

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

The Technology Thieves



Peter Crew

Published by Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, BC, Canada

First Published November 2024

Editors: Bob Furnell, Richard Peevers, Hamish Crawford

The Technology Thieves
© 2024 by Peter Crew

Doctor Who © 1963, 2024 by BBC
The Doctor Who Project © 1999, 2024 by Jigsaw Publications

A TDWP/Jigsaw Publications E-Book

Cover designed by Alex Lydiate
Interior Design by Bob Furnell

Brief Encounters logo © 2009 Brian Taylor
Cover © 2021 Alex Lydiate

Typeset in Cambria

The moral right of the author has been asserted. All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to any persons living or dead is purely coincidental. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any forms by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any other information retrieval system, without prior permission, in writing, from the publisher. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published.

Zoe Heriot was often puzzled by the behaviour of her new friend, the Doctor. It was hardly surprising: she approached life, first and foremost, from a stance of cast-iron logic. Since she had travelled with the Doctor and Jamie, Zoe had tried her best to think beyond that limiting stricture, but moments like this defied explanation.

They were on a high hillside in the badlands that bordered the central city of the planet Avenir. They had spent a pleasant day in the city, and the Doctor decided it was time to be on their way. Yet now that they had arrived at the TARDIS, Jamie already inside, the Doctor pulled Zoe aside before she could follow. He was looking inside, his features suddenly and inexplicably grave.

“Zoe, have you noticed anything odd about Jamie?” The Doctor was peering furtively out at Jamie through the open door of the TARDIS.

Zoe followed his gaze inside. The Highlander was standing over the console, staring down at its rows of strange switches and dials. Methodically, he moved over to the next panel. Zoe thought back over the day, and finally said, “Well now you come to mention it, he’s been - sort of distant. Ever since we got back from the city.”

Zoe had enjoyed exploring the central city, with its strange tetrahedral buildings and dazzling technology. It was a refreshing change from the cycle of danger and hair’s-breadth escapes that had been the routine for their last few landings. On the contrary, the inhabitants of Avenir, from their praetor Duvun on down, had been incredibly open and friendly - maybe a bit too open. They had no qualms in showing off the planet’s defence systems with considerable pride, and explaining their planet’s history—rather vulnerable, it seemed to Zoe, to attack from the surrounding planets and star systems. In fact, the scholars who seemed quite taken with her could barely think of a period in their history when they weren’t repelling some incursion or another. Zoe noted and memorised all the details with her usual acuity. A race called the Zalusans—the ‘Technology Thieves’, they were called—had suffered a particularly humiliating defeat, and the scholar Valap noted there were some Avenir alarmists who believed Zalusans still plotted to penetrate their shields and invade—some even thought they *had* done so already.

Zoe returned her thoughts to Jamie. “Maybe he’s just keen to get going.”

“Take it from me, Zoe. I’ve travelled with him for a while now, and I’ve never seen him so interested in the TARDIS controls. Look.”

Zoe’s wide bright eyes took in Jamie’s slow, almost sly movements around the console, startled as it dawned on her what the Doctor might be implying. She shook her head, protesting. “He wouldn’t, he just wouldn’t. He knows you’ve always told us never....”

“Keep your voice down, Zoe,” the Doctor urged, frantically waving his hands. “I don’t want him to overhear us. I’ve had to take the precaution of locking the flight controls.” He paused, then added mysteriously, “There’s something else.”

Something about the Doctor’s tone gave Zoe a nasty sinking feeling. “What is it, Doctor?”

“Think carefully a moment, Zoe. Would you say Jamie was right or left-handed?”

Thanks to her extensive memory training, Zoe hardly needed to think before she said conclusively, “Right-handed.”

“Right.”

At this moment, the Highlander turned to look over at them. Thanks to their hushed conversation, Zoe found his gaze newly disconcerting and disturbing.

“What are you two talking about out there?” he asked. His voice was flat, emotionless. Even at his most detached, Zoe had never heard him sound like that.

“Stay there, Jamie!” called the Doctor. “Catch!”

