor rose in his stirrups. ‘Pigs!’ he shouted. ‘Is this how you receive your Emperor? Let he that has a heart to kill his Emperor shoot!’

It was the appeal Napoleon had used on his escape from Elba. Now, as then, it worked like a charm.

‘Present arms!’ roared the sergeant, and the threatening muskets whirled in salute. The sergeant came to attention and saluted. ‘Your pardon, my Emperor. Nobody expected to see you here, so far from headquarters – and with so small an escort...’

'I was making a tour of the front line,' snapped the Doctor. 'We were ambushed by English cavalry in a sudden sortie. Only this brave lieutenant here managed to stay with me. We were lucky to escape.'

'All France was lucky, my Emperor,' said the sergeant. 'We will escort you back to HQ.'

'No, no,' said the Doctor hurriedly. 'That is not my destination. I seek the road to Waivre.'

'Waivre? But that is the direction of the Prussians.'

Was there a hint of suspicion in the big sergeant's voice?

'Do you dare to question the decisions of your Emperor?' screamed the Doctor. 'If my orders have been obeyed, Waivre is also the direction of a brigade of my troops. I mean to give those damned Prussians a touch of cold steel.'

'Your pardon, my Emperor,' said the sergeant hurriedly. 'The road to Waivre it shall be. Come on lads, let us escort our Emperor upon his way.'

The infantrymen gathered around them, and amidst cries of 'Make way for the Emperor!' they were escorted to a crossroads just outside the wood.

'There lies the road to Waivre, my Emperor,' said the sergeant, pointing. 'Give the Prussians a bloody nose for us!'

'My thanks, brave fellows,' said the Doctor. 'You have served your country well.'

To the cheers of the soldiers, the Doctor and Grant galloped away.

'You did well there, Doctor,' called Grant when they'd covered a safe distance. 'For a moment I thought you'd overdone it.'

'It's the advantage of being a dictator,' replied the Doctor. He had been saddened by the need to trick the French soldiers – perhaps even seal their fate. But for the sake of so many more people in the future it simply had to be done. 'In an authoritarian society,' he told Grant, 'people obey the voice of authority.'

They rode on their way.

It was some time later and the Doctor was beginning to feel saddle-sore, when they saw a little village in the distance, just beyond a crossroads. Clustered around the village, and covering the fields beyond, were hordes of black-uniformed soldiers.

‘It’s the Prussians!’ said Grant in astonishment. ‘They’re much nearer than I thought. But what are they sitting there for when they ought to be advancing on Waterloo?’

The Doctor had his suspicions. In a way this was what he had expected. ‘Let’s find out,’ he said.

They rode towards the village and were halted almost immediately by a guard picket of Prussian foot soldiers. ‘Who goes there?’

Adjusting his hat the Doctor stared down at them. ‘Don’t you know who I am?’

The sentry stared up at him in awe. ‘No...It can’t be!’

The lieutenant in charge of the picket came hurrying up. He looked at the Doctor in equal amazement. ‘Sir, what are you doing here?’ A wild thought struck him. ‘Have you come to surrender?’

‘Not to an officer of your rank,’ said the Doctor haughtily. ‘Take me to General Blucher.’

‘This way, sir. He’s in the village.’ They dismounted and one of the soldiers took their horses. The lieutenant led them into the village and up to the door of what was obviously the village inn.

He stopped at the door and hesitated. ‘You will please to make allowances for the General, sir. He is no longer young, and he has recently been wounded. And, of course, he is not expecting so distinguished a visitor.’

He opened the door to reveal a primitive-looking bar. Stretched out on a pallet on the floor was a tubby, be-whiskered, white-haired old gentleman. At the sight of the Doctor he bounded energetically to his feet.

‘*Mein Gott*, are we being invaded? Or has he come to surrender?’

‘So he says, my General,’ said the young lieutenant.

General Blucher marched up to the Doctor. As he came closer, the Doctor noticed that his face was covered in bruises, and that he was giving off a powerful reek, a mixture of embrocation, garlic and rum. He peered into the Doctor’s face.

‘This man is not Napoleon,’ he announced. ‘I have seen the Emperor many times and this is not the man. It takes more than a hat to make an emperor.’

The Doctor took off the hat and tossed it on the bar. ‘Quite

right, General. I am not Napoleon – any more than this man is a French cuirassier.’

Blucher stared at the tall cuirassier. ‘Colonel Grant! What is going on here?’

‘We used these disguises as a means to reach you,’ said the Doctor. ‘To bring you an urgent dispatch from the Duke of Wellington. He needs your support.’

Grant handed over the message and Blucher studied it.

‘But this is absurd. The Duke asks me to take the field immediately. That was my original plan. When I reached this point I received a dispatch from the Duke. I was to hold my position and await further orders. The Duke was most emphatic. On no account was my army to move until he had decided where we were most needed.’

‘May I see this dispatch sir?’ asked Grant.

Blucher rummaged in some papers on the bar and produced the dispatch.

Grant studied it. ‘A forgery,’ he announced. ‘An excellent forgery, but still a forgery. I can assure you my dispatch is genuine, General. I had it from the Duke’s own hand.’

‘Who brought the forged dispatch?’ asked the Doctor.

