

# THE EVOLUTION MACHINE

ONE

**Little Sarfield: 23. November, 2003**

**17:30**

The house itself seemed as old as time, carved straight out of shadows rather than good honest bricks and mortar. It sat and brooded in its grounds, acres of trees and neatly trimmed grass, the occasional flower-bed breaking up the stark lines. The village lay miles down below it, protected by the valley walls, and the moon watched down from on high. The only thing even vaguely near it was the caretaker's cottage, and that sat down by the lane to the village, lit warmly from within, hidden behind the trees. The only thing that lit the house was the light of the pale moon above. It made it look sick and insubstantial.

The trees huddled close by it at either side – oaks, willows, large bushes – yet none managed to bring themselves to touch the earth red bricks.

Only a braver patch of ivy had managed to claim a hold, clinging desperately to the wall by the porch, fighting to urge to let go, to escape and never be troubled by the house's dark grasp again. Even the grass couldn't bring itself near to the house's feet, leaving a moat of bare earth running all round the roots.

Three chimneys broke the immaculate tiled roof, standing firm and proud, but no smoke issued from any of them. A multitude of close-grouped, arch-framed windows faced out, but no light burned from within them. The house looked dead, and empty.

But, perched on the watch tower rising out of the centre of the house, sat a single black raven. Its jet eyes rolled slowly over the grounds, taking in the ornamental water garden, the small family crypt, the oaks standing guard at the edge of the grounds, even the diffuse glow of the village down below, settling in for another long winter night. With barely a turn of the head, it took all of that in, impassive. Then, in a sudden burst of feathers, it threw wide its wings and let out a short croaking laugh, before soaring away into the night.

As if this was the signal it had been waiting for, the rain started.

Once the light faded, he found himself alone in the cellar.

He could feel cold stone beneath his skin. This wasn't something to worry about. He was naked, and colder than he should be, but this wasn't something to worry about either. It wasn't cold enough to kill him, so he could live with it. He could see the brilliance of the light burnt onto his retinas, leaving the cellar a collection of vague red misshapes, but that wasn't

something to worry about. His eyes would clear, given time, and grow accustomed to the gloom. He couldn't remember his name. That was something to worry about. A name was important, it was the most basic building block of a personality. Without his name, he had no idea who or what he was.

He tested his memory carefully. It wasn't all gone. He knew, for example, that he was in the cellar. He knew that if he climbed the stairs in the corner, he would find himself in the hallway. The hallway of what, he wasn't quite sure, but that would come later. He wondered vaguely if he would find the door at the top of the stairs locked, whether he was being deliberately kept prisoner. He felt his hearts quicken at the idea, and found himself looking around this way and that for a trace of a uniform, not even knowing why. When he saw he was alone, his hearts slowed. But the idea remained.

Perhaps he had fallen. The amnesia could be the result of concussion. He had been coming down to the cellar to . . . to . . . He couldn't think of any reason why he'd be exploring the cellar naked, but he supposed that might come. He checked his head gingerly for injuries. Nothing, except a fine head of dark, wiry hair. So it wasn't that. Still, the idea that he had hurt himself remained, strong enough for him to check his chest for scars. Nothing.

His eyes cleared, giving him a vague view of the cellar. Stairs in the corner – he realised now that he'd known they were there long before he could see them. Red brick walls either side of him, the last wall hidden in the darkness. A single thick lead pipe running the length of the cellar, similarly disappearing once it reached the boundary of the light. Four windows, facing up into the night sky, covered in tiny rivers of rain water, water dripping down

and away to who knew where.

He still couldn't remember his name.

Outside, the gentle falling rain patterned the thick glass of the windows, and filled the cellar with a gentle drumming sound. He listened to it, letting it calm him. His pulse slowed, his breathing practically stopped. His crystal green eyes flicked this way and that. Through the window he caught sight of a dark bird on the wing, flying across the face of the moon. It sent a shiver down his spine. From somewhere, his mind dug up the name of the bird: a raven. He tried to make it dig up his own name from a similar place, but it wouldn't. Or couldn't.