He had produced a scuffed and worn tennis ball from the depths of his frock coat and lobbed it through the police box doors at his friend’s head. It sailed across the expanse of the control room. Jamie reached up and caught it—with his *left* hand.

“Aren’t you curious why I did that?” the Doctor challenged him.

“Not particularly. Let’s hurry up and get going.” He turned back to the controls and continued his silent, sinister study of them.

The Doctor turned back to Zoe. “See? Why is he now left-handed?”

Zoe’s jaw dropped. “What are you saying? Oh Doctor, you don’t think some kind of alien force has taken him over?”

“I’m afraid it’s worse than that. I don’t think that’s Jamie at all. He’s an imposter!”

Having left Zoe back at the TARDIS to deter this interloper from following, the Doctor hurried back across the open plain of Avenir’s orange vegetation, retracing his steps back to the central city, determined to find out what had happened to the real Jamie. He was confident that Zoe was safe. After all, the imposter would surely have attacked by now if he had intended any harm.

But what had happened to the real Jamie? Suppose he had been killed? Using strict mental discipline, the Time Lord forced himself to dismiss such festering thoughts, which definitely weren’t helpful. No, he had to work on the assumption that Jamie was still alive, and he was only thankful that he had suspected something was terribly wrong before taking off in the TARDIS, leaving Jamie behind to whatever fate had struck him.

The terrain was easy on the feet and the gentle heat from the dual-coloured sun would have felt very pleasant under different circumstances. It was slightly tedious to do the same round trip twice in one day, but on the bright side, it was a pleasant change to stroll these distances rather than having to sprint across, pursued by Ice Warriors or Yeti. But this was no time for enjoyment. Jamie was in danger and had to be found. Where to look, though? There were only a few places where Jamie had been out of sight—when he had tucked into that refreshment cart, and when they lost him rounding that larger modern building set apart from the city’s western district. Perhaps, too, the Scot had been drawn to something shinier and more intriguing when Zoe was absorbed with those scholars discussing Avenir history. But it was still barely conceivable. How, the Doctor asked himself, could his friend have been abducted so easily?

The Doctor could see the strange glow ahead, brighter even than the dual-hued daylight—another wonder of Avenir’s central city. Not much further to go.

A shuffling, scraping noise some distance behind confirmed the feeling he had for a while now. He was being followed.

Zoe did not like this one bit. No matter his reasons, she knew the Doctor’s talent for getting himself into trouble and he needed someone to watch his back. The Doctor wanted the imposter kept out of

the way; there was no point in complicating matters by having this false Jamie snooping after him. But Zoe's mind was made up. The risk to the Doctor outweighed the danger this double posed, so she was going to follow the Doctor. What to do about this imposter, though? And even if she did manage to get away, there was no telling what trouble the Doctor would have got himself into by the time she caught up.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of the duplicate Jamie at the end of the corridor.

Blast! Zoe and the Doctor had lured him to an old control room which the Doctor said was no longer in service. This Jamie had been so absorbed in exploring the complex array of switches, dials and levers that he didn't even notice Zoe and the Doctor leaving the room, giving the Doctor a chance to slip away. Now here this Jamie was, looking at her with eyes that gave her the creeps. That cold, aloof gaze had now turned into something dark and sinister. Zoe shuddered.

"Zoe," Jamie asked in that same brittle and cold voice, "if the Doctor doesn't come back, can you fly this thing?"

Zoe felt like asking him if he had to be so transparent. The real Jamie would never have asked such a thing, but she pretended not to notice. Instead she said simply and honestly, "No. Only the Doctor can," trying as she spoke to disguise her alarm. Jamie was looking down the corridor at the control room. Somehow he must have known the Doctor had left the TARDIS.

The store room! Zoe felt a bit brighter. She remembered there was some sort of electric scooter in there, and couldn't help smiling to herself as she remembered how the Doctor had stumbled upon it one day, and how he had ridden up and down all around the TARDIS like a toddler with a new toy on Christmas Day.

"Where are you going?" Jamie inquired brusquely.

"The Doctor needed a new fluid link before we can take off." She headed for the store room, Jamie staying close at her heels.