Blucher shrugged. ‘A young Guards officer. Thin, young fellow, very elegant. One of the Duke’s aides – or so I believed. I did not know him personally.’ Blucher laughed. ‘He had a woman with him. I thought how typical of the Guards to bring their mistresses to battle.’

‘What did she look like?’ asked the Doctor, though he felt he already knew the answer.

‘Very beautiful. She had dark hair and blue eyes, most unusual.’

‘The Countess!’ growled Grant. ‘A dangerous French spy. The man is her accomplice. Tried to assassinate the Duke at the Duchess of Richmond’s ball.’

‘We’re wasting time,’ said the Doctor. ‘Can you carry out the Duke’s orders, General Blucher?’

‘Of course, and very quickly, even in my condition. You see the state of me? Knocked off my horse and ridden over by cavalry – *my own* cavalry!’

‘We must get back to the Duke and give him the good news,’ said Grant.

As they turned to the door, the Doctor wondered if the fake dispatches were the whole of the Countess's plan. He was soon to have his answer.

A Prussian captain rushed into the bar and saluted. 'Large body of French troops approaching, sir. Infantry and cavalry.'

Blucher snatched up a telescope and ran to the door. He raised the telescope and studied the troop movements on the distant hills. Snapping the telescope shut he said, 'Here we have a pretty problem, my friends. I am very willing to carry out the Duke's orders. But how can I take the field at Waterloo if I am fighting a running battle with those gentlemen yonder?'

Chapter Thirty-five

Duel

So that was the Countess's plan, thought the Doctor. The way that Napoleon could win at Waterloo, even against Wellington. The Prussians lured into a trap, and severely mauled, prevented from bringing Wellington their vital last-minute support, the support that would tip the balance in the French favour. The battle over, the victorious Napoleon would then send his Grand Army to finally annihilate the Prussians.

His eye fell on the bicorn hat on the bar and he picked it up.

'Then we'll just have to ask our French friends to go away, won't we?' He settled the bicorn on his head and thrust a hand inside his jacket. 'And we'll just have to hope that a hat makes an emperor after all!'

Grant looked hard at him. 'Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?'

'Why not? It worked before.'

'It worked against a confused sergeant in a dark wood. Suppose that force is commanded by one of Napoleon's marshals? Someone who's fought beside him for twenty years?'

'It won't be,' said the Doctor, sounding more confident than he felt. 'All his marshals are needed at Waterloo. That force will be commanded by someone relatively junior. Someone who saw Napoleon twice at reviews, and met him once at a reception.'

'You'd better be right, Doctor,' said Grant. 'General Blucher, if the French force moves in to the attack, may I suggest that you send a rearguard of your best men to hold them back and do your damndest to get the rest to Waterloo. If on the other hand they start to retreat...'

'Then you'll know a miracle has happened,' said the Doctor. 'Shall we go, Colonel?'

General Didier, commander of the special French expeditionary

force, was standing, surrounded by his officers, on a hill overlooking the Prussian position. The General was in an irritable and nervous state. Newly promoted, this was his first major command. Its importance had been impressed upon him and he was desperately anxious to do the right thing.

Moreover he was suffering from confusing and contradictory orders. After a long period of inactivity, he had received orders to set off for Waterloo and support the Grand Army. Almost immediately these orders had been countermanded, by a dispatch borne by one of the Emperor's aides. He was to proceed to this crossroads and engage with a waiting force of Prussians. He was to prevent their reaching Waterloo at any cost.

At the sight of the Prussians, Didier had halted his brigade and summoned his staff officers to a conference. Unlike the Duke of Wellington, he was fond of conferences. Should they launch a full-frontal attack? Should they try to outflank the enemy with part of their forces and launch an attack on two fronts? Should they circle the Prussians completely and block the road to Waterloo?

Each of these propositions had supporters on his staff, and a fierce debate was raging. Suddenly there was a burst of cheering from the soldiers around the hill.

A cry went up. 'The Emperor! The Emperor comes! Long live the Emperor.'

They turned and saw a shockingly familiar figure – white charger, long black cloak, bicorn hat worn sideways – galloping up the hill towards them, attended by a single cuirassier lieutenant.

The Emperor rode his horse into their midst and dismounted, tossing his reins to the nearest officer. His aide did the same.

The Emperor glared around the terrified little circle. 'What do you think you are doing here?' he said harshly.

General Didier stepped forward. 'Obeying your orders, my Emperor.'

'Fool!' screamed the Emperor. 'My orders were that you should hold your position in reserve until I sent for you.'

'But those orders were countermanded by your special aide, Lieutenant Valmont. Here he comes now!'

An elegant young officer was striding towards their little group. He had classically handsome features, marred by a hint of petulance and romantically curling black hair.

It was indeed Valmont – the Countess’s companion and aide. The one who had killed Serena. It was bound to be him, thought the Doctor. The Countess would be with Napoleon at this crucial moment, and she had delegated this part of her plan to Valmont.

Attack, he decided, was his best – and probably his only – form of defence.

‘That man is not my aide,’ he announced. ‘He is an impostor and the dispatch he brought you was forged.’

Valmont’s counterattack was immediate. ‘This man is not the Emperor! He is the impostor! He is an English spy known as the Doctor.’ There was a gasp of horror from his audience. He turned to General Didier. ‘Surely there are soldiers here who know the Emperor well, who served with him in Egypt or in Russia? Send for them! When they denounce this impostor – as they will – you can shoot him as a spy!’

