



THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

**THE
DISCIPLES
OF XYOSIS**

Peter Crew with Hamish Crawford

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Published by Jigsaw Publications

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First Printing May 2026

Cover design by Alex Lydiate
Interior design and layout by Bob Furnell

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Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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PRELUDE: THE ARCHITECT

Springfield House, Hackney, Friday 22 July 1820

“You know, there really is no need for you to stay here.”

Peter Simmons was trying to be as firm as he could. Yet, it was a curse of his affable nature that people tended to nod genially before ignoring him. Today was no exception. The man who stood beside him had made his acquaintance several months earlier, and since that time had weighed in on every detail of the house that he was building. He asked Peter if he was sure the foundations were solid enough. He spent hours with the architects scrutinising their plans and making suggestions—expensive suggestions, naturally, but ones they all agreed were splendid ideas. And even now, with the house finally nearing completion, the man had remained a constant and unwanted presence. He had hovered like a nosy bee while the builders brought it to life. He had even done some of the digging himself—an apparent gentleman, yet happy to grab a spade and muck in! And yet Peter would gladly trade all of that obliging nature to never see the man again.

And like everyone else, when this strange man heard his suggestion—that was really no suggestion at all, but a command—he nodded, his thin lips curling at the corners and his eyes lighting with some inner mirth. “No need to stay? Not a bit of it, my dear Mr. Simmons. Good grief no, I’m so very interested in making sure your house comes together ... just the way you want it.”

Peter pursed his own lips and took the smaller man by the shoulder, escorting him away from the men at their work. “That’s just it. All these additional rooms ... digging so deep underground ... I wonder what the purpose is.”

“Well, er ...” The small man adjusted his smart black morning coat and the stiff collar of his shirt. His long sandy hair—too long for the fashion of the time, Simmons noted—caught a stray breeze and looked as shifty as the rest of him. In this animated moment, the little chap looked as though he had something he wanted to share with Peter Simmons, and yet he kept quiet and merely gave another of those thin-lipped smiles. If they were intended to be sympathetic, they were singularly unsuccessful. Instead, he emitted another high-pitched chuckle and said, “War my dear fellow! Attack! One never knows in this current climate.”

“Oh come now,” Peter scoffed. “We have won at Trafalgar. There is nothing to fear from Emperor Bonaparte if that is what you mean.”

“Well, er, perhaps not, but ... well, ever heard the phrase ‘Safe as houses’? Safe as houses! Yes, yes!” Another flurry of high-pitched giggling. This man found the oddest things amusing. For his part, Simmons had never even heard that expression, and he said so, such was his irritation. “Oh, er, perhaps it hasn’t quite caught on yet, eh? Yes, yes, indeed, perhaps not.”

“Forgive me, Mister, uh, Smith wasn’t it?”

“Was it?” He tapped out a brief, worried tattoo on his lower lip before nodding vigorously. “Yes, yes, of course it was, of course it was. ‘John Smith’. A good English name, wouldn’t you say? Easy to pronounce, inconspicuous ...”

“Yes, yes, I’m so glad you like your own name, Mister Smith. I just fail to see why my house should form such an interest for you. Why do you not bother the owners of ‘Spring Hill House’ over the hill, eh? Or ‘The Chestnuts’?” He gestured in vain at the two other mansions recently erected in these rolling green fields of Hackney.

“Because neither of them will remain standing in the next two hundred years, my dear Simkins.”

“*Simmons.*”

“Yes yes, that’s what I said,” the man fussed.

“And do you really think your work will make the difference? That Springfield House will remain standing that long?”

He leaned forward, his eyes blazing in that disconcerting way they tended to do when Simmons was least expecting. “I’m certain of it, my dear fellow.” Then he straightened and adjusted that odd clothing—so like the smart fashions of the time, and yet a little wrong somehow, like that long wild sandy hair of his. He seemed like a man out of time, and his mannerisms—so faraway and distant, as if he was much older than the mid-twenties he appeared—emphasised that. To Peter Simmons, it was all mounting evidence that this man who had attached himself like a limpet was deeply odd. And as a respectable Englishman, due to cement his status in society by erecting Springfield House, oddity was deeply distrusted. Odd people, it was well known, had ideas. And the last thing a respectable London merchant wanted was to ever have an idea.

“Perhaps you’re right though,” the little man mused, his voice so low that he seemed to be cajoling himself rather than replying to Simmons. “Perhaps I have dawdled here too long ... but you know it’s so bracing ... with my work done, to simply enjoy being out and about ... what a world, eh Mister Simcott! What a glorious world you have here!”

“I’m so glad.”

The little man was already dashing across the grounds of Springfield House, as if chasing a stray butterfly on this beautiful spring morning. Simmons was half-prepared to let him dash out of his life, and his worries, altogether. But one last thing occurred to him, and he called after the man: “What did you say your occupation was, old fellow? Are you an architect by trade?”

Try though he might, Peter Simmons spent considerable time speculating about the man. And he was certain that this irritating man, whose name was probably *not* John Smith, was an architect. It was the only explanation for his nosiness, his restlessness. No doubt he was idle—perhaps he had annoyed one too many prospective clients—and, without projects of his own, he decided to stick his beak into others’.

The man’s eyes narrowed and he frowned. “An architect? Oh, no, no no.” He tutted, as if the idea disappointed him. “I’m, er, not occupied as you might put it, at the moment. My work is

done, a great weight is off my shoulders, so I can enjoy myself. Just a citizen of the universe ... yes, yes, how grand to be that. To be away from home ... it's my first time. My first time, would you believe? And I'm so very absorbed by it! Between ourselves, I never want to go back, you know."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure." It was a shame Simmons had come to find the eccentric young fellow such a pest, as that statement—and where 'home' was for the man—was both sweet and intriguing.

"Though you know ..." Smith continued. "I have often thought I might try for a doctorate? Yes, what an idea! Thank you so much Mister Sugden. Yes, perhaps a doctor ... I like the sound of that ..."

Simmons didn't have the energy to correct him a third time. He was told, the following morning, that some additional digging had seemed to take place overnight, but by this point the house was nearly finished. There were odd little panels everywhere, and it had all cost him much more than he thought, but Simmons was broadly satisfied. He never saw the man again, and often wondered if he really did become a doctor.

CHAPTER 1

East London, Saturday 22 July 1978

Linda Cassell didn't know where she was going, and she really didn't care. All she knew was that she had to get away from her house ... really, had to get away from her mother. Linda's mother had turned up unannounced as though they had a normal relationship and she would be welcome any time. Who did she think she was? Her mother never approved of her working at the cafe as a waitress. She had always been such a snob. Worse, she had as good as disowned Linda when she found out that Linda was going out with Colin because he happened to be African. Dear Mother didn't even have the decency to turn up at the wedding. And since she had cut Linda off, she didn't get in touch when they had their difficulty with the miscarriage. And finally, she offered no sympathy when Colin died; in fact, now she seemed to think she would get back in touch, that Linda would forget all about him, all about all the losses and the toll they had taken, bottle up all that grief and sorrow.

Rather than have a row on the door step – rather than slamming the door in her mother's face and having her yell through the letter box, causing the neighbours to peer from behind curtains as though it was any of their business—Linda made out she was going somewhere in a hurry and it wasn't a good time, leaving Mother open-mouthed on the doorstep. It would never be a good time to see her. Not now, not ever. What had her mother against Colin, apart from him being black? Didn't she understand that love could and should have no boundaries, no limits? He had been a highly regarded surgeon for goodness sake. Not that Colin's profession should make any difference. More important was that he was a kind, thoughtful, caring, hard working, decent human being, as good as any other.

Linda wondered whether her mother would still be trying to see her if their son had survived, if she hadn't had a miscarriage. No – of course she wouldn't. Her mother would still be wearing the same face of disgust, even with her own grandson. With all that hate, how could her mother think she could simply patch things up?

Linda suddenly realised that she was heading in the direction of Springfield Park, the very park where Colin had been found dead. A freak accident of nature, they had called it: struck by lightning on the way home after a late shift. A one in a million chance.

Lightning? Like hell it was. She didn't believe it then and she didn't believe it now, but no one would listen to her. There wasn't even a storm that evening. After asking around, desperately trying to make sense of it all, she found no one had even heard a clap of thunder. And there weren't any burn marks on the ground where Colin's body had been found. Why was Colin crossing the park late at night anyway? It was a bit off his route home. Questions, questions and more questions but no answers. What's more, she was forbidden – yes, *forbidden* – to see the body, told that the face was unrecognisable and he had to be identified by dental records. That horrible Police Chief Superintendent or whatever he was (how did someone like that ever make it to that position?) had been so abrupt, that she was sure he was covering something up. He was so dismissive of the whole thing and treated her with contempt. It was as though Colin didn't matter, he was nobody. The most important person in Linda's life, and all these wretched people tell her how meaningless his death was.

Why was that Superintendent involved anyway, if it had been just a freak accident? No, there was much more to it and everything stank of a cover up. And yet everyone in their patronising way had told her she was just struggling to come to terms with what had happened. Well, of course she was. And her mother wasn't even there at the funeral. Linda had to suffer through it all on her own.

Linda didn't know how long she had been rambling aimlessly through the back roads, everything becoming a blur of fury, resentment, and overwhelming regret. But now she found herself heading towards the park this late July evening. A thirty-nine year old woman on her own in this part of London was asking for trouble, but Linda didn't care about her safety any more. Maybe she would be mugged and found dead with a knife in her back, but who would care? It seemed like yesterday that her life was full of happiness and goodwill, and now nothing seemed to matter. Her mother's presence brought that sad, bleak fact home.

She brushed back her wild brown hair almost as an act of defiance, picking up pace as she passed through the gap in the park fence. She hadn't bothered to tie her hair back or freshen up and straighten her clothes before she stormed off – it was a good job she was already wearing her sandals or she'd have been tramping around in her slippers. No, she just had to get away from her mother right there and then or else go mad.

She passed through the opening between the railings and bitterly noticed how everything in the park had been left to decay: all those beautiful flower beds now a tangle of weeds, the grass uncared for, the paths cracked and full of pot holes. Once an oasis in the desert of this run-down borough, the park was now as degenerate as everything else.

As Linda drifted on, her attention was caught by an eerie chanting coming from the house in the grounds – the so-called White House, which had until recently been a cafe. It was probably those monks who had suddenly turned up out of the blue a while ago. Every so often they would be seen, their faces obscured by the hoods of their habits. They were doing nothing, most often standing silently at street corners, but their very presence sinister and foreboding. The sight of them unsettled Linda to her core. Rather than spreading peace and love, they seemed to be bringing the Day of Judgement nearer.

As if she had willed them into existence, Linda now heard chanting, as if from some far-off monastery. It had to be those monks, after all. The chanting seemed to carry across the park with a power of its own, darkly menacing and unholy. She shivered.

Linda rounded a gloomy corner of the park, and as if summoned by her morbid musings, the white house appeared dead ahead. She was hardly surprised that the chanting was emanating right from inside. And appropriately with the monks in there, the house was no longer its shiny white—the peeling paintwork now looked muddy and grey. As she neared the house, Linda noticed a sickly green-yellow glow coming from the downstairs windows. The sight caused her to speed up her step, but as she hurried past a mist swirled up from nowhere, all around, spreading fast and reaching to the bottom of the park hill, where the River Lea passed through. A mist at this time of the year? That was as crazy as ... well, as everything else that had been happening around here, Linda considered. Suddenly and terribly, she felt there was a dreadful purpose behind it all.

Before her eyes, the mist's tendrils expanded. The tennis courts seemed to be swallowed up and soon she could barely make out the outline of the majestic trees beyond. Now it was a dense fog, oppressing and almost restricting the air. Linda wondered whether this was like the so-called pea-soup fog that plagued Londoners a century before. But why now? She felt an increasing sense of unease, her earlier bravado about her safety suddenly evaporated. Now she just wanted to be back in the safety of her own home. Perhaps even her mother would be tolerable. Funny, she thought, how in the face of real danger, the unrelenting fight for survival kicked in. But what was the danger? This was only a fog. Yet she had never felt so frightened in her life. This was *unnatural*.

Suddenly, she could make out dark shapes ahead. Reluctantly taking a few tentative steps nearer, her heart dropped as she recognised the hooded robes worn by the monks. Linda stopped, frozen and terrified, and tried to turn back but her will seemed to have been sapped. Barely breathing, she found herself stepping towards them. Was this the same mysterious power that had lured Colin here to his death? Somehow she knew this would be the moment she would meet her end. Her last thought was that, in spite of it all, she wished she had spoken to her mother before she ran out.

A few days later her lifeless body was hauled out of the river.

CHAPTER 2

East London in the 1970s was by any definition run down. Far to the east of the bustling metropolis, off to one side of the county of Essex and near tonier Islington, at this time it was divided into seven dreary boroughs: Barking, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest. Though little of its storied history could be seen in this time, it could be read from its street names: L Hackney's Mare Street alluded to the marshland that once covered the area; Roman Road was near to the thoroughfare those invaders had built. From Brick Lane there was a hint of the industries that once thrived. And of course, Whitechapel would never shake the unwanted connection with the horrors of Jack the Ripper.

But in the 1970s it had old, overcrowded housing, some not fit to live in and a few areas still not recovered from the devastation of World War Two. Slum clearance was still a job in progress, though the London borough did hold a few surprises, with some grander and affluent housing surviving from the 1930s for those who could afford to maintain them, interspersed among the run-down dwellings. A mix of medium and low-rise flats aimed to alleviate the housing crises, but much building work still needed to be done. The skyline was a sea of crowded, low-level roof tops. Only the cranes at the docks and taller factory buildings broke the monotony. Kids played out on the streets – there were few cars travelling away from the main roads. The odd clothes factory aside, there were few industries and the resulting high levels of unemployment plunged many of the locals into poverty.