"You don't have to follow, I'll be back in a minute," she told him with irritation, but he took no notice. *Looks like I'm stuck with him,* she thought.

There were many store rooms in the TARDIS, but thanks to her total recall, Zoe knew exactly which store room that scooter thing was in—the Number Four hold, where he had stuffed that big ball of string he said, "came in handy with Theseus and Ariadne" (whoever they were). Along the corridor, third on the right, then a sharp left.

When she got there, everything inside was cluttered around everywhere. Aside from the ball of string, perched on a high shelf waiting to be unravelled, Zoe didn't know what half the stuff was, but that didn't matter right now. This false Jamie followed Zoe into hold with interest and certainly showed a keen interest as he rummaged through a mountain of contraptions heaped up on a table. Good, she thought. That would keep him occupied.

There was the scooter propped up against one of the spacious cupboards!

Zoe grabbed it and pressed the start button. Nothing happened. Her face creased into a frown. The contraption was small and compact, and it had no wheels. With a black, uncomfortable single seat, no floor pedals, and a couple of handle bars, there was not much to it. How it ever managed to go at all, Zoe couldn't guess, but she thought back to the Doctor playing with it.

Zoe ran her hands over the chassis, trying to feel for a flap where a power pack might fit. Nothing! Determined not to be defeated, she laid the scooter down on its side. She just couldn't believe how light it was. Zoe carefully examined underneath and noticed a central flap that ordinarily housed a fuel cell. It was empty.

"Come on, Doctor," she said to herself, searching through the nearby cupboard. "Where have you put it? It must be in here somewhere."

Jamie must have heard, and his uncomfortable interest turned to what she was doing. Zoe tried to ignore him as she hastened her search. Jamie watched on as Zoe picked up something about the same size as the fuel cell's recess. She turned it over in her hands, doubt shadowing her face. It

didn't look much like a fuel cell. Spurred on more with curiosity than hope, she pressed a button on the side of the device, and it started emitting an intermittent chirping sound.

Jamie stiffened, snarling, "Get that thing away from me, will ye? Now!"

For the first time, Zoe saw something wild and terrifying about him - craven ferocity lurking behind that poker-faced facade. He was lashing out furiously with his fists, the only thing keeping him from attacking her directly was the pain the object was causing him. Perhaps she wasn't as safe as the Doctor had thought.

"Jamie, whatever is the matter?" she asked, trying not to show her fear. "It's only some kind of low energy submillimetre molecular transducer."

As she stepped nearer to show him, the duplicate Jamie staggered back, bumping into one of the huge storage cabinets and sending it crashing to the floor. Zoe, shocked by the force he had shown without any apparent injury, switched off the device. "It's all right," she reassured him. "I'm putting it back. It's not what I was looking for, anyway." But as she turned away, she slipped it into her pocket.

He lunged at her, grabbing her arm. "You're hurting my arm," she cried, gripped in his vice like clutch.

"You come with me, lassie," he snarled, dragging her out of the store room.

"All right, all right. Whatever has got into you..." she asked disingenuously. He said nothing, instead manhandling her down the winding corridors of the TARDIS. "Jamie?" she asked plaintively. "Just let go of my arm will you?"

More silence.

"Where are we going?" she asked wearily.

"Back to the control room," he finally replied, pushing her free.

Rubbing her arm, Zoe walked on ahead of him but suddenly took a dive towards another door. He made another grab at her. "What's in there?" he demanded.

"You know very well," answered Zoe, sounding indignant. "It's the Armoury. Where the Doctor keeps his collection of ray guns." *If you believe that you'll believe anything*, she thought slyly.

"Ah now, is it?" His interest aroused, he lunged inside, leaving Zoe in the doorway.

Zoe reached into her pocket and brought out the molecular transducer. "This had better work," she muttered quietly to herself.