It was Grant who saved the day. He stepped forward and slapped Valmont backhanded across the mouth. ‘You insult my Emperor!’ Valmont staggered back, mouth bleeding. ‘You demand satisfaction, no doubt?’

Valmont looked badly shaken, but at least he knew the form.

‘Very well, sir. My seconds will call upon you in due course.’

‘No sir,’ said Grant instantly. ‘That would not be fair.’

‘Not fair? What do you mean, sir?’

‘We are at war, about to go into battle. I might not survive, then you would never get the satisfaction you deserve.’

‘I am prepared to accept the risk.’

‘But I am not. I have insulted you, indeed I have struck you. You shall have your satisfaction, here and now.’

Grant went to his horse and took a brace of pistols from their saddle holsters.

‘These weapons are evenly matched, both primed and loaded.’ He held out the weapons to Valmont. ‘Choose!’

Grant was reversing the proper etiquette for a duel, thought the Doctor. It was for the injured party to demand satisfaction. He was forcing the pace, determined to kill Valmont. The Doctor wondered for a moment if he ought to intervene. In his

role as Emperor, he could forbid the duel.

But this was Serena's killer. With surprising and worrying ease, the Doctor crushed his conscience.

Instead it was General Didier who intervened. 'But this cannot be,' he said fussily. 'There must be seconds, they must strive to affect a reconciliation. A meeting ground must be mutually agreed...'

'With respect, General, there is no time. This is war.'

A lively debate broke out amongst Didier's staff officers. The consensus seemed to be that the duel should go ahead.

'Let them fight! This is war!'

Once again Grant held out the pistols to Valmont. 'Choose!'

There was no way Valmont could refuse to fight, not and maintain his role as an officer and a gentleman. He took one of the pistols.

'Twenty paces suit you?' said Grant. He turned to Didier. 'I know you believe this is all very irregular, sir, but this is war and great issues are at stake. Will you do the honours, sir?'

General Didier cleared his throat. 'You will take your positions, gentlemen.' The two men took ten paces each and then turned to face each other as spectators hurriedly moved out of the line of fire. 'You may cock your weapons, gentlemen.'

Two loud clicks resounded through the sudden silence.

Didier produced a handkerchief from his sleeve and held it high. 'When the handkerchief falls, gentlemen, you may fire. Take aim!'

Both men levelled their weapons. There was another moment of tense silence.

'One... two... three!'

Valmont fired in panic the second the handkerchief fell, and the cuirassier casquette flew from Grant's head.

Grant stood like a statue, pistol levelled.

Valmont saw Grant's cold blue eyes focused on him over the pistol barrel and knew that Grant would kill him. Faced with certain death his nerve cracked and he went – elsewhere.

The spectators gasped and gaped in amazement as one of the duellists faded away into nothingness before their eyes.

Chapter Thirty-six

Victory

The Doctor was quick to turn the astonishing event to his advantage.

‘I don’t know what we’ve just seen gentlemen but that certainly wasn’t one of my aides. They are talented young men, but their talents do not include magic!’

‘But who was he?’ stammered Didier. ‘What was he?’

‘An apparition, a phantom, an evil spirit – who knows?’ said the Doctor dismissively. ‘I have long been aware that my enemies were using black magic against me. I have wasted enough time here – my horse!’

An officer led up his white charger and the Doctor climbed on board. Grant collected his casquette and Valmont’s abandoned pistol and remounted as well.

From his superior position on horseback, the Doctor looked down on the thoroughly demoralised Didier. ‘You have allowed yourself to be deceived by false information and by disobeying my orders, you have put my victory in this battle at risk.’

General Didier wrung his hands in anguish. ‘I am sorry, Your Majesty, I apologise most humbly. But how was I to know? I will resign my commission.’

‘No, no,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. He needed Didier exactly where he was. In kinder tones he said, ‘You were misled by black magic. No blame attaches to you.’

‘Your Majesty is most generous.’

‘But mark my orders well. You will return to your original position, and await my commands. You will not engage the Prussian troops, they are of no significance. Do you understand?’

‘I understand, Your Majesty.’

‘Any contrary instructions you may receive, no matter who from, will be false and must be ignored. Do you understand me?’

‘I hear and obey, my Emperor.’

That was the best he could do, decided the Doctor. Even Didier ought to be able to obey an order to do nothing.

‘Good.’ The Doctor rode away down the hill, Grant behind him. Cheers and cries of ‘Long live the Emperor!’ accompanied their departure.

When they were clear of the French troops Grant called, ‘You did it again Doctor! What the devil happened back there? I’ve had duelling opponents run before now, but that’s the first one who’s vanished!’

‘Don’t ask,’ said the Doctor. ‘All that matters is that the Prussians will soon be on the move again. Let’s get back and give the Duke the good news.’

Surrounded by a little group of his staff officers, General Blucher stood at the inn door with his telescope and watched the French troops fade away into the distance.

‘It seems that the miracle has occurred after all,’ he said. ‘Forwards! Forwards to Waterloo! Let us pray that we are not too late.’