Down a quiet street off the main road, a strange noise like a broken engine far from Earth, tore open the fabric of time and space. A shape emerged. At first indistinct, the object solidified with a resounding thud into a blue police box.

The Doctor and Maggie stepped out, and while the Doctor locked the TARDIS doors, Maggie looked around expecting to see something threatening. All she saw were closely spaced houses made of old, dull brick; a dog trotting along and disappearing into a front garden; and closely parked cars lining the road. No monsters lurking around.

This was significant, as Maggie had stepped outside expecting the worst. They were in the vortex when the Doctor had some kind of hallucination. Lately they had both been troubled by visions—some of the past, some of the future, and some of alternatives in their present. At first it was only the Doctor, but even Maggie had seen glimpses of possible futures, paths she

might one day take—and she could remember some of the details as clearly as she knew her own past. Her friend could offer only vague explanations—it was some ability that Time Lords occasionally acquired in their later selves, but officially it was denied as a relic of their mystical past, and impossible. One of his own future selves, “the chap who got stuck in King Arthur’s court” as he glibly dubbed him, occasionally left notes and traces for the rest of them—“He always seems rather smug about it. I hoped I never had to deal with the ability,” the Doctor muttered glumly.

During flight, the Doctor got such a vision, highly oblique, but he was sure he had to divert their course to East London. The Doctor’s earlier vision had spooked Maggie, even though she was not clear exactly what he had seen. Neither, it seemed, was he.

“Are you certain we are in the right place at the right time, Doctor? I mean, I don’t know what you saw, but...”

For a moment his eyes glazed over, lost in some terrible, dark abyss as he recalled his earlier vision. Then he abruptly snapped out of it, forcing himself back to the present. “I am dead certain. But it isn’t just my future that drew me here ... I’ve been here before, Maggie. As for the time – well that was weird. I got a kind of sense impression of time. It was so definite when it happened ... but now ... pfft.” He clenched his hand. “Some of the vision clouded over like murky water.”

“Hold on to what you *can* remember.”

He sighed. “That’s just it Maggie? What do I remember ... a terrible evil, a new world order of terror expanding from here ... and keeps expanding, far and wide. And most vividly of all, I had the impression, the sick knotting in my gut. What I saw terrified me and I was filled with an abiding certainty that I can’t let it happen.”

“*Can* you stop it?” Maggie thought the Doctor could do anything, but whatever he had seen had affected him badly. She had never seen the Doctor like this.

“I have to try. As much as it terrifies me, I *must*.”

“Is it likely to happen?”

“That vision was just a glimpse along a probability line.” Reading Maggie’s puzzled look he explained. “The future holds an infinite number of possible outcomes, some with no chance of happening, some with little chance and others increasingly likely. With probability lines, nothing is set in stone, they are just a series of paths with various degrees of probabilities of occurring which are in part set by past events. Perhaps that arrogant chap who lands up in Camelot gains greater control of such visions. I saw one such path, enough to know that going down that line could prove terrifying. But it could.” His wide nostrils sucked in the East London air. “I feel some grave inescapable inevitability around me. Enough to say that there is a dangerously high probability.”

There was a momentary silence as Maggie took all this in, then she asked, “Best thing is to take it one step at a time. Where to now, Doctor?”

“I’m not sure. Let’s head for the main road and get my bearings.”

“You say you’ve been here before?” Maggie knew the Doctor was prone to landing in England, but it seemed this particular neighbourhood wouldn’t hold much interest to a time traveller.

“Oh yes. Way back in... let me see, when was it ... 1820 I think. And since then too, I’m sure. Let’s hope this had got nothing to do with that matter or we will have problems ...” He seemed lost in the past again. “No, couldn’t possibly be. I took care of all that.”

He lunged toward the main road before Maggie had a chance to ask him what that was all about, and she hurried to catch him up. They reached the busy main road, the air heavy with traffic fumes.

“No unleaded petrol,” observed the Doctor with a derisive snort. “Not that it made much difference. All this man-made pollution was a catastrophe waiting to happen.”

“What will happen Doctor?”

“Earth scientists knew enough about the dangers, all the warning signs, but people just buried their heads in the sand. By the time humanity took decisive action, it was already too late.”

Maggie wasn't sure whether he was sad or angry, but thought it best to concentrate on the immediate danger. She saw lots of people about, getting on with their lives: going to the train station, waiting at the bus stop, popping in and out the shops or just strolling aimlessly.

“Apart from the gas fumes, everything seems okay,” she remarked. “No one chased by aliens, no spaceships in the sky or monsters jumping out of bushes. Just an ordinary day.”

The Doctor tugged the neck of his fisherman's sweater, his senses still bothering him. “Let's just take a walk. Trouble has a habit of finding me.”

“You can say that again! I can see you won't be happy until we've poked this hornet's nest. How about going to the local library and taking a look at the archives – see if anything has been going on here – maybe they keep copies of the local newspaper?”

“Excellent idea,” the Doctor replied brightly.

“Which way, then?”

The Doctor held his finger up in the air as though checking which direction the wind was blowing. “This way,” he pointed. Then as they started walking, he changed his mind. “No, that way.” He headed off in the opposite direction.

“Good job you know where you're going!”

The library didn't look much from the outside, like most of the drab buildings around the high street, but inside were endless rows of bookcases stacked with books covering every topic from fiction to TV repair, and there were quite a few people browsing. At the counter Maggie was reminded of her younger days. She would be in Canada now, in her early twenties, and could easily have been one of the people queued up to get the books stamped with the due date, and a ticket held inside each book was taken out and placed in a small envelope with the reader's details hand written on. The envelope then had to be placed in a tray with all the others, in order according to the return date. It was much like the system still in use twenty years later, and much more orderly than the TARDIS library, where books re-shelved themselves and the sections appeared and altered arbitrarily, as if reading her mind. Seeing this old system in action made her wonder how future technology would change it all.

They were met by a helpful librarian who obviously loved her job, a short woman of about forty with glossy hair tied in a bun and glasses precariously balanced on the tip of her nose and attached to a light chain which hung from her neck. She eagerly showed them the archives in an adjoining room, with a number of microfilm readers. The Doctor lit up in delight at the antiquated technology, and was soon twisting the dials and spinning through the film like a kid riding a rollercoaster. The librarian looked at him a little dubiously, but the Doctor insisted he

knew how to use them, so after checking the local news archive film was in place, she left him to it. Meanwhile Maggie went to look at the local newspapers.

Maggie lost track of time, so absorbed was she in this arcane task. Most of the stories concerned council activities, scandals, robberies ... and some very nasty murders. Maggie got the impression that it was certainly a rough area but there was also a powerful sense of community, with a variety of different club and communal events being held. On the other hand, the violence could not be ignored, even when it was reported with the callous neutrality of a journalist. She noticed that there had been a spate of cats and dogs disappearing and it was thought that there was a psychopath on the loose with a thing against animals. That seemed to have died down.

Scenting a clue, Maggie scanned through more reports. Checking different dates, Maggie soon added up a number of deaths, which only got brief mentions in a small column, with not much said about the victims. Particularly alarming and callous was the person struck by lightning at a local park – horrific in its random violence, yet glossed over. The latest newspaper, dated Wednesday 26 July 1978, mentioned a body found in the river, but said little about her either. Maggie felt a rising surge of anger and sadness at how little these lives were valued. Everyone was important, everyone had a story, they were *someone* but they were being treated as nobodies. Feeling overwhelmed by the onslaught of grim news, she went back to the Doctor to see if he had found anything.

There was a middle-aged man sitting at one of the microfilm readers she hadn't noticed before. He must have walked in silently while she was reading. The man was half-heartedly looking at another microfilm reader, but it was clear he had been observing the Doctor. He was wearing a crumpled, loudly checked suit with the wide lapels and flares of the era, and an ugly wide brown tie, which was untidily slung to one side and didn't match his wide-collared blue shirt at all. He was balding, with a round face and shrewd eyes, and a small toothbrush moustache. Maggie remembered such a look was common among the teachers when she was a teenager. As Maggie crossed to the Doctor, he averted his gaze and returned to his unconvincing study of the reader.

"Found anything odd?" she asked under her breath. It was a quiet room, and she was sure the man would eavesdrop.

"Nothing." The Doctor sounded frustrated. "How about you?"

"There have been a number of deaths, which don't seem to have been reported in any detail. Even a man struck by lightning. You would have thought that would be big local news. Accidents, "sudden deaths," drownings, that sort of thing. Oh, and I may be wrong but, reading between the lines, the papers gave me the impression that there has been an increasing amount of unrest over the past year or so. The community is distrustful and worried."

When she had read it, Maggie was sure it indicated some malign pattern, and had been eager to share it. But now that she said the stories out loud, she doubted herself. It didn't sound any different from the tapestry of tragedies and sadness that plagued any city, and obviously plagued big cities more. She wondered if the Doctor agreed.

"Hmm!" He stared into space, quiet for a while. "Maybe very significant. It's all we have to go on at the moment. Let's grab a coffee and cake – give us time to consider what we do next. I know an excellent place."

As they got up to leave, the balding man stirred, got up out of his seat, and followed at a discreet distance.

At the bottom of the steps leading from the library, there was a figure distinct from the other citizens around: a monk, draped in a traditional dark hessian robe, its hood over his head, hands clasped in prayer and head bent forwards so far as to hide his face. The hessian-clad figure could have stepped straight from medieval times, and his sudden presence alarmed Maggie.

“He wasn’t here before,” Maggie commented.

“No,” mused the Doctor. “On our way over here, there were several more hanging around at street corners. Just standing there silently. Did you notice them?”

Maggie thought back. “I think I did – I must have, yet...”

“Barely noticeable and yet when you walk right into one, they seem out of place. Strange. Anyway, perhaps it's just our eyes glazing over from staring at too much microfilm.” He rubbed his eyes, and confessed, “Good to be out in the daylight, I must say. Let’s grab that coffee.”

Further down the road, they noticed a homeless person sitting on the pavement with a few bundles of blankets on the ground, and a tin with a few coins in it. The time travellers watched sadly as people tried to pretend he wasn’t there, hurrying past, their heads turned away or staring at the pavement—not unlike that monk, so wrapped up in his chants as to block the outside world, or to impose himself upon it. Maggie and the Doctor went over to him.

“Hello there,” the Doctor said in his friendly manner. “What’s your name?”

“Ian,” he replied in a hoarse voice. “Could you spare a few coins for something to eat?”

The Doctor produced an English note from his pocket, took the man’s hand gently and placed the money in it.

“Cor blimey, you’re a gentleman sir. A whole tenner. Thank you kindly.”

“Is there anything else you need, Ian?” Maggie asked, not sure if it was a silly question, knowing that he needed a home to live in, a family to support him, and sundry other things she was powerless to give.

“I could do with a pair of shoes.”

The Doctor saw Ian's shoes, barely held together with his toes sticking out. “Dear me,” he said. “English size nine I should think. Just a mo.” He left Maggie talking to him for a while and disappeared inside a nearby shop. He soon appeared again with a shoebox. “I’m afraid they didn’t have any wrapping paper,” he said jovially.

Ian’s jaw dropped and for a moment he was lost for words. With tears in his eyes he said, “There are some truly wonderful people in this world.”

“Not sure I count on that score,” the Doctor admitted modestly. “I’m just visiting this world.”

Ian was too overcome to notice these words. “Thank you sir, and thank you miss, for stopping to talk with me.”

“Our pleasure,” smiled the Doctor. “I’m afraid we must be on our way now. Good luck Ian.”

Maggie put a friendly hand on Ian’s shoulder. “Take care.”

They reluctantly left Ian, but were glad he was looking a little happier than when they first saw him.

The Doctor led the way to a busy cafe just a few shops away. “Ah, excellent – it’s still here.”

They found an empty table inside. “You sit down and I’ll get the goods.” The Doctor rummaged in one of his spacious pockets and produced some money. There was a friendly

woman at the counter, in her sixties, with greying hair, her lined and tired face belying her clear love for her job. A name badge on the pocket of her light blue overall read "EMILY".

Several people had wrapped up a complicated order before the Doctor got his turn. "Two black coffees and two jam doughnuts please, Emily," the Doctor requested.

"Right, easy. Sorry for the wait, luv. I'm on me own again today."

The Doctor noticed a collection box on the counter, filled with money. Despite it being a poor area, it looked as though people had been very generous. He was glad Maggie's suspicions about the strong sense of community were not unfounded. A handwritten notice, in capital letters, explained: COLLECTION FOR LINDA.

"Linda must have been very popular," observed the Doctor.

"Oh she was a luv'ly gal." Emily's face was a mix of joy and sadness and for a moment she was preoccupied with private thoughts. "A real angel. Everyone thought the world of 'er. It was so tragic. First she lost her husband – struck by lightning he woz. Who'd've thought it would happen around 'ere? She 'ad that miscarriage, too, she did, and yet she soldiered on. And then ..." She sniffed and dabbed her eyes, "and then she went an' drowned 'erself. Terrible thing it was. They pulled her out the river Lea."

"You were very fond of her."

"Everyone woz. If only I'd known she woz going to do 'erself in like I could've talked her out of it or somethin' but she seemed like she was coping all right. I'd never 'ave guessed."