The false Jamie had tentatively tiptoed some distance into the near-empty, dark and disused room. He scanned the shelves, with willow bats, red leather balls, and stumps neatly stacked; the hooks with Edwardian flannel sporting attire and jaunty striped sweaters; the nostalgic pictures of English villages on the walls; and the long patch of open grass extending outward. Of course, he had no idea that he had actually entered the TARDIS cricket pavilion, but nonetheless he now realised he had been duped. He spun round to face Zoe.

"Show me where the weapons are," he growled.

Zoe thrust forward the stubby transducer, pressing its activation button as he marched menacingly closer. Jamie's whole body convulsed violently, and he crashed backwards into a pillar. Zoe felt a twinge of horror; if it were really her friend, it would have been terrible to see him in such agony. "What have you done?" he yelled. "Turn that thing off or I'll pull you apart." Jamie struggled forward again.

Now was the time to really test this transducer out. She knew its energy output was low, so she didn't know how long until it shorted itself out, leaving an incredibly angry Jamie duplicate at large and heading her way. She thought she had long enough, but if she had misjudged it, her life would be in very real danger. Hiding the transducer in the base of one of the higher wall roundels (where hopefully Jamie would not be able to see it), she ran back towards the store room, quickly glancing behind her. He was not following her, still doubled over in the doorway to the cricket pavilion. Good! He was trapped right where she wanted him. With the duplicate Jamie out of the

way, she could hunt for that fuel cell. Getting the scooter working was Zoe's only chance of catching up with the Doctor.

Frantically chucking various bits of equipment out of the storage cupboard onto the floor, she came to a small block that looked the right size, but Zoe wasn't sure. Willing her hands to stay steady despite her tension, and once or twice sure she heard that lumbering imposter staggering toward her, she opened the flap, slotted in the block, and stood the scooter upright on the floor. Barely pausing for breath, she pressed several of its ergonomic buttons in turn. At last the scooter burst into life, floating steadily a few centimetres above the floor with surprising quietness.

"Oh good!" she exclaimed. "Now I just need to get the hang of the controls. They look simple enough. Oh Doctor, I do hope you haven't got yourself into trouble already."

She hopped on the seat. In an instant she was hovering out of the store room and into the control room. Opening the TARDIS doors, Zoe hovered out and made her way towards the central city of Avenir at full speed.

The hooded being scuffled along some distance behind the strange little man in the frock coat, bow tie, and checked trousers. The figure knew this little man, who called himself the Doctor, was up to something, and he had orders to follow. This Doctor was heading straight back to the central city, where they had spent the day observing him and his friends guilelessly wandering around taking in the sights. The hooded being from planet Zelusa had been on his trail for some time. Once in the city, the Zalusan would have to make sure that his hood was pulled well down to hide his face – he didn't want to draw attention to himself. His overly large, grotesquely circular face looked like an unpeeled potato. With small sunken pupils floating in golf-ball-sized yellow eyes, and fierce upper teeth overlapping the hideously bulging lower lip, he was not a sight the citizens of Avenir would find attractive. As he scuttled onwards, some new orders suddenly broke through the communicator concealed in his hood.

"That girl is more resourceful than we first thought. Somehow she has managed to imprison Unit 17. They must have suspected. Listen carefully, there is a change of plan. We were unable to comprehend the controls inside the Doctor's craft. From what we could see through unit 17 the technology is far more advanced than anything we have ever come across. Unit 17 cannot seize control of it as we had first thought. It will be impossible to operate without the Doctor's help." His voice became enraged. "We must have that craft. The power it would give us over our enemies is incalculable. Apprehend the Doctor and bring him in."

"What if the Doctor refuses to operate his craft for us?"

"Then he and his companions will suffer in agony and die in our attempts to persuade him."

The Doctor was aware that his follower was gaining on him. He stopped in his tracks and spun around, only to face the unmistakable sidearm of a Cyberman pointing directly at his head, held in the clawed hand of the Zalusan. The weapon looked as though it could have come straight from the weapons testing room on Telos.

"Mind what you're doing with that thing," warned the Doctor, eyes wide. "Those can be dangerous, you know."

"All the more reason for you to do exactly what I tell you to, Doctor," the reply came, low and grating.

"Doctor? Doctor who? Who's he? Never heard of him."