The Duke was moving up and down the line all too aware of the mounting crisis. Napoleon’s artillery were still bombarding the ridge and the defensive squares of infantrymen were smaller – and fewer. But they still held.

‘My lord, we have been dreadfully cut up,’ reported one of his commanders. ‘Can you not relieve us for a little while?’

‘Impossible. You must hold your ground till the last man.’

His centre was crumbling and his second-line reserves were raw troops who could not be relied upon.

‘Night or the Prussians must come,’ he said – and heard Grant’s voice behind him.

‘My lord, they are here. Their advance guard is already engaging the enemy.’

The Duke turned and saw Grant, back in his own uniform, with the Doctor beside him.

Smoke drifted over the battlefield and through it the setting sun glowed blood-red.

‘You are sure?’ demanded the Duke.

‘We found them quite quickly, my lord. They were much closer than we had even hoped. They were already on the march,

but halted by forged orders. We delivered your dispatch and they moved immediately.'

'Any French in the area?'

'Quite a large force, my lord, sent to attack the Prussians.'

'Did they engage? If the Prussians are attacked their main force may arrive too late.'

'There was no attack, my lord.'

'Why not?'

'The Doctor, or rather the Emperor, told them to go away.'

'You have done me great service, Doctor,' said the Duke. 'I will thank you when there is time. For now, the moment of crisis approaches.'

He turned his attention back to the battle

From his command post on a high bank Napoleon studied the same scene. He glanced at the hills to the right and noticed that they had turned suddenly dark. The darkness was the black uniforms of the advancing Prussians.

He turned to the beautiful dark-haired woman at his side. 'You said they would never come. You have failed me.'

Her blue eyes flashed with anger but she made no reply. Napoleon turned away, rejecting her. The next time he looked in her direction she had disappeared.

He forgot her, his mind racing. There was one card left to play – his finest troops, the Imperial Guard. They had never been beaten, never retreated. Until now he had held them back from the battle. Now he must gamble everything on their success.

The Doctor stood close to Wellington in the centre of the line. All around the Foot Guards lay in concealment, ordered by Wellington to lie down.

The Imperial Guard advanced in two columns. They wore long blue coats and bearskin helmets and they all seemed to be giants. British cannon opened up, cutting swathes through their ranks. Men fell and died. The Guard reformed and came on.

The Duke watched impassively until they had come within sixty yards. Then his voice rang out. 'Stand up, Guards!' Fifteen thousand men seemed to spring out of the ground before the astonished French.

‘Make ready! Fire!’

The speed and accuracy of their musketry was the British Army’s greatest asset. The long lines of muskets mowed down the enemy in a stream of bullets. Three hundred of the Imperial Guard fell at the first volley. More muskets opened up on their right flank and more men fell.

For the first time in its history the Guard fell back. ‘Now’s your time,’ called the Duke. ‘Charge!’

The Foot Guard charged with their bayonets, driving the enemy before them.

The horrifying news spread through the French army. ‘The Guard retreats!’

This was the decisive moment. The Duke rose in his stirrups and took off his hat, waving it three times towards the French, in the signal for ‘General advance’. There was a roar of enthusiasm from the entire army. Light cavalry in the lead, the British regiments swooped down on the plain, driving the fleeing enemy before them.

The Doctor turned away. The battle was as good as over. Wellington and his allies had won, and human history, bloody and tragic as the day had been, was still on its allotted course.

And Serena was dead.

Finding his horse, the fat and comfortable old mare, the Doctor set off for Brussels.

The next day the Doctor stood by a freshly dug grave in a little private cemetery.

The Duchess of Richmond was at his side and they were looking down at a plain white marble headstone upon which was carved one word: *SERENA*.

‘You’re sure that’s the only inscription you want?’ asked the Duchess. ‘No dates, no text, no loving memory. No record of her achievement, her sacrifice?’

‘I’m sure.’

‘And you’ll inform her family and friends?’

‘I shall set off for her...homeland at once.’

‘You’re leaving Brussels?’

‘Almost immediately.’

‘Have you seen the Duke, since the battle? He tells me you did him a great service.’

The Doctor smiled. 'The Duke has many calls on his time. I don't want to impose upon him.'

They heard the sound of hoof-beats and turned to see two horsemen riding up to the cemetery gate. One was the Duke himself, mounted on Copenhagen, the other was Colonel Grant. The riders dismounted, tethering their horses, and came towards them. The Duchess went to greet them, and tactfully took her leave.

The Duke walked towards the Doctor, limping a little. 'Were you hurt in the battle?' asked the Doctor.

'Not precisely in the battle,' said the Duke. 'You know I rode Copenhagen all day? Well, when the battle was over, we were both weary. I dismounted and gave Copenhagen a pat to show my gratitude. He kicked me!' The Duke of Wellington gave one of his great cracks of laughter. He thought the story was greatly to Copenhagen's credit.

The Doctor said, 'I must congratulate you on your victory, my lord.'

'Oh do not congratulate me,' said the Duke quickly. 'I have lost so many of my friends. And my poor soldiers...I have no feeling for the advantages we have gained.'

'It was a great victory, all the same. And it was your victory, my lord.'