The Doctor put another paper note into the collection box. "It's only money." He had no use for the stuff. He still had money left over from those unhappy few years he was exiled to Earth. Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart had insisted, even if he didn't accept a salary, that the Doctor should carry some money on him "to cover any unforeseen expenses."

"Thank you, luv," Emily replied. "We're trying to raise enough money to buy a decent memorial for 'er. She didn't have any family to speak of, not since...well, there was only her mother left and they didn't get on from what I 'eard. Hasn't been any sign of 'er since it 'appened. So sad."

The Doctor nodded. "Look after yourself, Emily."

She passed along his coffees and doughnuts, and he picked up the tray and took it to Maggie's table. He also noticed a balding, middle-aged man in a crumpled suit at the table behind, smoking a pipe, who must have snuck in while he was in the line. Wasn't he the same man from the library? The Doctor didn't really believe in coincidences, never more so than now.

He sat down, stirred his coffee, and took a bite of the jam doughnut, joyously mopping up the jelly that was dripping out of it. "Just as delicious as last time I was here," he said, smiling, through mouthfuls.

Maggie took a sip of coffee, unable to take her mind off the news reports. "Oh, there is one other thing." She hesitated, worried it would be as inconclusive and insubstantial as all the other incidents.

"Go on," the Doctor encouraged.

"I feel something – a sort of prevailing uneasiness."

"You've noticed that too, have you?"

"It's not just me then?"

"No. Trust your instincts. I do." The Doctor glanced over her shoulder and suddenly bellowed out, "And then there's the strange man who followed us from the library!"

Maggie heard a spluttering from the table behind, followed by coughs and embarrassed throat-clearing. Within a moment, the bald man was standing over their table. Maggie noted some coffee had run down his horrible tie, and it was a decided improvement. He asked in a subdued tone, "May I join you?"

"Please be out guest." The Doctor, being ever the perfect model of chivalry, pulled out a chair for him.

"I should explain. I'm Detective Inspector Arthur Moorley. Arty."

He didn't offer to show an ID badge, so Maggie asked him. She wasn't going to take him at his word.

He looked embarrassed. "Er, I em... I'm afraid I have been suspended from duty."

"Oh?" Maggie was even more suspicious now.

"I couldn't help overhearing you at the library. I had the same concerns, and they got me suspended. I wasn't satisfied with certain deaths and wanted to investigate, despite my superior closing the cases and ordering me not to interfere. When he found out I had ignored his orders and was carrying out some investigating of my own, I was promptly suspended "until further notice". The man's face coloured at the memory.

Arty's mind slipped back to Truman breezing into his office carrying a bundle of folders on the Mundy case. His face clouded over as his eyes fell on the splayed map on Arty's desk. "What are you doing?" These last words had come out with a chilling softness.

Arty remembered how full of fire he had been as he proudly reported, "Sir, I believe I have spotted a pattern to a number of cases..."

His boss's eyes darkened as they scanned the map showing the course of the River Lea with red circles drawn by hand along its path. Newspaper cuttings lay scattered alongside. "You were specifically told...no, *ordered*...to drop these conspiracy theories of yours and work on real cases. You have wasted police time when you could have been breaking up organised gangs and other crime going on around here." At that point the big man sighed, and said the next, inevitable words with that same chilling softness. "You leave me no choice. As from this moment, you are suspended until further notice."

It had hit Arty like a punch in the face. His mind came back to the present as he drew on his pipe and calmed down a little. "Bloody cheek!" he roared to these two strangers in this café. "I've been serving in the force for thirty-five years, gave my all – including throwing my marriage down the drain – and that's how I'm treated."

"This superior of yours," pondered the Doctor. "What sort of fellow is he?"

"Detective Chief Superintendent Alastair Truman," Moorley volunteered. "He was always a bit – how should I put it? He certainly has a bark and puts people in their place. But someone in his position needs to take a firm hold, you know – maintain strict discipline. Maybe I'm too harsh on him because I got the receiving end of that discipline. But he always seemed fair before, did his job as you would expect, very dedicated in fact..."

The Doctor noticed the past tense, and the pregnant pause at the end of this recollection. "And now?"

"I can't make him out. He's just not the same man. He glosses over things, doesn't seem to care about the job, or doing what's right. Half the time his mind barely seems on the job, like he's got other things more important than fighting crime and serving the public – the things that really matter. He tells me to get after organised crime, but what's he doing about it eh?" Arty shook his head, aware that his voice was rising in anger. He wished he could keep his emotions

in check; otherwise these two were liable to think he deserved his suspension. “But he certainly had enough focus that day to suspend me. *That* mattered enough to him ...”

The Doctor nodded. “These incidents and this police reaction ... they add up. There’s definitely something going on here we need to get to the bottom of, before it’s too late.”

“Look, I don’t know why I’m trusting you with all this.”

“Maybe it’s because I’ve got an honest face,” the Doctor said, beaming. “Why don’t we work together? Sounds like you’re not ready to give this up, and Maggie and I could be able to lend assistance. What do you know about any of the deaths?”

“I started mapping out where people had gone missing or died, especially the cases brushed under the carpet, then I stretched my investigation farther afield. The outcome was quite startling. The deaths and disappearances seemed to be concentrated in towns running close to the river Lea. Enfield, Clapton, Edmonton, Canning Town, even as far up as Luton. Something’s going on and I’ve been stopped from finding out what. And that last victim lived just nearby. Used to work here in this café. A lovely person she was. Came round talking to all the customers, making them feel welcome – like each individual person was her best friend. Linda Cassell was her name.”

The Doctor remembered his conversation minutes ago, at the counter, with Emily.

“They pulled her out of the river Lea a few days ago,” Arty continued. “Suicide, they said it was, but I saw her face. Someone who drowns doesn’t end up with a deformed face.”

CHAPTER 3

There was a loaded silence while this sank in. Arty went on: “They said it were the fish that did it. You can’t tell me there are fish like that in that river. If there were piranhas, we’d know all about it. No. It reeks of a cover-up. Especially when the same lass’s poor husband gets struck by lightning ... *by lightning*, mind you ... in almost the same bloody place!”

Maggie shuddered. She no more believed in coincidences than the Doctor, and the mere fact that the news reports she read were exactly what Moorley was investigating—and that the callousness of Moorley’s superior seemed to match that of the local journalists reporting on the event—pointed to something sinister.

“Detective Inspector Moorley...”

“Call me Arty, my friends do.” He added grimly, “I’m off duty.”

“Arty. Is there any chance I could examine the body? If it hasn’t been released from the morgue yet.”

“Well, erm....that would be highly irregular. You say you’re a doctor? Would that be a medical doctor?”

“Yes, amongst many other things.”

Maggie suppressed a laugh. The Doctor once told her he had received his medical degree in Glasgow way back in the 19th Century, and an honorary one from St Cedds College, Cambridge. Things in the medical world had surely moved on since then!

“It will be a bit dodgy. But I’m known there, and with a bit of luck they won’t have heard about my, er, fall from grace. What about...” Arty gave a slight nod towards Maggie and cleared his throat, awkwardly.

Maggie saved him from further embarrassment. “I think I’ll look around the town, maybe the park where that poor man was struck by lightning.”

They tucked their chairs under the table and went outside. Arty pointed out the park, barely any distance from the library. More ugly coincidences, thought Maggie—the fact that all these places of interest were so close to each other.

“We’ll catch up with you there,” promised the Doctor. “I’d like to take a look at this park, too.”

“Come on,” Arty said as a bus drew near. “We’ve got a bus to catch.”

The Doctor hurried after him. “I do love those old vintage London red buses,” he said, bursting with an enthusiasm that left Arty wondering what he meant.

Maggie headed off, taking a look at the local shops, and at the same time surreptitiously watching the people around her, conscious of the Doctor’s nebulous warnings of disaster and the strange pattern that seemed to be forming all around them.

Her thoughts turned to Detective Arthur Moorley. Was he really who he said he was? Could he be trusted? *Trust your instincts*, the Doctor had said. Those instincts told her he certainly played the part of a detective well and seemed genuine enough.

She soon passed the spot where they had found the homeless man, Ian. She had saved her jelly doughnut and was planning to give it to him, but now she noticed with a chill an ambulance parked on the road. Only Ian's threadbare blankets, an empty shoebox and those well-worn shoes remained. A policeman stood by, watching an ambulance crew carry a stretcher with a body, a cloth covering its face. Maggie felt a terrible sinking feeling.

“Stay back ma’am,” the burly policeman ordered. “Nothing to see.”

“What’s happened?” Maggie cried.

“Only some down and out,” he stated with cruel blandness. “Found dead. Nothing for you to worry about. Probably drank himself to death, I shouldn’t wonder. You know what they’re like.”

“He can’t have died like that – I was speaking to him less than an hour ago,” Maggie couldn’t believe what was happening or fathom the attitude of the policeman. With anger welling up inside her she snapped: “And his name was Ian.”

“This is our stop at long last,” Arty said, and they both hopped off the bus. They had been stuck in a long traffic jam and it took them longer to get there than it should have. Though the Doctor doubted that had anything to do with this potential disaster, it was downright inconvenient. “That burst water main caused havoc with the traffic,” he complained. “I thought we would never get here. It’s a wonder that ambulance managed to weave its way in and out.”

“Perhaps it was on its way to the morgue,” Arty quipped drily. “We should have hitched a lift!” The Doctor noticed another monk standing nearby in silence, head bowed in apparent prayer.

“Strange fellows, aren’t they? They get everywhere.”

“Nobody pays them much mind, but everywhere I turn I seem to bump into one of ’em. Moved in all of a sudden not long back, supposed to be bringing peace to the community, but I haven’t seen much evidence of that,” Arty said, putting away his pipe. “I don’t know who or where their abbot is either. You said it, Doc. A strange lot for sure.”

The Doctor considered Arty's words. “You say they’ve recently moved here. Where are they based? There isn’t a monastery around here as far as I can remember.”

“Posh old house that became a tea room. Mind you, I haven’t seen it open for ages. The people who ran it abandoned the place suddenly, and it fell into disuse. In Springfield Park, as a matter of fact, where we sent your friend Maggie. That whole park looks bloody condemned, even before the murders.”

The Doctor shuddered, remembering their earlier talk of an evil atmosphere in the air. Could the park itself have some presence that was spurring on these horrors? He hoped he hadn't let Maggie walk right into danger.

They walked a bit further down the high street, before Arty abruptly led the Doctor down a side road. "The morgue is out of the way down here. A bit more discreet for the 'customers', if you get my meaning." The Doctor knew exactly what he meant. Bringing bodies in and out was not something people would want to see every day. "When we go in, let me do the talking. They know me in there."

Eventually they came to the official building at the end of the side road, with a barrier across its entrance. A sign outside announced sternly: METROPOLITAN POLICE FORENSICS DEPARTMENT. As they approached a security kiosk Arty waved to the uniformed guard.

"Good day, Paul," he called out. "Any new stiff's in this morning?"

"Hi Arty. New one fresh in. Some old guy living on the streets – well, used to. Must've broken every speed record getting him in, the ambulance practically ripped through the barricade. Don't know why he was brought here, not exactly like them other poor sods. How's that investigation going by the way?"

"Oh, I'm plodding along," Arty replied evasively

Paul snorted, clearly unimpressed at his detective skills. Then he gave the Doctor a suspicious sidelong glance. "Who's this then?"

"He's a doctor, colleague of mine – he's come to give an expert opinion."

"Come a long way?"

"You've no idea," the Doctor replied honestly. Arty was momentarily worried he'd mention coming from Pluto or somesuch, but Paul chuckled at the comment and opened the barrier.

"Right-o, in you go." Paul gave them a friendly nod and returned to his paperwork. The Doctor sighed in relief – it was nice to get past a security guard without any difficult questions every so often.

They entered the drab building and were immediately hit with the smell of strong disinfectant and other chemicals. Various members of staff were hurrying along, a few nodding in recognition but far too busy to stop and talk. This was all to the better, as hopefully they could get in and out before anyone was the wiser. Arty indicated a metal door at the end of one corridor. He drew a breath as he pulled it open. "I'll never get used to this place, no matter how long I work in the force."

The room was sparse and chilly, with a large metal mortuary cabinet against one wall. Arty picked up a nearby clipboard and scanned the list of names, went over to one of the large mortuary drawers and pulled it out. Inside, the outline of a woman's body could be seen, covered by a sheet. The Doctor pulled back the sheet and grimaced.

Arty remained silent as he watched the Doctor pulled a small box from his pocket. He pressed a button, and lights glowed in a kaleidoscope of changing colours in time with a warbling sound.

Finally, he had to ask, "What on earth is that device, Doctor? I've never seen anything like it."

"Not on Earth at all really...." he muttered absent-mindedly.

Already questioning the wisdom of this break-in, now Arty wondered if this Doctor fellow was mad, what with this 'not on Earth' nonsense. Surely he wasn't suggesting it came from Mars? "So what do you think?"

“She didn’t drown, that’s for sure. She was already dead before she hit the water.”

“And the face?”

“Without some more sophisticated equipment in the TAR...er, back at the laboratory, I can’t be certain. But at a guess I’d say that there was some kind of endothermic energy absorption. That would certainly explain the deformation of the face.”

“Eh?”

The Doctor sighed. “She had the life drained out of her.”

“I’m not following this. Have we finished here?”

“I think so.”

Feeling thankful, the inspector slid the drawer reverently back into the wall, as though not wanting to disturb the dead. They were just about to leave when a couple of porters wheeled a trolley into the room. “Hello there, Inspector,” one of them said cheerfully. “Another one for the cold storage. No one knows who he was – a vagrant, apparently. Rushed him in like he was going to get up and walk out.”