"Your name is Doctor. We have been observing you for quite some time, so you can stop your prattling."

“Typical Zalusan hospitality,” he grumbled.

“When we get to the city you will not speak to anyone, you will keep quiet and go where I say.”

The Doctor weighed his options. The weapon was too close, and the Zalusan too trigger-happy, for him to try any false moves. Furthermore, he had a feeling—or possibly merely a hope—that wherever he wanted to lead him would be where the Zalusans were holding Jamie.

“Well if you put it like that...”

They continued to the city, but just before they got to the built-up area, the Zalusan indicated a large building with triangular sides standing in its own grounds, far away from all the others. The Doctor remembered Jamie going around the other side of it earlier.

“Aha,” he noted sadly. “So this is where you did your little swap of my friend?”

They stopped at a crystalline post. Keeping the weapon trained on the Doctor, the claws of his abductor’s other hand pressed a sequence of buttons on a control panel set into the post. Silently a door slid open ahead of them and the Zalusan gestured for the Doctor to go in.

“Well, well ... what have we here?” remarked the Doctor, looking around amazed at the scenery despite the circumstances. Gleaming banks of control panels lined the far wall, and numerous tiers of balconies spread around the entire internal perimeter, ascending dizzily towards the roof. Screens displayed flight telemetry and planetary readings. A throne-like seat was wired into a control panel with levers and wheels. Cluttering the main floor on which they had entered was a myriad of equipment.

This wasn’t a building - it was the flight deck of a spacecraft. It took the Doctor a moment to identify the precise make and model.

“A Kruxon spaceship,” the Doctor identified in awe. Then it dawned on him the reason for the mismatch between the inside and outside. “Just a minute. You must have a chameleon circuit from a TARDIS, to make this ship take on the appearance an Avenir city building. Of all the nerve! Where did you get that?”

The Doctor’s brows crossed in unvarnished fury—not so much because the circuit had obviously been stolen, but because it was actually working. The circuit in his TARDIS had not worked for an exceptionally long time, and while he had become used to its police box shell, and even come to like the look of it, there was no doubt a functional disguise would come in handy now and again.

His eyes caught a large booth set into the wall on the left of the helm. Before the Zalusan could stop him the Doctor had scampered over to examine it, taking advantage of his captor’s momentary distraction, hunched over one of the ship’s engine output schematics.

“Quite the galactic shopping trip you’ve been on. I see you’ve got a Dalek robot replicator machine, modified too. I haven’t seen one of these since I was older.”

The Zalusan looked back from his readout. If he was feeling stupid for letting his quarry wander off, it didn’t show. He regarded the Doctor quizzically, as though looking at a madman, and the Doctor realised he was thrown by the reference to his previous incarnation. Daleks had made a robot replicate of him in an attempt to kill him and his travelling companions. With some glee he went on, “It didn’t get the better of me then, either.”

“Get away from there,” the Zalusan gestured with the gun. “I won’t warn you again.”

“Well if you’re going to be like that,” the Doctor complained, moving back cautiously. He rapidly gaze left, right, up, then down. “Would you mind telling me how you got hold of all this stuff?”

“We have our means,” came the cryptic reply.

“You don’t get duplicators, Cyber-guns, and chameleon circuits at the average jumble sale. I know you’ve stolen it, I’m simply curious from whom.” The Doctor’s manner changed to one of exaggerated cordiality. “We haven’t been introduced yet. I’m the Doctor.” He held out a hand, which the Zalusan declined.

“Don’t be so standoffish, Stag!” a voice called from behind the Doctor. He whirled around to see another Zalusan, identical to his captor, only with a silver band around the collar of his drab uniform. “I am Leader Quorn, and your guide on the way here is Enforcer Stag.” A third Zalusan with a purple band popped out from behind the Doctor like a jack-in-the-box to look over the replicator. “And last but not least is Engineer Vison.”

“Nice to make your acquaintance. All very civil,” said the Doctor, beaming. Then his tone dropped. “But what do you want with me?”

“You have something we would dearly like to acquire, Doctor.”