'It was a damned close-run thing, Doctor,' said Wellington frankly. 'I do not think it would have done if I had not been there.' He looked at Serena's headstone. 'And I do not forget that I should not have been there, had it not been for your friend and her sacrifice. Nor might I have been victorious had it not been for your extraordinary feat in securing the arrival of the Prussians. Colonel Grant has given me a full account of your achievements. Will you not accept some reward, Doctor? A decoration, perhaps? I can ask for a knighthood?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'My reward lies in knowing that Bonaparte is defeated, and that your lordship will enjoy many more years of service to his country.'

'Not on the battlefield,' said the Duke. 'I have fought my last battle, Doctor. It is a bad thing to be always fighting.'

'Oh, I quite agree,' said the Doctor.

Wellington brooded for a moment. 'Thank God I do not know what it is to lose a battle. But next to a battle lost, the

greatest misery is a battle gained. I am quite overcome by the losses we have sustained.'

To the Doctor's surprise he saw tears in the Duke's eyes. Perhaps it had all been worthwhile, he thought. It was quite clear the Duke meant what he said. Unlike Napoleon, this man was no glory hunter, no lover of war. The long struggle with Napoleon had been a necessary task. Now it was over and he was glad of it. No war world would follow his victory.

The Duke said gruffly, 'Well, I must be on my way, there is much to be done still. We haven't caught that rogue Napoleon yet, but he'll turn up. Goodbye, Doctor.' He paused, then said awkwardly, 'I shall be fully occupied here on the Continent for some time. But if you should happen to be in London, later, in calmer times, I should be most happy to see you, Doctor.' With that, he turned and strode back to his horse.

Colonel Grant, who had been hovering discreetly in the background, came up and shook hands. 'Goodbye, Doctor. And thank you.'

'I walked off with your Napoleon hat. Shall I send it to you?'

'Keep it as a souvenir, Doctor. You've earned it!'

He went over to join the Duke and they rode off.

The Doctor stood for a moment longer, looking at Serena's grave.

'Goodbye,' he said softly, and turned and walked away.

He walked slowly through a jubilant and rejoicing Brussels and came at last to the Parc de Bruxelles and the little ornamental pavilion that was really a TARDIS. He was fishing for the key when a familiar voice said, 'Surely you weren't going to leave without saying goodbye, Doctor?'

A woman was walking down the path towards him. She was tall and graceful and she wore a long, hooded black cloak. It was the Countess.

'I didn't much want to see you again,' said the Doctor. 'And I certainly didn't think you'd want to see me.'

'You give me no credit for sporting spirit, Doctor. The Game is over, and you have won. The least I can do is jump over the net and congratulate you.'

'It was never a game to me.'

'It was never anything else to me. You don't realise the

extent of your victory. The Grand Design has been abandoned. The Wellington-Napoleon Game is no more. All Games have been suspended indefinitely. We have caused too much disturbance, been too much noticed. I have been reprimanded.'

'Good!' said the Doctor. 'Why don't you abandon the whole thing? Can't you find anything to do but make the fate of suffering humanity even worse?'

'Oh, there will be more Games, Doctor, never fear. You and I will play again, many times. Our destinies are intertwined.' She looked at him with frank amusement. 'Two odd-looking little dark men. Two geniuses. And I had to pick the wrong one!'

She smiled at him with genuine affection, and then faded away.

The Doctor looked at the spot where she had been.

She was beyond redemption, of course. A completely amoral being.

'Why is it,' wondered the Doctor, 'that I can never completely hate the people I ought to hate? Or love and respect the people I'm supposed to look up to?'

He took out the key, the door appeared, and he went into the TARDIS. Minutes later there was a musical humming sound and the little pavilion faded away.

Chapter Thirty-seven

Homecoming

The Doctor sat in the Celestial Intervention Agency conference room facing Sardon and his assistant, Luco, across the polished table.

He looked neat, clean and refreshed, and he was wearing, almost it seemed as a gesture of defiance, a somewhat smarter version of his normal attire. Black frock coat; neatly pressed trousers in black-and-grey check; a crisp, wide-collared blue shirt and a rather natty, dark-blue bow tie with little white spots. A colourful red-and-white display handkerchief flowed extravagantly from the top pocket of his coat.

The message was clear, thought Sardon. The Doctor was himself again.

There was just one significant difference. The mop of jet-black hair now showed fine streaks of grey. It had obviously been a gruelling assignment.

The Doctor had just been delivering a long and full report on his mission, a report to which Sardon and Luco had listened in a would-be intimidating silence. Nobody took any notes, but the Doctor was well aware that his words were being recorded. At the Agency everything was recorded.

He finished his account and sat back, calmly awaiting their reaction.

For a long moment none came. Then Luco said, 'You took your time getting back here Doctor.'

'I thought I deserved a little holiday. And besides, I wanted to be quite sure that the Countess and her friends really had given up – that everything in the post-Waterloo world was as it should be.'

'And was it?'

'I saw no signs of further interference. I visited the Duke in London in 1816 – we even had a night out together. I won quite

a lot of money playing faro. Then we went down to Brighton and saw the Prince Regent and he persuaded me to invest the lot in some bank his friend Chumley was starting. I'll be lucky if I don't lose the lot. Then we –'

'You were not provided with a fully functioning TARDIS for your own amusement, Doctor,' said Luco.

'I take it you had little difficulty in mastering the controls after Lady Serena's unfortunate demise?' asked Sardon.