“Aye,” the Inspector nodded. “I think Paul mentioned this fellow. Any idea why the rush?”

The porters shrugged. “Just finished the post-mortem, though if you ask me I think they were cutting corners and just come up with what everyone knew already – clear case of alcohol poisoning.”

“Just a moment,” the Doctor said. He pulled back the sheet and replaced it quickly. “Okay, Inspector, let’s get out of here.” Outside, the Doctor said angrily, “Alcohol poisoning – my foot! Did you see his face? It was the same as the other one. Someone around this town must have a lot of influence to cover this up.”

This time the Doctor led the way and Arty was surprised he could remember the way. Out in the fresh air, they saw a police van and an officious looking Detective Chief Superintendent, with an impressive array of medals attached to his dress uniform. The Doctor guessed who he was, but Arty confirmed: “Detective Chief Superintendent Alastair Truman,” Arty muttered in dismay. “What the hell is he doing here?”

CHAPTER 4

The Chief approached Arty and the Doctor, flanked by a couple of junior officers. He was tall and imposing with a severe, hardened face and penetrating eyes. The Doctor could well imagine Arty, a smaller and older man, shrinking back from this broad-shouldered and sour-faced superior if he got into a rage.

He gave the pair of them a perfunctory glance, as if he had never seen even Arty before in his life. Then, he adopted a tone of official condemnation, as if he should be wearing a wig and a black cap in some eighteenth century courtroom: "Arthur Moorley, you have entered an official establishment of Her Majesty's Police Force whilst suspended, aided and abetted by this man, and neither of you have a legal right to be here. Officers, read these two their rights and arrest them immediately."

The officers looked as flustered as Arty. Arresting one of their own was never easy, especially someone who was highly regarded.

The Chief ignored the tension in the air. His bland affect was replaced by rising rage. "You heard me, officers. Don't stand there gawping, GET A MOVE ON!" By the time he had screamed those last words, Truman was shaking with revulsion and fury.

"Yes sir," they intoned in nervous, urgent unison.

"How did you know we would be here?" Arty demanded.

"I have eyes and ears everywhere," Truman said with disconcerting casualness. "Put them straight into the holding cells."

"I don't suppose I could call my solicitor?" the Doctor asked impishly.

Unsurprisingly, the Chief Constable ignored him. "I want to question them personally, but for the moment I have more pressing matters to deal with."

Maggie was still feeling shocked over the sudden death of Ian. Reluctantly she had moved on and had decided to spend some time exploring this part of London, her curiosity aroused. She began to think she was walking in circles, not helped by the weak fading light of this supposedly

summer's day. She was now worried about getting back on task and eager to find her way to the park.

"Hey," a woman's affable voice called behind her. She whirled around to see the librarian they had met that afternoon. "Forgive me for intruding, but you seem lost."

"I am," Maggie admitted. "I saw something back there ... a poor man dead, and worse than his death is how they're treating it."

The librarian nodded sadly. "Sometimes I wonder what's happened to this place. Seems to be getting worse all the time. That's why we have to look out for each other, eh?" She nudged Maggie companionably, and she smiled in thanks.

"While I've got you here, which way is Springfield Park? I'm, uh, supposed to meet my friends there."

The librarian's face clouded in worry. "Be careful in there. You won't be staying long, will you?"

Maggie shrugged. "Probably not. I'm just looking at..."

"Those horrible deaths?" She nodded. "I assumed seeing you in the microfilm room with Arty. Poor man, this case has driven him half-mad. Like I say, it's not what we're used to." She indicated a side road. "Get to the end of that road, and you'll find the sign. It's about another hundred yards from there. And do take care." She gave Maggie's shoulder another squeeze before going on her way.

Heartened by the momentary interaction and the fact that a fellow citizen was showing some concern and empathy, Maggie got back to her task. She passed a row of run-down houses with corrugated iron covering their windows and doors. They looked condemned, likely due to be pulled down. To her horror, she saw people shuffling in and out of them. Surely people didn't have to live in places like these? The houses down this street looked fairly new at the street corner, but farther down seemed to deteriorate, the last few looking no more than ruins. There seemed to be unsettling extremes in East London: some houses old but well-kept, others falling apart, and seemed to see-saw from one extreme to the other at random. She wondered how long people would have to go on living in the worst of these places.

At last she came to the sign pointing to Springfield Park. The road came to an abrupt end where the park began, with a children's play area of swings and roundabouts. There were, unsurprisingly, no children playing here on this grim, lowering day. A bandstand nearby, rounded with benches, had its candy-colouring faded and looked distinctly unmusical. It was hard to believe it was midsummer, with the grey skies and no flowers or plants in bloom. She passed several tennis courts and a bowling green that were similarly vacant.

Beyond, the park opened out before her, sloping gently towards a river—the River Lea, she reasoned from Moorley's earlier comments. Houseboats were docked on the river, bobbing listlessly in the cold wind. By the river there was a large flat area with some stands erected. A clubhouse farther away proclaimed itself "HOME OF HACKNEY RUGBY CLUB". But no games were being played today, at the height of summer. A wicket and a cricket bat lay abandoned, making the whole area like some athletic *Mary Celeste*.

Maggie walked past the sporting area to continue her exploration of the park. Sections were marked out by massive flowerbeds, a network of pathways spreading out in different directions, and magnificent trees. The once tended flowerbeds were sadly neglected. Maggie could imagine how magnificent the park must have once looked; but now even the grass was overgrown. Only the trees kept their majesty, standing up against the ravages of time and neglect. A large row of steps were pitted with holes and covered with crumbling tarmac. It

seemed criminal to let such an area of beauty to fall into such a state of decay. Where were the park keepers?

As she descended the steps, Maggie noticed a battered shed set deep into one of the wooded areas. Curious, she stepped off the path and made her way across to the rotting structure, which she guessed probably housed tools for upkeep. The door was stiff but opened with a little effort and the foul smell within made her retch. She covered her mouth and nose with an arm but curiosity got the better of her. Ignoring the cobwebs brushing her face, she went a little farther inside and then recoiled in horror.

Piled up in the darkness were human remains. It was hard to see how many had been carelessly heaped, skeletal arms and jagged bones jutting out in an obscenely careless pile. With a cold clammy panic and revulsion gripping her, Maggie spun round and fled, slamming the door behind her.

It took a while to regain her composure after the horror she had seen in there. Was that what had happened to the gardeners? Or were these poor souls the cricketers whose game had ended so abruptly? Whoever they were, Maggie couldn't believe they had died and were dumped here unnoticed and unmourned. Surely a search would have been made when they went missing? Then it occurred to her that no one seemed to be visiting the park; she had not seen a soul, neither passing by or even in the distance. The park was about thirty-five acres, she reckoned, and yet it was entirely empty. This sparked her to consider the librarian's warning. With the apparent lack of concern for missing or dead people, perhaps its dereliction was not so surprising. If the only people who went here were themselves killed by lightning or drowning, then no wonder such horrors had not been followed up. What was going on here?

It must have been late afternoon or early evening, and there was not a soul in sight. Maggie heard a distant train rumbling by, and the hum of traffic, but nothing else – not even the sound of birds singing in the trees. What happened to the wildlife? It should have been a haven for many varieties of birds with all those trees to nest in. She thought of those horrible reports of missing pets, and wondered if the birds knew something, instinctively.

She considered what to do now. The police needed to be informed of her hideous discovery, so she could search for the nearest police station. But she had promised to wait for the Doctor and this detective guy. After all, it wouldn't be long and those dead bodies certainly weren't going anywhere.

Maggie decided to look around a bit more, perhaps to shake the horrible image of that shed from her mind. As she headed towards the tennis courts, a sound drifted across the park. At first she wasn't sure what it was but as it got louder, she realised that it was some kind of chanting. Despite being unsettled, she found herself moving toward the ominous droning. This was nothing like the peaceful and calming Gregorian chant she had heard before. It repeated, insistently and without melody. This sounded disturbing, even evil. No wonder no one wanted to come here if they were going to be subjected to that cacophony. She thought of that monk outside the library. He had been mercifully silent, but if he did have a mind to chant, she could easily reckon this kind of tuneless and skin-crawling dirge would be to his taste.

Nearby she could see the hazy outline of large house, barely visible amid a sudden, thickening mist. The air chilled, and as Maggie drew nearer, the mist soon thickened into a fog, which seemed to close in around her. She wanted to turn back but curiosity got the better of her. She crept up to the house and noticing an open window, peered in.

Inside, thirteen monks stood in a circle. Twelve wore identical dark robes, and their apparent leader wore bright red. On the floor was drawn a pentagram with weird symbols

decorating its edges. In a blue circle within the pentagram was a stylised clock face, with black ticks to indicate minutes and Roman numerals from thirteen to twenty-four. Black hands in the centre of the clock read 13:13. The red-clad monk stood by this number of the clock.

Like the lone monk outside the library, everyone in the circle had their heads downcast, so she could not see their faces. Their leader intoned some kind of Latin verse above the chanting. Maggie had no idea what the words meant, but they simmered with ancient evil – clearly some kind of incantation. The chanting sped up, building to a frenzy. The monk in the red robes raised his hands, his voice raised to a thunderous booming: “Xyosis!” he cried. At that moment, Maggie saw his face. He was tall and imposing with a severe, hardened face and penetrating eyes.

A yellow spherical glow appeared above the pentagram, faint at first but growing and brightening as they followed their leader’s example, the chanting reduced to the single repeated word – “Xyosis, Xyosis.” Over and over they repeated this word – or was it a name? – their voices growing to feverous rapture. Maggie was fixated, not thinking of running away from this nightmare despite her dread.

The eerie yellow glow had elongated, and was nearly three metres across. It was shimmering in unison with the chanting, gradually solidifying.

It formed the shape of a man, a silhouette that glowed gold. Where its face should have been, she could make out no features, only a distorted blur. She was breathless with terror as she sensed it was looking at her.

CHAPTER 5

The Doctor and Arty looked around the jail, taking in its peeling white-painted brick and rusty bunk bed. Their jailer was particularly apologetic to Arty, whom he knew well.

“Bagsy the top bunk,” the Doctor cried out, his eyes gleaming childishly as he shrugged off his green greatcoat, hopping up the ladder and stretching himself out.

Arty paced, agitated at this odd stranger's sudden relaxation.

“Can’t you just sit down for a while?” chided the Doctor. “You’re making me feel seasick.”

“This is no laughing matter,” countered Arty. “We’re in a very serious situation. Al seems determined to throw the book at us. He has everyone at his beck and call. I don’t know how you can be so laid-back.”

“It gives me time to have a think,” the Doctor riposted. “Things are even more serious than you can imagine – and I’m beginning to get a pretty good idea of what’s going on.” His voice dropped. “It might even be my fault.”

This admission made Arty soften a little. “I wouldn’t go blaming yourself, Doctor. You can’t possibly be held responsible for all this.” Unless you’re a multiple murderer, he thought, and wouldn’t it be a hell of a time to admit it.

“But it is my fault. Something I did a long time ago. My memory isn’t as reliable as it used to be” His eyes drooped, and his voice slowed, as though sleep was coming. “I have lived so long and have so many memories I can’t possibly have everything at my fingertips.”

Arty could barely believe this handsome Black fellow, who looked at most thirty-five years old, could be as old and weary as he said. And yet, in his voice, in the strange things he said, and in the distance in his eyes, he *did* believe it. He said nothing, letting the stranger continue – hopefully he might say something that would make sense of it all.

“But back then, I genuinely thought everything would be all right. Can they really be trying to get hold of something I buried here? Something no one must have?” He paused to reconsider. “No – I made sure no one could get to it...”

The Doctor tuned out the clutter of his fears and immediate circumstances, diving deep back into his memories. It took some doing, but eventually the recollections resurfaced from deep within. He recalled the stone. It had been tracked by the Matrix, hurling through space and time towards Gallifrey. Its relentless progress was regarded with mild concern, but no particular urgency; it was long averred that nothing could penetrate the mighty temporal defences of Gallifrey. Even when it passed through the atmosphere unscathed it was unheeded. It landed in the untamed wilderness north of Mount Cadon, and the Time Lords were famously indifferent to most of the goings-on outside the Capitol. Some of the older Time Lords recalled a similar stone that had hurtled to their planet in earlier times. But the Castellans and the other authorities were quick to discredit such folklore. Hence, when tales of devastation wreaked on the minds of anyone nearby came down from the north, they were treated as tall tales typical of those provincial folk.

However, its presence—and more importantly, the difficulty of getting rid of it—slowly began to disturb the people of Gallifrey. It was found that this *was* the same space rock that had crashed in their distant past. They had no idea where it had come from and all their instrumentation yielded no answer about its properties or origin. Since they had cast it out into space and it found its way back, all they could say with certainty was that it seemed to have an inexplicable affinity for Gallifrey.

This was long before he had his doctorate; he was a young Time Lord, barely out of the Academy. After the disreputable end to his studies, he had spent some time pondering his future. To stave off such morbid musings as his career prospects', he did a fair bit of travelling outside the Citadel, and particularly enjoyed keeping up with the drop-outs who lived in those bucolic environs up north, and these tales of madness and their connection to Gallifrey's history intrigued him enough to seek it out. He investigated with the help of his Metaphysical Xenofolklore and Applied Cosmology tutor, a woman with more than a little of the wild spirit of Gallifrey's Old Time. She pointed him in the right direction, and his research led to his discovery that the mysterious power of the stone could be curtailed by Cardian forces. The archives identified the planet Earth as one of a number of planets with sufficient Cardian lines all crossing at a point to render the stone inert.