“Oh, and what would that be? My recorder, perhaps?” he asked airily.

“Your TARDIS. We observed you materialising out of thin air and have been spying on you ever since. We’ve even taken a look inside.”

“I might have guessed. That would be of particular interest to a bunch of galactic magpies like you. Well, you’re not having it!”

“I beg to differ. Look around, Doctor. We always get what we want. If we were able to raid Telosian weapons stores and the high security drydocks of the Kruxons, what chance does an unarmed galactic mayfly and his two immature companions have?”

“Hmph! I think you’ll find, Leader Quorn, that I’m a tougher nut to crack than you think.”

“The lives of you and your travelling companions depend on this little transaction. We have one in our care already, safe for the time being. It’s a fair exchange; their lives for the TARDIS. I will give you time to think it over, then we will start persuasion methods.”

For the first time, the Doctor realised that Zoe was not as safe with that robotic replica of Jamie as he had thought. “If anything happens to either of them, I won’t cooperate, you know,” he said, folding his arms.

“Put him with the others,” ordered Quorn, then warned the Doctor, “I always mean what I say. I will give you time to think things over and co-operate. But when that time is up, I will show no mercy.”

As the Doctor was led away, protesting and blustering, Quorn muttered under his breath sheepishly, “However, we will need to recover that girl before we can make good our threats.”

The Doctor was hauled into a predictably dark and drab space. Stag operated a sequence of controls, and an inner door slid shut, locking the Doctor inside.

The Doctor looked around to see a group of Avenir prisoners sitting on the hard floor in solemn silence. He recognised Praetor Duvun himself, but the elder statesman merely nodded a glum greeting. The Doctor positively glowed with delight when he saw his fellow travelling companion among them.

“Jamie! Thank heavens you’re safe.”

“Och no, they’ve got you too, Doctor,” replied the Scotsman, getting up and seizing the Doctor in a relieved bear hug. The other prisoners barely looked up.

“Not for long, Jamie, I’m rather good at undoing locks. The more pressing concern is to find out what these Zalusans are doing here.”

“Aye, well I can tell you that. I was clever, see. While they were questioning me I made out I didnae know anything about anything.”

“That couldn’t have been too difficult,” teased the Doctor. Seeing Jamie’s scowl, he clarified, “I mean you’re very good at playing the part when you need to.”

“Aye, talk about ingratitude.” Jamie went on: “Anyway, I did a lot of eavesdropping. They didn’t mind saying things in front of me – they didn’t think I would understand, see? Mind you, I didn’t understand it all, but I did hear them talk about some plan to ... do something to Avenir’s entire defence system. What was the word they used? I’m-something ...”

"Immobilise," guessed the Doctor, horrified. "That would leave the whole planet completely defenceless, open to all sorts! They have some bad history, you know."

The local prisoners nodded sadly. One of them, Valap, the scholar from earlier who was so taken with Zoe, piped up. "This is true. The nearby system alone includes the Vlantet, the Gromodi, and the Pelded."

"Aye," Jamie nodded, though the names were little more than a word salad to his ears.

Sensing his friend's confusion, the Doctor continued, "Suffice to say, Avenir happens to be at a jolly dangerous junction in galactic circles and that defence system has been the only thing to keep the peace on more than one occasion in the last generation or so."

"It was a close call with the Brizax incursion of the Fourth Cycle," Valap noted.

"Quite! There are more than a few nasty neighbours who wouldn't mind invading. We can't let them leave Avenir entirely open to attack with nothing to counter the threat."

"There's more," Jamie went on. "They're going to sell these Avenir people as slaves to the highest bidder on some other planet. Probably one of the shady ones ye just mentioned. And those who are not sold will get used for target practice."

"Oh no." The Doctor sounded defiant. "I'm not having that!"

Duvun, who had been listening in silence, stood up, broken from his sombre mood. Even in captivity he had retained his statesman-like bearing, and Jamie had found him rather difficult to talk to even before they were thrown in a cell together, what with his stern face and greying hair. His orange-yellow robe, tied with a gold belt, had been a touch dirtied and scuffed from his confinement. "Can you really stop all this, Doctor?" He was alight with hope.