'Not really,' said the Doctor. 'A TARDIS is a TARDIS after all – and I am a genius.'

'So, there you were with a fully functioning TARDIS in your control, and nobody to restrain you,' said Luco. 'Why didn't you simply take off again?'

'There are reasons. You wouldn't understand them.'

'Why not?'

'Because they're connected with things like honour, and honesty, and keeping your word. Things the Agency finds meaningless.'

Luco flushed angrily, but didn't reply.

'Besides,' said the Doctor, 'do you think I didn't know you'd installed a recall mechanism – that or a self-destruct device.'

'Both actually,' murmured Sardon. He sat back and looked thoughtfully at the Doctor. 'Well, Doctor, you seem to have completed your mission successfully – despite a good deal of unauthorised interference in human history.'

'Which you knew full well would take place. I couldn't stop interference just by observing it. You knew that when you sent me.'

'The death of the Lady Serena is greatly to be regretted...'

'It's to be more than regretted,' said the Doctor. 'It will be publicly acknowledged, memorialised. The High Council will issue a formal tribute, and her name will be added to the Gallifreyan Roll of Honour.'

Sardon shook his head. 'That sort of publicity will not suit the Agency's purposes.'

'Perhaps not, but it will suit mine – and those of her family.'

'Her family knows nothing of the circumstances of her death.'

'Then they will soon. I shall tell them.'

Luco glanced meaningfully at the door. Outside, as the

Doctor well knew, were two members of the Capitol Guard.

'You are still a prisoner on parole, Doctor. Do you really imagine you will be allowed to make any statement of which we do not approve?'

The Doctor rubbed his hands. He seemed to be in excellent spirits.

'Ah, but that's where you're wrong.'

'In what way am I wrong?'

'I'm afraid I've already done it.'

'Impossible! You have had no opportunity.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Haven't I?'

'Please explain, Doctor,' said Sardon wearily.

'When your excellent TARDIS passed the transduction barriers and landed outside the Capitol, I emerged and was immediately surrounded by the stalwart young men of the Capitol Guard.'

'Who brought you straight here,' said Luco triumphantly.

'Yes indeed – but not before I had told them of Serena's death. They were devastated. Most of them were rather enamoured of her. I asked them to send a message to her family, offering my condolences on her death, and promising them a full account of the circumstances. They agreed to do it at once.'

Sardon raised his voice. 'Guard!'

The door opened and an immaculately uniformed guardsman stamped into the room. 'Sir!'

'Were you a member of the group that met the Doctor here on his arrival?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Did he ask you to send a message to Lady Serena's family concerning her death?'

'Yes, sir. We were all very sorry to hear the news, she was a wonderful –'

'Has the message been delivered?'

'Oh yes, sir. I attended to it immediately. We in the Capitol Guard pride ourselves on prompt obedience to orders and the efficiency of our communication systems.'

'Capitol Guard? Capitol idiots!' screamed Luco.

Sardon waved him to silence.

'Is anything wrong, sir?' asked the puzzled guard.

'No, nothing's wrong. That will be all.'

The guardsman saluted and left.

‘All very nice boys, those guardsmen,’ said the Doctor. ‘Very well brought up. Now, my other conditions...’

‘You are scarcely in a position to impose conditions,’ shouted Luco. ‘Just because you have perpetrated one petty deceit...’

‘Oh, but you haven’t thought things through,’ interrupted the Doctor. ‘The Dellatrovellas are still a very powerful family – Old Gallifrey, so to speak. Even the Agency wouldn’t want to tangle with them.’

‘Go on, Doctor,’ said Sardon.

‘I’m the only one who can give them a first-hand account of Serena’s death, and they’re going to insist on seeing me. Now, do I tell them of her heroic death on a noble mission? Or do I describe a young life carelessly thrown away on a lunatic Agency project in which she should never have been involved? It’s all a matter of interpretation, you see. Some people call it spin!’

‘And a favourable spin depends on our meeting your conditions?’

The Doctor smiled.

‘You are willing to use Lady Serena’s death as a bargaining counter?’ asked Luco.

‘I learn fast, don’t I? Aren’t you proud of me?’

Sardon sighed. ‘These conditions, Doctor?’

‘The first is obvious. I want the traitor who has been sabotaging my mission found and removed.’

‘A traitor here, on Gallifrey?’ said Luco. ‘The idea’s absurd.’

‘What makes you suspect the existence of such a traitor?’ asked Sardon.

‘The Countess always seemed suspiciously well informed about my mission and my movements.’

‘Bad luck, perhaps,’ suggested Sardon. ‘Or astuteness on her part? From your own account, she is both cunning and capable.’

‘I’m more inclined to suspect inside information. But what really clinched it, was the two attacks on us – the vampire and the Raston Robot. They must have come from the Death Zone on Gallifrey. But how were they dispatched to eighteenth-century Earth – and whisked back to Gallifrey when the attacks failed?’

‘That’s impossible! The Timescoop was destroyed at the end

of the Dark Age,' said Luco.

'How do you know?'

'I have made a study of the period.'

'Who do you suspect?' asked Sardon calmly.

'You,' said the Doctor with equal calm. 'If anyone had a Timescoop hidden away, it would be the Agency.'

'What would be my motivation? After all, this entire mission was my idea.'