There was nothing else for it. He brought himself to his feet, ignoring the gritty feel of the stone beneath his feet. He made for the steps, not hesitating, not afraid. Now his eyes were cleared, he could see a small crack of light creeping in where the door didn't quite fill the frame. He had spent too long in the dark – it was time to go. Putting a hand on the single banister, he climbed steadily up the stairs.

The journey to discovery starts with a single step.

A single gold coin dropped through the air, reflecting the candle light before it clinked to the table top with its two twins.

'Deal,' Wagner said, his deep voice filling the small room.

The sound of the rain echoed around the station as it hammered into the flat roof above them. Somewhere in the corner, the water leaked through

into a bucket: the station wasn't built to last, and no-one could be bothered with keeping it repaired. It was little more than a shed out by the level crossing anyway – most of the people driving through on their way to the city assumed it was the guard's hut. But it was the nerve centre of the Little Sarfield Constabulary, the one remaining officer of which was the grey haired guy dealing the cards at the other end of the table, a cigarette drooping from one side of his mouth.

'You have to take this so serious, Steve?' the Sarge said, fifteen cards shooting from his fingers faster than it took Wagner to take a chug on his beer.

'We should consider ourselves fortunate he decided to bring this game over from Las Vegas for us, yes?' Lars smiled, taking a sip of his neat vodka as he picked up his cards.

Wagner smiled, and inwardly regretted asking if they'd ever heard of poker over here when he'd first met the Sarge and Lars. They were good guys, and had taken him to their hearts over the last few months, but dear Lord they could rib a guy till he bled. He'd assumed it was the famous "British sense of humour" that he'd heard so much about, until he found out that Lars was from some place else, over on mainland Europe. Not that he ever said *that* out loud – the Sarge tended to get upset if you suggested that Britain was just some small island principality of Europe. He was just starting to learn the boundaries of his new friends that way.

'I'll take two,' he said, trying to keep his voice level. Three picture cards waved up at him, all of them hearts.

Lars nodded, and tossed down three cards without a word. His blond

hair was swept neatly back out of his eyes, leaving his green eyes free to sparkle in the candle light. His face didn't betray the slightest sign of what he held in his hand. As usual. The Sarge's face too was set and firm, his eyes alive despite – or most likely because of – the years etched on to his face. Which meant that he had nothing and was planning to either burn or bluff. The Sarge, lord love him, always got a twitch in the corner of his eye when he had a good hand. He just couldn't lie, which could've been why he was a cop. He'd never make it as a crook, anyway.

'Well I'm having two,' said the Sarge, as his eye started twitching.

Wagner threw Lars a quick grin, and the European threw down his cards. Wagner, however, kept hold of his and took another swig of his beer. A Bud. Not as good as you got at home, but still better than the sludge that passed for beer over here. He looked down at his cards. As well as the royalty smiling up at him, there was a nine and a ten of hearts smiling beside them. He settled in his seat, trying not to look too smug, or too rushed. Feed them the line, then reel them in.

'You in or not, Steve?' the Sarge asked.

'You got a reason for trying to rush me, Sarge?' Wagner asked back, his white teeth showing against his ebony skin.

'Worried about getting back to your work, I'll bet,' Lars said.

To high-light his point, he waved a hand around the office. It was practically empty, the computer on the desk turned off and covered with a sheet, the three chairs dragged around the coffee table for the game. They never got put back, and no-one ever complained. The station was a relay point for the bigger one in the city: anything bigger than a kitten in a tree got



dealt with up there. The Sarge was only here to work out his retirement, then they'd close the shack down. It was a common joke, and Wagner got the feeling that the Sarge was quite pleased his life had grown so quiet.

'When're they gonna replace you with a computer anyway?' Wagner said, throwing in three pound coins. Lars arched an eyebrow, but said nothing.

'As soon as they can find a computer that'll work for less than me,' he answered, chewing on the tip of his cigarette.

'No chance,' said Wagner. 'Computers got a better union.'

'You owe us a refund,' Lars said, picking an imaginary piece of fluff from his pastel blue suit. Man with a suit that good could afford to lose a bit of dough. 'We've got one of your computers at the Manor. We can't even make it turn on.'