"Possibly," replied the Doctor, "I've an idea how they plan to take the weapon system – by using imposters already deployed in strategic positions. No doubt they replaced you, Praetor, shortly after we left the city. I fancy I'd have been able to tell you apart from a cheap Dalek duplicate. In my experience, they usually have trouble even getting the faces right." He chuckled, before returning to the problem at hand. "But first thing is to get us out of here. Jamie, when we get out I need a distraction."

"When?" the Avenir scholar said. "Surely you mean 'if'?"

"The Doctor means what he says," Jamie insisted, before assuring his friend, "You can rely on me."

The Doctor crouched down by the door and prised off a panel to examine the lock mechanism. His face dropped. "Well, that's thrown a spanner in the works. This is one of the most advanced systems in the universe—also stolen no doubt. I'd place it in the Second Dynasty of the Draffidian Logicians."

"Aye, but how does it work?"

"It has a randomly changing pattern of codes, impossible to break into."

"What can we do, then?" asked Duvun, despair returning.

The Doctor's face creased as he rifled through the pockets of his black frock coat. "It's always possible I could trip it with a precisely modulated etheric beam..." He felt as embarrassed as the Avenir citizens; having boasted about how easy their escape would be, he was totally caught off-guard without a clue.

They tensed in unison at a clicking noise coming from the door. All eyes remained locked on the door as a mechanical hum filled the air. The prison door clunked opened and in walked Zoe.

"Zoe, how did you get here?" The Doctor was radiant, and Jamie got up to greet her too.

"Jamie, you are so much nicer than the other Jamie," she said smiling as she seized the Highlander in a warm embrace.

Jamie's face creased into a puzzled frown. "Eh?"

“Never mind that now,” urged the Doctor. “What are you doing here, Zoe? You were supposed to stay in the TARDIS.”

“I couldn’t leave you on your own. You know how you always seem to get yourself into trouble. So I put that other Jamie out of action and caught up on that scooter thing of yours. I saw you taken at gunpoint, so I knew I was right. I followed at a distance.”

“Zoe, how clever and resourceful you are. I have to admit I was pretty well beaten by this security system.”

“Really? But the algorithm is fairly easy to calculate.”

“Yes, well, don’t rub it in. I’m a bit rusty at doing maths in my head after all these centuries.” Eager to change the subject, he said, “Now we can take care of things. But we need to move quickly before one of those Zalusans come back.”

They quietly slipped out of the prison area into the main area of the space ship, using for cover the masses of instruments and devices that the Zalusans must have acquired from various other planets. Silently they crept around, forming an outer ring, with the three Zalusans fussed over various instruments. It was clear they were still getting to grips with the equipment functions—for instance, a proximity alert was beeping, presumably informing them of Zoe’s intrusion in the ship, and another klaxon was alerting them to the breach in the cells, but they were paying attention to neither in their focus on the ship’s main controls.

Zoe headed towards the exit door, while the Doctor sneaked towards the robot duplicating machine. Once he got to that, he would be very much exposed. He slid across the floor in a supine position, hoping the others would cause enough of a distraction for him to set to work.

On cue, Duvun stepped out from behind a rack of equipment, purposely revealing himself to Vison, who was monitoring the robot replicating machine. For a moment, the Zalusan stared in disbelief, then grabbed a gun screaming, “Escaped prisoner!” He belatedly realised that the warning lights were trying to tell him that.

Whilst Vison went after Davon, the Doctor stood up and started working at the replicator controls, his hands flying frantically over the dials and switches, his fingers manipulating them as deftly as a concert pianist might dash off a sonata. But Vison, spinning round to see the Doctor meddling with the controls, took a shot at him and the Doctor felt the heat of the deathly ray soar past his ear as he miraculously dodged to the side. Before Vison had a chance to fire another shot on the Doctor, Jamie came hurtling at him, riding on a trolley like a human torpedo, the impact knocking the Zalusan off his feet. Jamie leaped off the trolley, and jumped on him, knocking his Cyber-gun clean away. But Vison growled in an animalistic outburst, and with unexpected strength dragged Jamie down to the floor. Jamie struggled to crawl away, luring the Zalusan further from the Doctor. Racks of equipment were now on either side of the Doctor, forming a protective shield.