Or so he thought.

He had always wanted to visit that planet, to experience its history for himself. But he knew he couldn't trust his peers with the knowledge he had found about the stone. The authorities were happy either to ignore it and let it drive the mountain-folk mad, or else unlock its powers for their own use. The Doctor had learned enough to know that both those options spelled catastrophe. He didn't want anyone to know where he would hide it. They reluctantly agreed to let him go on a lone mission to rid them of this menace, and were quite happy for it to be on someone else's patch.

Funny to remember how easy it had been to requisition a TARDIS and spend a little time out in the universe at large. Indeed, thanks to his execution of that little mission, soon after, he was selected to attend Joinson Dastari's scientific summit in the Third Zone. All very above board—nothing like the day the Doctor stole his favourite old Type 40 and left for good ...

Arty sighed with frustration and sat down on the lower bunk, but no sooner had he done so, then the Doctor slung his long legs over the side of the bunk bed and jumped down, suddenly bright and alert.

“Right, let’s see about getting out of here, shall we?”

Maggie had been running through the dense fog, not knowing where she was going. All she could think about was getting away, but now she felt she was running through treacle. Not only was she physically struggling, but she felt her willpower fading.

She worried about her heart. It had been a little fast a couple of times in their last few trips. They hadn’t yet made it back to Revelstoke for her to get that medical check-up. She could feel it racing through her chest. Would this be the time it let her down? Would the Doctor be too late? No, she willed herself. Whatever else happens, stay calm.

Now, though, her racing heart stopped. So did all other sensations. She tried, but found herself turning around, to see several robed figures circling her in the fog. They never seemed to move, and yet they were always there, the same distance ahead or behind, waiting for her. She was inexorably drawn towards them, step by step.

Without further resistance, she followed the hooded figures back to the house.

“Guard!” yelled the Doctor.

He wasn’t sure if that was the correct form of address; it had been a while since he was locked up in East London. But the racket was sure to attract attention, especially hammering on the cell door. It wasn’t long before they could hear footsteps along the stone passage outside, the sound of sliding bolts and then the iron door flying open.

“What’s all the noise about?” asked the jailer.

“Have you seen this?” The Doctor held up his hand, showing the guard a ring on his finger—that had not been present before—with a brightly coloured blue stone set in the middle. The guard protested, but the Doctor persisted. “Take a look. Can you see? Look at the colours, all the colours of the rainbow reaching out to you like gentle caressing fingers.” The Doctor’s voice had become soothing. “How relaxed it makes you feel. You have been working tirelessly and you need to rest just a moment, it won’t hurt...” Arty couldn’t believe what this Doctor was trying to do, but couldn’t argue with its effectiveness. He even started feeling drowsy himself.

“Now you know you’re hearing the voice of the Chief Constable, don’t you? He is giving you strict instructions to release the two prisoners – Detective Inspector Arthur Moorley and the Doctor – without charge. There has been a mistake and they should never have been arrested. You had your doubts anyway, didn’t you? You knew your old friend Arty couldn’t have done anything wrong. You are to escort them off the premises. You will carry out my instructions on the count of three. One...two...three.”

The Doctor clicked his fingers and the duty policeman blinked and said, “I’m terribly sorry, there has been a mistake. You are to be released at once, Commissioner’s orders. Please allow me to escort you out.”

Arty’s jaw dropped, utterly speechless.

Maggie finally felt her muscles coming back under her own control. To her relief, her heart rate had slowed. She could feel it before she consciously saw it. Although she could see no eyes, she was sure that it was studying her. The bright glowing gold of the perfectly spherical head seemed to throb gently, hypnotically. After an excruciating length of time, it spoke.

“Interesting. You are a traveller – a very unusual traveller. Your journeys have taken you distances people on this planet could only dream of. There is one who travels with you. Not just anyone. The Doctor. He knows where *it* is hidden.”

“Who are you?” Maggie spoke out more boldly than she felt. “How do you know this? Why can’t I see your face?”

“You can’t see my face because I choose not to be seen. As for names, I have many, but here I am known as Xyosis. My disciples know me best by that name. My powers are beyond anything you could possibly imagine, and are growing. So you would be wise to treat me with respect.”

“Where are you from? What what devilry are you up to here?”

“Enough questions! Take her downstairs to the holding chambers. When the current cohort have expired, we can torture her along with the next batch.”

“Isn’t that a bit primitive for someone so powerful?” Maggie tried to sound scathing as well as unfazed by the threat.

“I’m no primitive,” the thing sneered back. “It is unfortunate, but I must use such techniques to extract mental energy to build my power.”

“That was an extraordinary stunt you pulled back in there, Doctor. You really are quite a remarkable fellow.” Arty chuckled. The Doctor and Arty were standing outside the police compound, savouring their freedom. “I wonder what Truman will have to say about this when he finds out?”

“Can we get to that river easily from here?” then Doctor enquired. “It leads to the park I believe. It might help to get a complete picture of their operation. The person or persons behind all this.”

“I see.” But Arty didn’t, really. But for now he had nothing else to go on. Hell, unless this Doctor sorted things out, the only thing Arty Moorley had to look forward to was a nice stretch in prison followed by the dole.

Arty led the Doctor to the footpath beside the river, which they followed to Springfield Park. A few barges occasionally passed by, their cargoes covered with tarpaulin, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. In different circumstances it would have been a pleasant evening stroll. Arty couldn’t help noticing how worried and edgy the Doctor seemed, even more so than when he first watched him back at the library.

The park was darker than the surrounding area, and when they got closer, they saw an unnatural mist settled over the river, which got heavier the deeper in they went, ultimately becoming a fog. “This shouldn’t be here,” commented the Doctor. “Wrong time of year for a start. It’s June isn’t it?”

“July,” Arty corrected him, somewhat astonished at this level of absent-mindedness.

They barely made out a solitary barge, drifting down the river disappearing into the fog. The Doctor fumbled in his coat pockets and produced a chunky pair of binoculars. Arty couldn’t

fathom how they could fit into a coat pocket. Some kind of hidden seam, presumably; fitting, as this man had a touch of the stage magician about him.

Another point preoccupied him: “Erm Doctor, I don’t think those things will be much use in a fog.”

“Nonsense, my friend. These are precisely what we need.” As he peered through the lenses, he adjusted the focus, then passed them over to Arty.

Arty took the binoculars. “That’s incredible. I can see through the fog as clearly as a summer’s day. A *proper* summer's day, of course. We could do with these on the force – you know, for surveillance work.” He continued looking at the scene in front of him. The barge had stopped by the park, and people were filing off onto the footpath, flanked by two monks.

“Monks! What the hell are they doing there? And those people beside them – they seem...”

“In a trance?” The Doctor nodded grimly. “No doubt some more will have gone missing from a town farther up the Lea. The river is clearly being used as a convenient means to transport abducted people. That would also account for the concentration of deaths along its course.”

“The monks are behind these murders,” Arty said.

The Doctor’s eyes narrowed. “Although they’re no monks you would recognise. I have no doubt they are very faithful, but they are definitely not dedicated to the salvation of the soul. They worship something very old and very evil.”

It was barely conceivable to Arty. All the steps they had to take—setting up shop in the White House, operating these barges, watching everyone at street corners and striking ... but perhaps, he reasoned, that was the cleverness of their disguise. They had set up all this horrible machinery and done all these brutal deeds, and no one even noticed them.

He still had questions. “But why would they be doing this? And why take or murder people from further away? There are more than enough people living around here.”

“Maybe they did not want to raise too much suspicion. If they had all come from this one area it might have been more noticeable. After all, it was only your unrelenting diligence that led you to uncovering a link to all this.”

“Some official must have known they were here, must have been able to follow the clues...”

“And yet they didn’t.”

Arty swallowed, horrified by the full connotations of his ‘conspiracy’ and ‘cover-up’ talk from earlier.

“Let’s follow them and see if we can find out what they are up to.”

Arty followed, knowing he was being led into something terrible and deadly—and the danger came as much from the Doctor, innocently or guiltily, as from these monks.

Maggie was roughly shoved down steep stone steps. At first all she could perceive was a damp, musty smell. As they descended, she heard quiet moans and whimpers emanating from behind metal bars. Peering into the darkness, a sight sickened her: about ten prisoners lying on the concrete floor, limbs twisted at wrong angles, some with no limbs at all. Most were caked in blood, some were missing teeth or clumps of hair, and there was at least one with...no, Maggie had to shut it out of her mind, it was all too horrific. It was a scene out of the worst excesses of the Dark Ages.

“What kind of animals are you?” Maggie spat out at her captors. “You must be sick.”

The robed figures maintained a deathly silence as they dragged her on through the gloomy passageway. There was a terrible pomposity about them, as if the savagery they had perpetrated on these innocent victims was for some higher purpose. If summoning Xyosis took that, then his existence was an obscenity that should be undone as soon as possible.

As they passed one of many tunnel openings down in this cellar, Maggie felt a brief wisp of much needed fresh air. She longingly breathed it in, but all too soon one of the monks opened a door and roughly pushed her in, slamming it before pulling the bolts across. She listened as their footsteps faded away, then all Maggie could hear was the quiet moans and sobbing from the poor souls who had been tortured. Alone and frightened, she sat in the corner of her cell, shaking.

The Doctor and Arty followed the monks and their captives from a distance, aided immeasurably by the Doctor’s high-tech binoculars. The unnatural fog, though clearly part of this terrible presence, was helping them by shielding them from sight. “They must be taking them to the house,” Arty said. “The ‘White House’, they used to call it.”

“This house – would that be the one built in 1820?”

“That’s right. There were three originally, but Springfield House is the only one surviving now.”

“Well, that confirms my worst fears. Can you feel something about this place, Arty? A kind of energy. Affecting your nervous system, your very mind, something you can sense, but more than just unnerving you?”

“There’s...something. I’m not sure. I think I’ve been trying to ignore it.”

The Doctor punched his open palm with unusual aggression. “You must confront it, and *fight* it. I think the thing I planted here isn’t as contained as I thought it was. Even in spite of the protection of the Cardian lines. It’s leaking out.”

“Come on, Maggie, pull yourself together.” The sound of her own voice echoed in the dark. She knew that she had to at least try to escape, or end up like the people she had seen behind bars, reduced to such a wretched state that it had not even been necessary to lock them in.

She heard other cell doors opened and people roughly thrown inside, more fodder for these depraved monks. Standing up, she studied her surroundings. A concrete floor, walls of rock roughly stacked. Not a natural formation, but man-made. She felt along the rocks, looking for a loose one, but they seemed secure. She felt around the door. There was a slight ledge above. What would the Doctor do? Well one thing was for sure, he wouldn’t hang around waiting to become another victim.

Gripping the rocks, she pulled herself up, ignoring the grazes she got against the sharp edges, and with careful footing she found it was just possible to climb the walls. Her plan was crazy. She knew it didn’t stand a chance of succeeding – it was too simple, too obvious.

Once she had reached the height of the door, she worked her way over to the narrow shelf above. The shelf was too narrow to lie on comfortably, so she had to stand, holding onto the suddenly slippery rocks to steady herself, her every muscle tensed, praying she didn’t fall.

The Doctor and Arty watched through the windows as captives were marched into Springfield House and taken below. The entire house had been cleared out and turned into a large ceremonial hall, centred around a pentagram. They could see a half-formed glow of light slowly resolving into the shape of a human man: Xyosis, the Doctor explained. This name meant nothing to Arty, but next to this golden being, clad in scarlet robes, stood someone he did recognise: Detective Chief Superintendent Truman. Despite his professional problems with the man, this revelation still shocked and disgusted Arty. It was all so simple: the cover-up, relieving him of his duties. But to know that a decorated police officer was capable of such appalling crimes was barely believable.

The Doctor, unexpectedly cynically, was not so shocked. “Well that could explain a lot. And so could that clock painted on the floor with the hands set to 13:13.”

Maggie didn't think she could hold her position for much longer. Her limbs were aching. I'm no spring chicken any more, she thought bitterly. Her entire body was weak and weary, crying out for rest and food. Her heart had calmed down, with concentration. But she couldn't afford to succumb to the pain. For this to have any chance of working, she had to hang on.

She heard footsteps outside, then the sound of bolts pulled across. Her entire aching body stiffened in anticipation. Now was her only chance. She drew a breath. The door opened and luck was on her side – only one monk had entered. He stood bewildered by the empty cell. Agonising moments went by as he swept his head left, then right. Come on, willed Maggie. Come on in, you filthy swine.

Another seeming eternity passed before he took a few steps inside. Maggie swooped down and fell on top of him, leaning her arms against the monk's head to ensure that it took much of the impact. His head hit the stone floor with a smack. He groaned; he wasn't unconscious. Maggie picked herself up as fast as she was able. Luckily the worst of the fall had been broken by the monk but she felt a shooting pain in her right leg as she hobbled out of the doorway, slammed the door shut and pulled the bolts across.

Not out of the woods yet, she thought. Hurriedly she unbolted the other cell doors and urged the prisoners within to move quickly, and help her to unbolt the remaining doors. Altogether there were ten more prisoners, including the ones who had just arrived, staring around in bewilderment.

“We can't risk going back the way we came in or we will be overpowered by those creeps up there,” she told them. “There's one chance.” She took them to the tunnel where she had felt that gentle breeze. “We have to hope that there is another way out of here.”

For a second Maggie wondered if their minds were too warped by shock to understand her, if they had all retreated inward, refusing to accept the evidence of their eyes.