'Not my department,' said Wagner. 'I only design them. They make them down in London.'

Casually placing his cards on the tabletop, the Sarge reached over to the telephone and picked it up.

'Who're you calling?' asked Wagner.

Putting his hand over the receiver, the Sarge said:

'Fawney Rig. I thought I'd better report that Lars had let something slip about the place. Prob'ly a breach of the official secrets act, or something.'

'Ha ha,' said Lars.

'No, I think he's got a point. The law's there to be upheld.'

'Hello? Is that Fawney Rig? It's Sergeant Murphy here - I'm afraid I've got to report one of your staff. Yes, he actually mentioned something that

goes on up there. Okay, right. Thank you.'

The Sarge put down the telephone and picked up his cards. With a single definite motion, he managed to throw in five pounds and stub his cigarette out in the ashtray at his elbow. Thunder rumbled in the distance, or . . . no, it was a train approaching. The six o'clock, bang on time. She'd be rattling the glasses on her way to the city in a couple of minutes.

'Well?' asked Wagner.

'They say I'm to shoot him immediately,' smiled the Sarge. 'Sorry, Lars. Nothing personal.'

'Only way you'll win tonight is if you *do* shoot me,' smiled Lars.

Outside, the rumble of the train got louder. Without a word, everyone reached down for their drinks. Even the Sarge's heavy coffee cup had to be steadied with a reassuring hand.

'I don't know how you put up with that,' Lars complained. 'You ought to get them to move you.'

'Nah,' smiled Wagner. 'If he does that, they'll remember he works for them and sack him.'

'You could be right,' agreed Lars.

That was when Wagner glanced over at the Sarge. He was sitting in his chair, his jaw almost on the floor, dark brown eyes staring straight ahead. His cards had fallen to the table: despite himself, Wagner noticed that he would have beaten him, again.

'Sarge?'

'Oh my God,' said the Sarge.

Wagner wondered what was going on. The rumbling outside was even louder now - he thought for a brief moment that it must be an earthquake, until he remembered they didn't have them in Britain. Then he turned around, and saw. For a moment, all three of them sat staring out of the window at where the village should have been. Instead of the familiar view, all they could see was the giant blue side of a British Rail train.

The Sarge was the first to move.

'Something must be wrong,' he said, pulling on his jacket and heading to the door.

'Is there anything we can do?' Wagner asked.

'You've got a car, haven't you?' Wagner nodded. 'Stay nearby, then. I might need you to fetch the doctor.'

'Right,' he said, but the Sarge had already gone.

Wagner and Lars looked at each other in silence and hurried after him.

The train had stopped just at the level-crossing, leaving the barriers down and the lights flashing wildly. It looked alright – no broken windows, no missing parts – but Wagner knew something was wrong. He'd been in the village three months now, and he knew damned well the trains didn't stop here. Sophie always complained that she felt cut off here – she couldn't drive the car and the buses were once a fortnight. So there must be some good reason for this one stopping now. He felt sure that nothing trivial would delay British Rail.

'What d'you mean no-one's hurt?' the Sarge was shouting up at the driver when Wagner and Lars arrived. He got there a good ten yards ahead of

them: despite his age, the old coot must be in good shape. He was certainly a threatening enough presence to get the driver on edge. Perhaps it was the uniform, but more likely it was the fire in his eyes.

‘Everyone’s fine, officer,’ the driver stammered, a little kid who didn’t look old enough to be out of short pants. ‘We’re just letting off a passenger.’

Wagner reached the Sarge’s side, and realised Lars wasn’t with him. Looking over his shoulder, he could see his neat silhouette hanging back, assessing the situation from a distance. The Sarge didn’t care, he was wading straight in.

‘This isn’t a passenger stop,’ he snapped, disbelieving.

‘Which is why it’s so nice of them to let me off,’ said a voice from beside them.

Wagner and the Sergeant spun around to see a woman hopping down from the carriage behind the engine, her long black leather coat flapping out behind her like a pair of wings. As she bent down to snatch up the blue denim rucksack at her feet, a dark shape leapt down behind her, landing sure-footed before it started to wind itself around the dark woman’s feet. Her hair was pulled into a pony-tail, but her eyes were hidden behind a pair of mirrored shades, despite the darkness of the evening. As the rain dropped all around them, the three men all struggled to find something to say.