'Suppose you had been seduced by the Countess's ideas of intervention? If her plan to alter Earth's timeline had succeeded, you might be asked why you had failed to detect it, to stop it. "But I tried," you could protest. "I sent my brightest assistant to Earth, and when he discovered nothing, I sent the Doctor and Lady Serena. Unfortunately, they failed too."' "

'It's a possibility, Doctor,' said Sardon thoughtfully. 'But it's a little convoluted.'

'That's what I decided,' said the Doctor. 'So I thought of a simpler scenario. A young man who visits Earth for the first time and meets and is seduced by the Countess. She boasted she'd been investigating the Time Lords. Such a young man might be in line for promotion if his superior's pet project failed. And if he was a student of the Dark Times, and knew of the existence of a hidden Timescoop...'

'I like that scenario much better,' said Sardon. 'It sounds so much more probable somehow.'

'That's the conclusion I came to,' said the Doctor. 'What do you think, Luco?'

The Doctor and Sardon looked at Luco, whose face had gradually drained of colour until it was a ghastly white. He jumped to his feet.

'You were right the first time, Doctor,' he screamed. 'It wasn't me, it was him! It was Sardon!'

'But the name of the Timescoop came to your lips very readily,' said the Doctor. 'Even on Gallifrey few people have even heard of it.'

Luco's nerve broke and he ran for the door.

'Guards!' shouted Sardon again, and again the door opened revealing a guardsman.

'Seize Luco and hand him over to the Security Branch,' said Sardon. 'He is to be confined and interrogated. The charge is

high treason. Tell Security they are authorised to use the mind probe.'

As Luco was dragged away they heard a scream of, 'No, no, not the mind probe!' floating down the corridor.

As the door closed Sardon turned back to the Doctor. 'My apologies, Doctor. Now, these other conditions of yours?'

'Oh nothing very much. I'd like my own TARDIS back for a start. These new machines are soulless, there's no real rapport.'

'Very well. We'll even give her a complete overhaul. We may install a teleport control, but you won't mind that.'

'I shall mind it very much, but I can hardly stop you.'

'We'll give you a Stattenheim remote control as well,' promised Sardon. 'You've earned the privilege. Anything else?'

'I'd like to choose my own companion this time.'

'After what happened, I can scarcely deny you that. Who would you like?'

'Jamie, I think. He's very good at handling the rough stuff.'

'Oh there won't be any rough stuff on your next mission, Doctor. Purely diplomatic. Still, Jamie by all means if we can find him. We'll have to adjust his memory.'

'And account for whoever he thinks is missing. Let him believe we've dropped off Victoria somewhere for some reason. She wants to learn, oh I don't know...Graphology! That sounds like Victoria.'

'Very well.'

The Doctor clapped his hands together, beginning to enjoy himself. 'Now, what's this nice peaceful diplomatic mission you've got for me?'

Sardon went over to a monitor screen and punched up a picture of a complex multi-levered structure hanging in space. 'You remember Space Station Camera, Doctor?'

The Doctor came over to join him. 'Good Lord yes. I went to their inauguration ceremony, bearing fraternal greetings from the High Council. That was in my more respectable days, of course. Is old Dastari still their head of projects?'

'Yes indeed, very much so.'

'Brilliant scientist, totally mad.'

'It's the work of two of his scientists we're worried about,' said Sardon. 'Professors Kartz and Reimer.'

'What are they up to?'

‘They’ve been carrying out some rather dangerous experiments in time travel. We’ve already registered readings of point four on the Bocker scale.’

‘And what do you want me to do about it?’

‘Persuade them to stop, if you can. Or, at least, to suspend the experiments while we evaluate their work. We can’t be seen to intervene formally, of course. Officially, you’ll be an unofficial ambassador. You should enjoy a visit to Camera, Doctor, I hear they’ve got an excellent chef...’

As Sardon droned on, the Doctor sat down again, feeling reasonably content with the way things were going. There was a painful interview with Serena’s family to get through, of course. But his account of her death would make them proud of her. And he’d see that the High Council issued a glowing tribute. It was the least he could do.

For a moment the Doctor was saddened by the memory of Serena.

Then he rallied, trying to cheer himself up. After all, his next mission didn’t sound too difficult. Old Dastari would huff and puff, but he’d probably be able to talk him round in the end.

And it would be nice to see Jamie again...

HISTORICAL NOTES

Napoleon Bonaparte

Once he knew that the Battle of Waterloo was lost, Napoleon abandoned the field. A brigade of the Old Guard sacrificed themselves to cover his escape.

He returned to Paris and began telling everyone who would listen that the defeat was not his fault. He had been betrayed by his allies, let down by the incompetence of his marshals. The Chamber of Deputies and Senate were unimpressed and demanded his abdication. On 21st June 1815, Napoleon abdicated for the second time.

He lingered for a while at Malmaison, his country house. From there he sent a plan to the Provisional Government. If they would give him command of the Army, he would guarantee to defeat the approaching Allied and Prussian forces and save Paris. The offer was turned down.

Napoleon stayed at Malmaison until he heard that a troop of Prussian soldiers was approaching with the firm intention of seizing and shooting him. He decided his future lay in America and set off for the port of Rochefort. But the British Navy was ahead of him, and he decided the best course was to surrender. On 15th July he surrendered to Captain Maitland of HMS *Bellepheron*, ironically a captured French battleship. (English sailors called her the *Billy Ruffian*.)