Finally, one of the prisoners, a tall man in his forties, spoke up. “But it's just a slight wisp of air coming in,” he protested in a weak and defeated voice. “We can't be sure. It might lead nowhere.”

“Have you got a better plan?” retorted Maggie. “What do you want to do, take that lot on up there?”

There were murmurs of agreement, tempered with grumbles.

“Hopeless ...” the man replied wearily, his eyes misting over with despair.

“But first,” Maggie continued, trying to shake him and the others from defeat. “We must see if we can help those poor people farther down, behind bars.”

The tall man’s voice became firmer. “We should just get out of here while there is a chance.”

Maggie went taut with anger. “Go on ahead if you want to – I’m going back.”

Wasting no more time, Maggie went back down the passage, dreading what she knew she would see there. She called with quiet urgency to the victims: “Listen, I am going to try and get you to safety.”

Something stirred, then an elderly lady’s voice came out of the gloom: “No, no, leave us, dear.” She grimaced with intense pain for a moment, then continued, pausing frequently as she panted for breath. “We are finished. There’s nothing you can do for us now.... Most of us can’t even move... We are dying, anyway. You must save yourself while you still can.”

Tears welled up in Maggie’s eyes as she saw the futility of her rescue attempt. These people couldn’t even move. “I can’t just leave you like this.”

“You must. Take heart, dear. I just came down here, got involved in all this, because of my daughter. Linda ... she died the day I came, and it was partly because I wasn’t there for her.” She closed her eyes in sadness, and Maggie nodded. “Please, dear....save yourself...you may already be too late.”

Maggie turned away reluctantly, but when she turned back, the cells were empty. By their side, another bolted-on piece of circuitry blinked.

Maggie ran back along the tunnel and caught up with the ten other prisoners, now standing at a dead end looking desperately around themselves. “We’ll have to go back,” a woman cried in dismay.

“No, we can’t do that,” a young man in his twenties insisted. “If we do that we’re done for.”

“What else can we do?”

They froze in the gloom. They couldn’t go forward and they couldn’t go back. “Someone’s coming!” yelled the woman. “We’re trapped.”

All they could do was wait as the running footsteps got nearer and nearer. A figure appeared out of the shadows. “What are you lot hanging around for?” Maggie asked breathlessly as she caught up with them.

“You can see for yourself. It’s a dead end.”

Maggie pushed past to the wall and pushed against it in frustration. “This doesn’t make sense,” she said. “I can feel air coming through the rocks.” Maggie had enough adventuring experience behind her to know not to take anything at face value. These rocks somehow didn’t feel right. She started pulling at them. “Come on,” she urged. “Help me.”

The others started pulling at the rocks. “You’re wasting your time,” chided that same forty-year-old naysayer. “You’re never going to be able to shift this lot.”

“Stop whinging and help, will you?”

“Hello, what’s this?” One of the others stood back and Maggie came to look. One of the rocks had pulled out to reveal something alien: a shimmering box about the size of a radio,

covered with dials and flickering lights. It looked like something the Doctor might have built in a hurry; if not him, then certainly something a Time Lord had stuffed down here.

“I knew there was something odd about this wall,” Maggie said excitedly. She fiddled with the controls, and as though by magic a section of the rock disappeared to reveal a hidden section.

“I don’t believe it!” exclaimed the man. He wasn’t whinging now.

“Come on,” said Maggie. “Hurry.”

She got to the end of the hidden section and saw a circular grid above, with a ladder. With aching limbs, she climbed. It had to be a way out. Wasting no time, she fumbled with the mechanism and the grid moved aside. When she went through the circular aperture, Maggie saw that she had come up amid a cluster of trees. The others soon followed.

“We owe our lives to you.” The man who had been so cynical before now spoke sheepishly. “I panicked, I couldn’t keep my head. If you had listened to me ...”

“Forget it. All part of the service.” Maggie was somewhat embarrassed. She didn’t really like being the centre of all this admiration. “You should all get away from here, now,” she insisted. “There is nothing we can do against those horrible monks back there.”

“Something must be done,” another would-be victim objected. “We need to get help.”

“You go. I know someone who can sort this mess out and he should be here any minute – he’ll know what to do. I’ll take cover somewhere and wait for him.”

CHAPTER 6

Xyosis didn't like waiting. He had sent that monk to the woman Maggie, but he didn't come back so had to send another monk down to the cellars to find out what was going on. Now Xyosis towered over the terrified pair of monks, who had been brought back empty-handed from below. For all their capacity for cruelty, as soon as the wrath of Xyosis turned their way, they lapsed into all-too-pathetic humanity. He looked at the cowering pair as they might have regarded an impertinent insect.

"Sh..sh..sh...she tricked me, Lord Xyosis," he bleated. "She lured me in, and when I went in she jumped me from behind."

"And the other prisoners?"

"Gone, my lord. All gone! Even the ones you have been torturing ..."

There was a general uproar of disquiet among the thirteen members. If their prisoners had got away, they could reveal the truth about them. Suddenly the power they wielded, the atrocities they had perpetrated within these walls, faded into insignificance and the thought of real, mundane law and punishment crashing down upon their heads terrified them even more than Xyosis.

"Silence!" the entity thundered. "They must still be there. They couldn't possibly move in their state – that's why we don't need to lock them in. Fool! You have failed me. While you were locked in a cell where our prisoners should have been held secure, they had time to make their escape and find some other tunnel we didn't know about. It's all your fault. You know how I deal with failures. If I cannot have the pain of those prisoners ... I shall drink yours."

The hapless monk threw himself to his knees, but already on that glowing face of Xyosis, two points of red light burned with menace. The monk screamed his last ever words: "No, no...not that. Please."

The monk's face twisted into an unrecognisable pulp and his lifeless body toppled over. Xyosis savoured the energy drawn by a direct killing and it could be done anywhere. He had even empowered his followers to carry out this method. It was of a different kind to the slow-drawn energy he could absorb from torturing, but the two types of energy combined potently, which he and his followers shared. From it, even they had gained some fraction of his powers—as much as their pitiful human frames could take, anyway.

Truman and the other monks had been watching in horrified fascination. The Chief Superintendent asked, timidly: “My lord, does that not leave you with only twelve disciples now? You always said we need thirteen to harness the power here.”

“I am able to harness great power from the number thirteen. I have someone waiting in the wings who has already proven her worth.” He snapped his fingers and a robed figure stepped forward from the shadows: the librarian who had met the Doctor and Maggie earlier that day.

“To our new member, I bestow the greatest gift ... the taste of the wonders of Xyosis.” Golden energy flickered from Xyosis to the librarian, and for a time her body glowed in its unholy brilliance.

“The Doctor is being brought here,” she assured her colleagues. “He knows the exact location of the source of the great power we seek – after all, he hid it here.”

The Doctor knew that they were coming for him. He could sense their power reaching out for him, and him alone. “They think the thing they are seeking lies under the house.”

“It does?” Arty felt silly asking, and had grown to dread the answers as one further step into the realm of madness.

“The house lies on the intersection of a number of ley lines. Thanks to some judicious misleading on my part, the monks have been tricked into thinking that’s where I’ve put it, but I set a trap here when the place was built, just in case some evildoer like them tried to get hold of it.” He remembered how he had persuaded the architects that a cellar and a network of tunnels had many uses, and was able to make a few surreptitious technical additions of his own, involving advanced technology—the holographic trap door and the like. Of course, that gentleman who was building the house, Peter Simpson or something like that, had only ever been concerned about the cost. Back then, the Doctor didn’t really understand such human foibles.

“But it was built back in 1820. One hundred and fifty-eight years.” It occurred to Arty, not for the first time, that whatever was clawing at their minds had already driven the Doctor mad. In fact, as he thought earlier in the cell, part of him wished the Doctor was responsible for these murders and they could wrap it up that way. But they were long past such a neat solution. After all, accepting that some intangible force was capable of clawing into minds and driving someone mad—which Arty had, counter to all common sense—meant, surely, that the Doctor was the sanest person around. If Chief Superintendent Truman had not been warped by this evil presence, then he was simply evil himself. Arty wished to believe something of the man could be salvaged.

“Arty, I want you to call in backup. This place will need a pretty thorough mopping up when I’m done. For now, it’s me they want, not you, and I need to stop the one behind all this.”

“The monks? My super? Or the golden bloke?”

“All three. If their master – the, er, ‘golden bloke’ – is as powerful as I think he is, then I will have to spring my trap before it’s too late.”

Arty hesitated. “Are you sure you’ll be all right?”

“There’s no time. Please ... I can look after myself.”

Arty looked back a handful of times, but before long had vanished out of the eerie embrace of the fog. Moments later, a line of monks appeared.

“You lot,” he said sternly. “It isn’t too late to change your minds, is it?”

They said nothing.

“Well, I’ll avoid the obvious line about bad habits. Lead on.” The Doctor felt their minds and willingly accompanied them inside the once majestic, now ruined and shrouded Springfield House. Its walls resounded with the sick mind of its most powerful entity. “Ah, Doctor, it’s good of you to join us,” Xyosis boomed out. He sounded genuinely glad.

“To whom am I speaking?” The Doctor strained to make out a face amid the body’s all-encompassing shimmer of gold.

“I am one with many names. Here I am known as Xyosis.”

The Doctor flared his nostrils and summoned his haughtiest Time Lord superiority. “I’ve never heard of you. You overestimate your importance, Xyosis. As for this get-up ... what’s the matter? Too ashamed to show your face?”

“We prefer to work from the shadows.”

“And yet you’re lit up like the Blackpool illuminations?”

“Enough chatter. You know what I am looking for, and you will show me where it is.”

“What makes you think I know that?”

“The ancient records are quite explicit. You buried the psychic power source beneath this house, on the intersection of the Cardian lines, because they neutralise its power. I know it is here. The influence is leaking out, I can feel it but I can’t locate it. We want that power ...”

“I don’t think you understand what you are dealing with,” the Doctor said in earnest. “You can’t control that power – no one can.”

“With the mental energy I have amassed and shared with my disciples, collectively we *are* strong enough and can harness that power.”

“It’s impossible!” The Doctor flung the words at Xyosis with anger. “You’re a fool to meddle with this.”

“If what you are saying is true, then the added mental energy of a Time Lord will tip the balance. You would make a powerful ally, Doctor. Don’t tell me with all you have learned that you were never tempted by the power. Together we could harness that power, together our combined wills could accomplish wonderful things....”

“The two of us still wouldn’t be enough. Even if I did want to help you.” The Doctor hoped his full contempt was audible in the emphasis on that last word.

“Our mental power will be enough to bring you under our control. There are thirteen of them and only one of you.”

“You are asking me to bring death and destruction on us all, on this whole planet, and far beyond..”

Xyosis snapped his fingers and thirteen monks gathered round, chanting. Only one, the librarian, raised her gaze to look directly at him. Her earlier enthusiasm was replaced with a dedicated, single-minded fanaticism. The Doctor strained, his eyes closed tightly. At first he seemed able to resist, but then his eyes opened, all his muscles relaxing, his arms dropping to his side. He stood motionless, waiting.

“Now take us.”

The circle parted and the Doctor led them down the steps. Xyosis followed, with Truman and a few senior monks in tow. At the foot of the stairs, the Doctor’s hand fumbled with a rock in the wall, and a 158-year-old control panel opened out. He entered a specific sequence in the Gallifreyan keypad, and the solid rock wall disappeared, revealing another passageway behind.

“Ingenious,” remarked Xyosis. “A hologram with a solidification field. My victims must have escaped this way.”

The Doctor marched along the passage. In the darkness, the monks couldn't see the Doctor's hand brush against something on the wall. A minute later there was a loud, violent rumble from behind. The ground shook and debris rained down from the roof.

Hidden in the clump of trees, Maggie saw a figure running out of the fog. At first she feared more monks would emerge, but as it got nearer she could see that it was Arty. Maggie came out of her cover to meet him. "What's going on?" she demanded. "Where's the Doctor?"

Was it possible that Arty double-crossed her, led her into a trap, and was now here to do the same to her? Maggie reasoned, whether she could trust him or not, he did know where the Doctor was.

"We need to get help," Arty panted. He briefly explained how the Doctor had willingly surrendered to the monks. "I really can't make out this Doctor friend of yours at all. I have to ask, Maggie, this thing seeping into our minds, whatever it is ... do you think it could have affected him? What he says sounds like sheer madness half the time"

"Don't underestimate the Doctor."

Arty nodded quickly to quell her objections. "That's the daftest thing about it all. I believe him. Despite myself I believe him. I feel this whatever it is, affecting my own mind. What's the word ... 'distorting', I s'pose, everything around here."

"We should focus on these monks."

"Oh, I know all about them, and their leader, Detective Chief Superintendent Truman?" Arty said grimly. "We saw him in there. It explains why he's been trying to cover so much up and why he suspended me. Like I say, that presence distorting us. Guess it nobbled him too." He cleared his throat, saddened by the thought of his lost comrade. "Now I've got to get some back-up before it's too late."

There was a low rumble, as the ground under their feet shook. Then an eerie silence followed.

As the roof rained down, the Doctor broke into a run. "Quick, after him!" yelled Xyosis. "He's tricked us all!"

The Doctor knew the layout of the tunnels – after all, he drew the plans up. As hazy as his memory of that long-ago trip was, as soon as danger reared its head, instinct kicked in. It was just as well he had taken so many precautions; he took a bit more time on that trip than he did on his subsequent jaunts. And the whole time was shot through with his anxiety about the power of the stone. Despite his teacher's assurances, the binding power of the Cardian lines struck him as dubious at best. On top of that, he had always feared that one day someone from his own race, the Master perhaps, might come to find out about that youthful trip to Earth, and want possession of the strange source of mental power for their own malign purpose. As a precaution, he had falsified the records and laid a trap for anyone stupid enough to attempt it. He chuckled to himself—such a double bluff was a tactic worthy of the Master.