While all this was going on, Zoe had been working on the controls by the exit, which now slid open. Quorn glanced in her direction, having just knocked one of the Avenir prisoners to the floor with a violent backhand.

“What’s that interfering girl doing?” he yelled. “Get the exit sealed. No one is to escape.”

Vison tried to wriggle free from Jamie, leaving Stag to try the controls. But nothing happened: Zoe had frozen them. He grabbed Zoe around her neck, and yelled, “Everyone stop where you are, or I will crush this girl with my bare hands.”

An ugly silence fell, and the other prisoners came out from behind the racks of equipment with their hands raised. The Doctor stood away from the robot replicating machine.

“What have you done?” demanded Quorn.

“I’ve sent for help,” answered the Doctor.

“You lie,” said Quorn.

“I always mean what I say. Except when I don’t, of course.” The Doctor laced his fingers together, and with off-hand modesty, informed Quorn, “I’ve programmed all your robot replicas to come back here and attack any Zalusan they find.”

“That’s it?” Quorn sneered. “Then I will simply reprogram them.”

“I’m afraid I’ve got you there, too.” The Doctor looked even smugger. “I’ve fused the controls. The instructions can’t be rescinded.”

As if on cue, smoke started pouring out of the machine. At the same time, what looked like ordinary people from Avenir’s grand central city started piling into the spacecraft through the entry ramp, which was now stuck open. But these were the robot imposters.

“Everyone out!” ordered the Doctor. They pressed through the sea of robot doubles swimming in through the narrow entrance. Stag, overwhelmed by the deluge, fired at one of the robots. Incredulously the robot looked down at the damage, before continuing implacably to home in on the Zalusan.

As the Doctor emerged, he tinkered with the controls on the exit, forcing the door to close behind him once more.

“Clear the area,” he yelled. “I’ve programmed the robots to take the ship back to Zalusa. It could take off at any minute!”

As they watched the ship fade into the sky, the Doctor spoke to Duvun. “You must warn the authorities back in the city. Be prepared in case any more Zalusans come to your planet.”

“We will be more prepared if they try again,” replied Duvun. “They won’t stand a chance. We want to extend the hand of friendship, but we can look after ourselves if we need.”

“Splendid!” The Doctor rubbed his hands together. “Now come along, Jamie, Zoe. Time we got back to the TARDIS. Looks we’re in for a beautiful sunset, but we don’t want to be finding our way in the dark now, do we?”

A nasty thought overcame Zoe as they neared the city limits as she saw the TARDIS up ahead. “What about the robot back at the TARDIS? That transducer must have gone flat by now!”

“Didn’t you see him run in with all the other robots? Who do you think is piloting the Zalusan spacecraft?”

Zoe looked at Jamie doubtfully. For his part, the Scot seemed inordinately proud that his double could manage such a task. Laughing at their near escape the three weary time travellers crossed the peaceful plains of Avenir as the dual-coloured sun set gently in the sky, bathing the planet in a beautiful haze of violet and emerald green.

"I don't think that's Jamie at all. He's an imposter!"

The Doctor, realising that the real Jamie must have been abducted when they were exploring the central city of Avenir, returns to the city to look for his companion, leaving Zoe behind in the TARDIS with the imposter. But is Zoe as safe as he thought she was? And who or what is following him? The Doctor himself is soon abducted by a ruthless race of thieves who want to steal his TARDIS to gain power over their enemies. The thieves need the Doctor to operate the TARDIS for them, but if he refuses then his companions will be tortured or killed. Meanwhile Jamie has uncovered a plot to immobilise Avenir's defensive weapons, leaving the planet to the mercy of its enemies. The thieves must be stopped, but how?

ISBN 0-918894-28-X



This is another story in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Second Doctor as played by Patrick Troughton