Napoleon was transferred to HMS *Northumberland* and taken to the prison island of St Helena, a volcanic island 28 miles wide, in the South Atlantic. He was allowed a small court and staff who spent most of the time squabbling and later wrote their memoirs. He remained on St Helena, closely guarded until his death from stomach cancer in 1821, six years later. There were rumours that the British had poisoned him. Arsenic in the wallpaper has also been blamed.

The Duke of Wellington

The Duke of Wellington stayed on in France for a while and was appointed commander-in-chief of the Allied army of occupation. He was also appointed, somewhat tactlessly, British Ambassador to France.

He took over the enormous house of Pauline, the Princess Borghese, who was Napoleon's sister. He also took over, in succession, two of Napoleon's mistresses.

Wellington returned to London at the end of 1818, loaded with rewards and honours by a grateful Government and a grateful Europe. The Prince Regent gave him a gigantic nude statue of Napoleon by Canova – just what he wanted, no doubt.

Eventually, Wellington entered politics, and in 1828 he became Prime Minister. Politics didn't really suit him, however. He was an old-fashioned aristocrat by nature and had no sympathy for growing demands for parliamentary and social reform.

After a lifetime of military command, democratic methods didn't come easily to him. After his first Cabinet meeting as Prime Minister he complained about the odd behaviour of his ministers: 'I gave them their orders, and they wanted to stay and discuss them!'

He resigned two years later in 1830.

In later life Wellington left politics. Though always a powerful and influential figure, he settled down into becoming a national hero and a grand old man.

He lived on into his eighties, dying in 1852, full of years and honours, in the reign of the young Queen Victoria.

Talleyrand

Just as you might expect, Talleyrand served in the Provisional Government, which ruled briefly after Napoleon's downfall. At Wellington's suggestion, Talleyrand and Fouché were appointed 'advisers' to Louis XVIII, also known as Louis the Fat, the Bourbon monarch, now restored for the second time. Both were soon ousted, however – angry royalists couldn't stomach the wily duo's revolutionary pasts.

Talleyrand assumed that he would soon return to politics. After all he had helped restore the Bourbons to the throne of France, not once but twice. Surely they couldn't be so ungrateful as to dismiss him entirely? But they could, and they did –

Talleyrand was forced into unwilling retirement.

He made a comeback some fifteen years later in 1830 during the reign of the new king, Louis-Philippe, and became, of all things, Ambassador to England, where he had a friendly reunion with the Duke of Wellington.

In 1834 he resigned and went into retirement at the age of eighty-two.

Talleyrand lived on for another three years, in the comfort and luxury he had known all his life. He still enjoyed good food and wine and the company of friends, especially beautiful women, and gave fashionable dinners at his house in Paris.

He also took the precaution of becoming reconciled with the Church – no easy task, with a record like his – he had to write a letter of penitence to the Pope. He was accepted back into the Church in the nick of time, just before his death in 1838.

As one of his biographers said, the great diplomat left for his last journey with his credentials in order and his passport signed.

France

After Waterloo, the Bourbons were restored in 1815 in the substantial form of Louis XVIII. He refused to change his reactionary and repressive ways and only lasted fifteen years. As someone said, the Bourbons had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

In 1830, fat Louis' successor Charles X was ousted by the Duke of Orleans, who became King Louis-Philippe.

In 1848 he was ousted and abdicated, and France was a republic again. Louis-Napoleon – Bonaparte's nephew – returned from exile and was elected President.

In 1852 the Second Empire was proclaimed, and Louis-Napoleon became Napoleon III. He was ousted in 1870, after leading France to disastrous defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. The Third Republic was proclaimed, and France has been a republic ever since.

Which is where we came in.

About the Author

Terrance Dicks joined **Doctor Who** as junior assistant trainee script editor in 1968 when they were making the story *The Web of Fear*, and desperately trying to make a roaring Yeti sound less like a flushing lavatory. He worked on the show during the end of the Troughton years, and co-wrote *The War Games*, Patrick Troughton's last show, with Malcolm Hulke. He stayed on as script editor for the whole of the Jon Pertwee period and left to write *Robot* the first Tom Baker story. (This was in accordance with an ancient **Who** tradition, which he'd just invented, that the departing script editor writes the first show of the next season.)

In the years that followed he wrote a handful of **Doctor Who** scripts, finishing in 1983 with *The Five Doctors*, the programme's twentieth-anniversary special.

In the early seventies he was in at the beginning of the **Doctor Who** novelisation programme and ended up, more by luck than judgement, writing most of them – seventy-something in all. He has since written a number of **Doctor Who** 'originals' including *Exodus*, part of the opening *Timenyrm* sequence published by Virgin, and *The Eight Doctors*, the first original novel published by BBC Worldwide.

He has written two **Doctor Who** stage plays, one a flop d'estime, (great reviews, poor audiences), the other a bit of a pantomime but a modest touring success.

He has also written about a hundred non-**Who** books, fiction and non-fiction, for young adults. But nobody ever asks about them.

In over thirty-five years with the Doctor he has grown older, fatter, greyer and grumpier. But not noticeably wiser.