But despite his preparations, things were getting dangerous. The power was undeniably leaking out and he could not risk Xyosis and his followers getting that source. Already, they had twisted this corner of East London into a nightmare where innocent people could be murdered

and the populace and officials wouldn't lift a finger to help. He could easily imagine how the horror would spread. Indeed, in a more jaded mood he might consider that humanity needed little prodding from Xyosis and this source to rejoice in their evil side.

He resolved himself. The task ahead was straightforward enough; get that ancient stone away from here, and away from Xyosis. But he remembered the horrors it unleashed last time, horrors that were presently kept at bay by the restraint of the Cardian lines.

There was the spot, at the base of the tunnel, he had dug that last night before he left Peter Simmons to live in peace. He climbed down the rickety ladder and ended up in a chamber about five metres square, and right in the centre on a plinth sat a large, white egg-shaped stone, glowing eerily with a reddish blue hue. Surrounding it were four upright girders arranged in a square, crisscrossed with dimensional stabilisers and other lashed-up technology, lights running up and down, blinking. The last line of defence against any intruders.

"I'm taking you to a new home," the Doctor told the stone. He placed a hand on one of the girders. The Gallifreyan technology instantly responded to his unique metabolism and mental patterns, much like the TARDIS key, and the lights on the four girders stopped blinking. The defence mechanism was now disabled. Already the Doctor could feel the mental energy from the stone impressing on his mind, eating into him. Once he moved the stone from its resting place, the attack would be unbearable. Strong though it was, would his will be able to keep him sane? He had only survived last time with the help of the TARDIS's telepathic circuits and his tutor's arcane, pseudo-mystical techniques to reinforce his mental defences. Now, with its power and purpose having grown, could he rely on the same strength?

"So this is where you've kept it hidden." The triumphant voice came from behind him. The Doctor spun around to see a figure cloaked in a gold robe. "Of course, the Gallifreyan defences were an unfair advantage." He put a hand to his forehead as his face strained. The power rippling out was already beginning to affect him. Now no longer hidden, the Doctor could see his face was a man's, almost ordinary, lined with age and wisdom, but with hawk-like eyes. "This source is dangerously powerful. I can feel its pressure."

"I warned you it can't be controlled."

"What are you planning to do with it?"

"Taking it out of harm's way."

A smirk of amusement formed on Xyosis's face. "Is that so? I'll give you a hand."

The Doctor looked behind him. "What of your minions? Will they come along for the ride?"

Those hawk-like eyes flickered with amusement. "They have served their purpose, to manifest me. My priority is to seize the power. If I decide thereafter, I may share it with them ... or I may not. Perhaps their faith in my dark powers will sustain them."

The Doctor shook his head at the treachery. If Xyosis stuck around on this planet, he would have a wonderful career in politics ahead of him.

The old, lined face looked around the narrow chamber. "Well, Doctor? What now?"

As if on cue, the grinding engines of the TARDIS sounded. No doubt the old girl had sensed the ancient power unleashed and knew the Doctor's next move. He picked up the egg, his hand burning at its contact, and trudged toward his ship. Xyosis eagerly followed. "At last, Doctor, my journey back to existence, and thence to omnipotence, nears its end!"

"I don't doubt it," he replied as he slammed the door shut. The worst was yet to come.

CHAPTER 7

Maggie and Arty stared at each other in silent dread, and from there they looked out at the White House and the surrounding parkland. The silence continued unabated, but now there was a strong pressure, like an almighty wind.

The wind picked up, and for a second both of them thought they might lift off the ground. The noxious fog vapours blew away, and there was a change in the air.

Suddenly it was brighter and warmer. Around them, though no such people could have been there before, crowds were circulating in Springfield Park, enjoying a late summer stroll. The obvious and most overt change had been in Springfield House ahead of them. No longer was its paint peeling. The ugly, unearthly green glow had dissipated.

Maggie took the inspector's hand and they ran toward the teahouse. "I don't believe this," he muttered, half with joy and half in genuine disturbance.

There was no longer that ghastly clock-face-cum-pentagram painted on the floor. Instead couples, groups, and families were congregating over trays of sandwiches and cakes, and large pots of delightfully aromatic tea.

"Can I help you?" a lady at the door asked.

Arty went white. He had seen that face hours earlier, on his unauthorised visit to the morgue. "Linda ... Linda Cassell?" he asked.

"Yes, that's my name. Have we met?"

Maggie and Arty exchanged unsettled glances. "Is your husband Colin Cassell?"

"Yes ... he should be at home now. Did you want something?"

Arty reached into his pocket and flashed his badge. "D.I. Arthur Moorley. This is, er, my deputy, Maggie. Perhaps it's nothing, but ... do you mind if we look around?"

"Particularly downstairs?" Maggie added.

"I don't ... I don't understand ..."

If they had not witnessed first-hand the chaos wreaked by Alastair Truman and his unholy brethren, the sight would have been comical. There they lay, he in his scarlet robes and they in

their black, scrawled up and down with mystical symbols, while all around the busboys and other staff tried their best to ignore them and carry on their duties.

Maggie recognised that kindly librarian among their number. Now that the danger seemed over, she could only look upon the woman with her own confusion: all that helpfulness, all that kindness, directing Maggie down to this park, while all the time she was planning this horror ...

Truman was looking around, his face gripped with inconsolable loss. He lit up dimly at the presence of Maggie and his subordinate, as he knew they had seen what he had unleashed. "Moorley ... tell them ... tell them of the power ... it was so close ... and now I've lost it ... now I've lost everything ..."

He sagged, weeping silently. "Right then, sir, let's help you up on your feet." He turned back to Linda and the surrounding staff. "Sorry for the, uh, disturbance, all. I'll get me lads in to sort all this out."

"Looneys, they might be," one of the busboys remarked grimly, "but I still don't know where they came from. Door down here was shut up and locked." He gave their extravagant clothing a sceptical look. "Don't s'pose this was some kind of magic show, was it?"

The inspector scratched his balding head and looked from the staff to Linda. "I might have to get back to you on that one."

Maggie left Moorley to handle that, while she poked her head around the corner. She saw the tunnels, but they looked merely empty, not haunted and mildewed as they had. Less than an hour earlier, she and those other wretched people had been cooped up in here like lambs waiting for the slaughter. And now, it was all so commonplace. It was a relief, but also a worry.

For nowhere in these subterranean recesses could she see any sign of the Doctor.

"You saw, Moorley! You were getting too close, so I suspended you! Don't you remember? The power of Xyosis ... should have been mine ..."

They were loaded into the back of an ambulance, their replies to any rudimentary questions clearly indicating they had snapped. Maggie tried one last line of inquiry before the officers closed the van's back door.

"Where did you see Xyosis last?"

"Following the Doctor ... such power, I felt it ..." He pathetically slapped at his breast like a depressed gorilla. "They left with it ... they must have ... and left us here ... with nothing ..."

"Too right," Moorley declared tersely.

The van drove away. A few more hours had passed, and the inspector had a whole team from the East London branch roving around the White House. Somehow he expected no less when they came up to tell him they had found nothing suspicious, nothing untoward. "A few health code violations, maybe, but ..."

"The Doctor ..." Maggie repeated, beginning to feel like Truman and his wretched associates.

"It's over. Better than that, doesn't look to have happened in the first place. I'll be blown if I understand that, but if the Doctor can make that happen, then it doesn't matter if he is as mad as a balloon."

"But where is he, Arty?" Maggie asked. For his part, the inspector had no answer, and could only give her a sympathetic pat on the shoulder.

The vision suddenly became clear. The Doctor remembered what he saw, and knew its meaning.

A distant planet formed. Not formed ... will form, millions of years from now. Universes away, in a corner untouched by observation or posterity. There were no records of its existence; it is yet to be discovered. Even his own people don't yet know about it. A whole planet, entirely composed from the matter created by the collision of Cardian forces.

All he had to do is take the source there and it will be completely safe, maybe even destroyed.

There was only one problem with that plan, and he could already feel it, standing in the TARDIS control room entering the coordinates: the source affects minds. That was why he kept Maggie and Inspector Moorley at a distance: its influence would have instantly destroyed any nearby human mind. It had been bad enough dropping it off the first time, and then it was barely a fraction of its present strength. He remembered those trips up north, seeing Time Lords driven to madness from contact with it, and even all the mayhem East London had seen so far would be just a glimpse of its full terrible power.

He thought of Maggie, and thanked the stars she was safely out of its clutches. He wondered if she felt abandoned, but he couldn't risk it damaging her mind. It would have reduced her to a vegetative state. Truthfully, he was not even sure if *he* could withstand it this time. But it was simply too dangerous to leave. It couldn't be contained much longer. The thing was determined to be born.

"Well, Doctor?"

He looked across the control room, its roundels seeming to ebb and its walls rippling as if even the old girl was straining to contain the malign presence. There at the other end stood Xyosis, his most unwanted companion on this trip. Though perhaps it was, in some perverse way, good to have Xyosis here: at least *someone* would enjoy the journey.

"Quite right, Xyosis. I was just trying to remember the coordinates. Now then ..." The Doctor cracked his knuckles and typed in a complex sequence. "The mysterious planet Eosis," he explained grandly. "Yet to be discovered in the far future, and even then only as a distant speck in the databanks of the Lobri Gestalt. Its existence and properties never fully understood. Nice to know there were always a few mysteries left out there in the dark."

He punched in the last button and looked at the main lever. As soon as he pulled it, the TARDIS would take him there. He braced himself for the ordeal to come.

Xyosis ran his increasingly human features over the controls. "I presume you are taking it somewhere its strength can still be contained?"

The Doctor glared. "That's very perceptive of you, Xyosis." He splayed his fingers over the lever, hesitating at this crucial moment from the *coup de grace* he knew would follow. Perhaps this entity of pure evil didn't deserve the warning, but he issued it nevertheless. "If you come with me, it will take complete control of you."

Xyosis extended his glowing golden hands menacingly toward the Time Lord. "And if you don't, I will drink in your life force here and now, and it will be mine for the taking anyway."

"Then you don't give me any choice, do you?" The Doctor sounded downcast, already feeling the growing strength of the stone. It languished in a far corner of the control room, in that antique fridge-like cabinet he had once stored the Key to Time inside. Ultimately, the stone only

went inside the TARDIS because it was lured, molecule by molecule, floating through the open TARDIS doors and into that further limbo.

Even contained thus, the stone still gave off intense, palpable power. Trying to blank out the pressure, and for now ignoring the threat from Xyosis, the Doctor ran over his possible escape options.

Xyosis crossed the control room and opened the fridge door, beholding the stone for an instant before he backed away in alarm. His lined face looked another decade older simply from that one glance.

“We can’t get near it,” he exclaimed, both hands clutching at his head, the newly formed features rippling in pain at the close proximity to the evil substance. “It possesses more power than I could possibly have imagined.” There was a hint of alarm in his voice the Doctor hadn’t noticed before.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” rebuffed the Doctor, flinging down the materialisation lever. The engines let out a long, ominous groan as they struggled to execute the programmed instructions against the overwhelming force from the stone. There was a loud bang, something sparked, and the TARDIS lurched sideways before spinning recklessly through the space-time continuum.

The Doctor was barely holding onto consciousness, his mind was being split into fragments of memories, eleven lifetimes mixing, colliding and swirling like eddy currents whilst he tried to hold the console. There was another loud bang followed by a grinding noise as the materialisation circuits switched in, the engines choking as they attempted to bring the journey to an end. And then, some excruciating length of time later, it all stopped.

The Doctor was barely conscious. He looked around in a confused daze, reading the instruments on the nearest panel without understanding what they meant. He didn’t seem to even notice Xyosis standing there, the weapon now pointing at the TARDIS hat-stand. Mumbling unintelligibly to himself, the Doctor’s hands hesitated over the controls before he finally grasped the door lever by an instinct.

Xyosis stood in awe at the sheer power of the stone clawing away at his mind. He tried desperately to cling onto his very sanity.

The Doctor’s thoughts were swimming in a whirlpool of confusion. Wasn’t there something he was supposed to do? He had to pick someone up. Who was it? Must be Susan. Or was it? Were Tamara Scott and Mortimer the cat still about? Come to think of it, where were Jamie and Zoe? Hadn’t he told them to stay in the TARDIS?

The doors whirred open, letting in a magnificent yellow glow from outside. Standing framed by it, Xyosis almost blended with the brilliant shimmer. Eyes straining against the light, the Doctor staggered towards the open doors and noticed the egg-shaped stone floating at eye level, now surrounded in the yellow glow.

Xyosis staggered toward the Doctor, reaching out desperately, his mind muddled. He looked across at the stone as his mind clung onto the edge. Here he was, an all-powerful being at the verge of greater wonders still, but ... but his all-encompassing control was slipping. He fixated on the stone, desperate for it to provide the answers he so desperately sought. That stone was his, wasn’t it? Wasn’t that what he was here for? Wasn’t it a fact that he could command the stone to teleport him anywhere? His mind filled with the obsessive excitement that from here he would also be able to control the stone’s power.

But who was he? Where had he come from? His work on Earth, the murders and the pain that had brought him into existence ... Xyosis could feel all that undone by these elemental powers. If they were gone, who then was he?

The Doctor glared at Xyosis, his own mind no less confused. The awesome pressure of the stone was drowning out his memories. He could barely remember who this man was. Through the scrambled fog, he remembered something evil about this golden-skinned, glowing chap. Hadn't he planned to bring him here for a reason? He was sure that taking that robed figure to wherever they were was part of his ploy.

"Your stop, isn't it?" the Doctor said dumbly. He looked over at the stone hovering in mid-air, curiously calm amid its ravaging of his mind. "That shouldn't be in here," he mumbled, batting it through the doorway like some stray rubbish. "How untidy."

Filled with thoughts of his oncoming universe-spanning power, Xyosis dived through the doorway after it.

The Doctor peered through the doorway but all he could see was the golden glare. Xyosis wasn't even visible amid its blazing light.

"Where am I? Shouldn't be here." He touched his closely cropped scalp, relieved. "Pain in my head gone. Best be on my way then." He went over to the console, scratching his head in bewilderment. "Wasn't I supposed to be going somewhere? To pick up Susan, was it? No, no, not that. I made a promise to someone." He started rambling as he belatedly remembered to shut the doors, leaving Xyosis forever stranded millions of years in this future on a boiling planet which no one knew about. Out there on the roiling surface of the new world, Eosis, Xyosis was communing with the stone, his mania so intense he didn't even notice his only escape vanish.

As the doors groaned shut, the Doctor tutted. "Poor old girl, you sound ill. Now what was this promise, eh? It was important, made to someone special...what was her name? Liz?... Hannah?...Rachel, or didn't she go by Silver?... Oh, the names are confusing enough without the nicknames ...

"No, no. Come on, think! Doctor? No. How about Mortimer? Master? No, definitely not, but it began with "M" he was sure." Then he slapped his hand on his head.

"MAGGIE!" he shouted triumphantly. "I'm coming for you!"

He looked at the controls. "If only I could remember where the return switch was."

Every day Maggie visited Springfield Park. There was no hint of the evil ambience she had felt that day in July. The flowerbeds and landscape were back to their former glory, the house was a tea room as it was always supposed to be, and not a single mysterious murder had been reported along the River Lea.

For a while, she and Arty both had seen glimpses ... horrifying visions ... of the spreading cult of Xyosis, of more and more deaths, the influence spreading higher and dedicated to elevating a chosen few to a different realm ... but then they vanished, and reality asserted itself again. She knew, and tried to explain to the hapless detective, that this was probably their minds coping and interpreting the Doctor's battle against Xyosis, wherever and whenever that was happening. Or had happened, or will happen ... at that point the inspector tended to put his head in his hands and take her for a pint. It hardly helped that the only people who were sharing those fragmented visions were Chief Constable Alastair Truman and those deranged acolytes found in the park that day, all of whom were now committed and saying nothing but lunatic

declarations that they would rule the world and Xyosis would save them from their miserable fate.

A tall man dressed in black bumped into Maggie early on. Later, she found in her pocket an envelope with over three thousand pounds and an address. The man must have known something about the Doctor, so she looked out for him, but she never saw him again.

With some assistance from Detective Inspector Arthur Moorley, Maggie managed to get herself a job at a local store. The address the man gave her led to the house of a very friendly Jamaican family, themselves renting the house and probably not supposed to sub-let, but in need of extra income. They knew her name and were expecting her.

Onward 1978 went, with that cold grey giving way to summer heat as August flew by. Maggie remembered the 1970s in Canada, and they certainly seemed less grim than the times here in England. Not that this family let that bother them: they were nice people and insisted that she join them for meals. Sometimes she would look after the two young children while their parents took a night out at the Hackney Empire, a local entertainment venue where they had a variety of dance nights and theatre. Maggie was a frequent visitor there too. There was a rich mix of diverse cultures, something that many appeared not yet to accept or appreciate, and that sadly but inevitably some even felt threatened by. She saw Linda and her husband Colin there, and every time she was glad they didn't die horrible and alone. Though Linda still didn't get on with her mother, at least the old woman was still around, not tortured to near-death in the basement of Springfield House. In these moments and elsewhere, Maggie saw that community she could sense when she first arrived here, the one that was still striving to flourish in spite of those cult members and Xyosis and that presence underground. Mostly people were friendly, though inevitably some were hostile, and there seemed to be some gang activity that Maggie never really wrapped her head around, but she had learnt to keep out of trouble.

But though the days were filled, and though the Jamaican family and Arthur Moorley and the shopkeeper and everyone else did their best to include her and make her feel welcome, Maggie felt in her soul a restless yearning. She missed the Doctor, and often lay awake at night wondering what terrible fate might have fallen on him. The visions of the alternative future—the horror the Doctor must have glimpsed, that first brought him here—gradually grew less frequent and vivid, which convinced her he had won the day and defeated that energy source. But still he didn't come for her. Maybe she would spend the rest of her life here after all. Would she ever fully adjust? What would her family and cousin Larry, and Rebekah and Simon and all her other school friends in Revelstoke make of her sudden disappearance? Sometimes she felt she had let her friend down by leaving him to that awful fate; perhaps she should have gone with him and shared it, no matter the cost.

She remembered last year—to her, anyway, back in 1998—when, after that business with the Last Doctor and his seventh incarnation, he had gone away on that mysterious mission with that mysterious woman¹. He never talked much about it, but it seemed to have put years on him and increased his woes, even though it was behind him. That time, however, he seemed in control. This time, when she last saw him, he was on the edge, if not threatening to tumble right over. She remained hopeful. There wasn't just that time. She reminded herself that several times before, he had to leave her, but they always reunited. Therefore, it would happen again this time; after all, he always kept his promises.

¹ See *The Doctor Who Project* Season 45: *The Last Doctor* Part Two (All is True).

It had been over a month now and, as autumn beckoned, the leaves in Springfield Park were turning beautiful shades of red and brown. It was there, walking in the park one afternoon after work, looking at a cluster of trees that she thought she saw something come down from the sky. Funnily enough, the family had told her they would all be out extra-late, so she should take a long walk. What had they known?

But as she stood there, an object clearly resolved itself into Maggie's vision. Was it her imagination or was it a box-shaped thing? She hardly dared to hope, and blinked as she strained to see it.

Climbing over the low fence separating the thicket from the path, she saw a number of broken branches, still bearing clusters of autumnal leaves. Some distance away, the Hackney Rugby Club were having a particularly tense game. That was when she heard the unmistakable noise of the TARDIS materialising. Or rather trying to materialise. Its outline came and went several times, then there was an almighty shriek before it finally took on solid form.

Maggie looked around, and marvelled that no one—not the rugby players nor the visitors to the park—noticed its arrival. All those people who may not have been around but for the Doctor, and they wouldn't even know the truth.

But the TARDIS was just sitting there, under the shade of an oak tree. Those narrow blue doors swung open, inviting her in. Clearly something was very wrong. Maggie entered.

There was a deathly silence inside. The first thing she saw was the Doctor, spread out on the floor, motionless. His skin was slick with sweat, his handsome features drawn and bony as if he had not eaten for years. Maggie hurried over and knelt beside him. Not sure whether he was alive or dead, she tried to feel for a pulse. She put her ear up to his mouth and could just make out slow, laboured breaths. He was alive. But barely.

Maggie couldn't just watch him die but it was no use getting him to hospital – what would they know about Time Lord physiology? While he was alive there was hope. On the other hand he might die if she just left him like this. She thought back to how this had all started, with that mysterious vision he had while working on the telepathic circuits, and how he had now risked his life without hesitation, for the sake of others. Surely there was something she could do for her friend in return?

The telepathic circuits.

What was that he had said about it? In an emergency it would hand decisions over to the TARDIS—or something like that. It was worth a try, there was nothing else left. She had no idea what she would be letting herself into, but what choice did she have? She couldn't just leave the Doctor in this state.

Maggie grabbed the circuits, still dangling from the panel underneath the console. She hadn't prayed since she was a girl, and even then never the three times a day her more devout relatives and the Rabbi encouraged. Even her parents, though less observant, would chide her for her lack of faith and her occasional cynicism. But now, Maggie felt that faith strongly: whatever presence there was in the heart of this strange alien craft, she would help her oldest friend.

As if in answer, the time rotor in the middle of the control console moved up and down. Maggie had to steady herself as the ship lurched to one side, its motors screaming.

Flung to the floor from the take-off, Maggie crawled across to check on the Doctor. Already there seemed to be some effect. He seemed calmer, his breathing less laboured. He muttered something, but Maggie couldn't understand. Maybe the TARDIS was taking them to a Time Lord hospital, if such a thing existed? Then again, the Doctor was currently on very bad

terms with his people, so Maggie wasn't sure if landing him among them might constitute a fate worse than death.

After what seemed like an age, the ship stopped lurching as it made its strained effort to materialise. The doors opened and Maggie looked out to see where they were.

The sight was astonishing. There seemed to be no solid forms, but a kaleidoscope of colours delicately swirling around like wisps of smoke, gently spreading out and entering the TARDIS, drifting gracefully. A great feeling of peace and calm washed over Maggie. It was like being by the sea, or that stillness she remembered from reaching the summit of Mount Begbie, but even more exhilarating and restful.

To her amazement, she heard the Doctor's voice behind her. "We must be on the Star of Anakainoo. Best place to be for renewal of the mind."

She looked behind her, and saw him stretching out and bounding across the control room as if ready to run a marathon.

"Doctor, are you all right?" Maggie asked with delight. "I didn't think the TARDIS would hold out. Something is seriously wrong with her."

"I'm afraid she took a severe mental battering deep in her telepathic circuits, rather like me. That stone nearly finished us both off, but I'm glad to say it's neutralised now in a better habitat and won't be causing any more harm. What's more, I tricked Xyosis into believing that from there he would be able to use the stone to teleport anywhere in the universe. Instead, I left him powerless and stranded on a remote and desolate planet he can never leave." He inhaled deeply and pleurably, and let it out again. "And England? Back to normal?"

"I'll say," Maggie replied. "The murders never happened. Only the Chief Constable and the cult-members remembered ... and Arty and me ..."

The Doctor sighed in relief. "Then it's all over." They turned to take in the colourful swirling gases around them. Already they both felt invigorated.

"This is just the place we need to be for restoration," Maggie suggested.

"You can say that again! In fact, it's the most healing place in the cosmos. Thanks to its metaphasic properties, it even gives the Eye of Orion a run for its money." He looked directly into Maggie's eyes. "All I could do was think of getting back to you, Maggie. It kept me going, through the worst of the agony, the shredding of my consciousness. You saved my life."

Maggie looked out at the vista enveloping them, the cavalcade of sensation and colour. Even breathing in rushed her synapses with stimulation. "This place ... it's incredible. It feels incredible."

"I'm glad you like it. We may have to stay quite a while to completely recover."

"I think it's time we both took a holiday." Maggie winked. "Doctor's orders."

EPILOGUE: THE ARCHITECT'S SON

Springfield House, A Sunday in late May 1843

Peter Simmons was enjoying tea on the veranda of his house. His wife was staying with her sister for the weekend, and he had the place to himself. At such times, he often let his mind wander. Today he regretted it.

A tall man was strolling about the grounds, as casually as if he owned them. He drank his tea indignantly and tramped down the hill after the man. Only one man he had ever seen had been that impertinent.

“Smith! Mister Smith! Is that you?”

He was now nearly upon the man, and grabbed his shoulders and whirled him around. Then he started back in embarrassment. The man looked nothing like the young, long-haired fellow who had come and gone from his life twenty-three years ago. And yet ... in his eyes there was some flicker of recognition. They could not be the same man—this man was taller and older, with a beard and hair of vivid ginger. Instead of the neat but vaguely anachronistic clothing Smith had worn, this man wore a shambling fur-fringed coat and loose, casual garb. But something about him made Simmons start at the familiarity. This struck him as odd, since he had never seen anyone remotely like this man before in his life.

“Oh, no,” he chuckled. “Though he would be flattered you remembered him. Think of me as ... a relation of his.”

“Oh?” Despite himself, Simmons assumed the vague vestiges of politeness. “How is he anyway?”

“Very well. He did get his doctorate, just so you know.”

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

He chuckled. “Just making sure everything’s satisfactory. You are enjoying Springfield House, aren’t you Mister Simmons?”

Simmons gasped, startled that the absent-minded man had known his name all this time, enough to tell his younger sibling about him. In response, he said, frankly, “Yes, yes it’s lovely. I’m so happy I was able to build it here.”

“No bad feelings? No sensations of dread when you venture downstairs to fetch a bottle of wine?”

“No.” Simmons frowned.

“Jolly good. Well, it has been nice to see you again.”

Peter smiled at the man as he went on his way. “It’s nice of you to check in on me.”

“Of course. The universe won’t look after itself, you know.” He reached into his fur-fringed coat pocket and checked a pocket watch inside, tutting. “Do excuse me, Pete me old mate. Must be on my way. King Arthur won’t let me stay away for long! Have a nice life, old chap!”

Peter Simmons sighed as the man disappeared over the brow of the hill. Why did people have to be so strange?

NEXT WEEK ON
THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT

COFFEE, CROISSANTS AND COSMIC CHAOS



Having foreseen disaster in a terrifying vision, the Doctor diverts his course and lands in East London, determined to prevent a catastrophe. But what is the source behind the pervading sense of uneasiness which can be felt everywhere? Who are the mysterious monks standing discretely at street corners? And why are so many deaths being dismissed as tragic accidents? As the Doctor heads for the morgue, Maggie walks right into the heart of danger where she sees an evil entity manifesting.

This is another story in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Eleventh Doctor as played by Winston Adderly



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