‘Thank you,’ the dark woman said to the driver, his face beetroot red. ‘When do you come back this way?’

‘Not till Monday,’ the driver managed to stutter.

‘Right, I’ll see you then,’ she smiled. ‘Come on, Wolsey.’

Wagner knew cats – Sophie had had them for years, all of her life probably, so he'd been forced to live with them for the last five years. And he knew you couldn't train a cat. But this one just trotted calmly behind the woman, pausing only to scowl at Lars. As the woman got closer, Wagner could see she had a badge pinned to her lapel: a hammer and sickle. It looked authentic. She smiled at Wagner, and he found himself trying to remember Sophie's pale face.

'I wonder if you could help me,' she said, softly.

'Glad to be of service, miss . . . ?' Wagner smiled hopefully.

'Dorothea,' she said. 'Dorothea McShane. Pleased to meet you.'

Wagner reached out his own hand and shook. The woman . . . Dorothea had a surprisingly firm grip for such a . . . young woman. Her own slender hand nearly crushed Wagner's giant slabs of meat, which was no mean feat.

'Stevie Wagner,' he said, smiling all over his dumb face. 'This is Sarge Murphy and Lars . . . hell, Lars. What is your last name?'

'Something amazingly foreign and unpronounceable,' smiled Lars, shaking the proffered hand. 'Pleased to meet you.'

'Likewise,' smiled Dorothea politely. 'This is Wolsey.'

The cat regarded them all with cold eyes, and Wagner felt worryingly as if he was being sized up for dinner.

'Miss McShane?' the Sarge said diplomatically.

'Sergeant Murphy?'

'You wanted to come to Little Sarfield?' he sounded a little amazed.

'I'm here, aren't I?'

'Well, yes, it's just . . . well, forgive me if I sound a little confused, Miss McShane -'

Dorothea held up a hand: 'Dorothea, please.'

'Dorothea,' continued the Sarge seamlessly. 'You'll have to forgive me, but this is the first time that train's stopped here in twenty years. So I'm sure you won't mind if I ask you what brings you to the village.'

The young woman looked the Sarge up and down for a moment, her eyes hidden behind those mirrored lenses. Wagner wondered briefly what she was trying to hide.

'I'm looking for a place called Fawney Rig. Heard of it?'

Wagner couldn't be sure, but he thought he saw Lars go pale.

'I've heard of it,' said the Sarge, cautiously.

'Is there anywhere around here I can get a taxi?'

'I'm afraid not,' Lars piped up. 'The nearest taxi rank's in the city. Ten miles that way.'

'Ah, right.'

'There's a telephone at the station you can use to give them a ring, if you want,' the Sarge offered.

'Okay, yeah. Thanks.'

'This way, then.'

Like some kind of butler, the Sarge stretched out an arm and Dorothea strode off towards the dull light of the station. Behind them, the lights of the village shone bright. Wagner moved to follow them, but Lars put a firm hand

on his shoulder and whispered:

‘Who the hell is she?’

‘How should I know?’ Wagner grinned. ‘Perhaps she’s who they’ve sent to shoot you.’

Lars scowled.

‘Did you see that badge? D’you think she’s Russian?’

‘Jesus, I thought it was my lot that were supposed to be hung up on the Russians.’

‘But she could be?’

‘Dorothea’s French, isn’t it? Besides, there isn’t a Russia any more. Come on, Lars.’

Wagner moved off after the two dark figures, leaving Lars staring after them, barely even noticing the rain.

As soon as he left the cellar, the urge to explore came over him in a wave.

The first room he found himself in was the kitchen. It looked as if it could have easily serviced an entire restaurant full of hungry people, the large black range sulking in the corner covered with a series of stains that gave testament to heavy usage. The floor was covered with dark ceramic tiles which were scrupulously clean, but chilled the bare soles of his feet. Although it was well stocked with utensils and appliances and food, it contained no clues as to his identity. Nor did it contain any clothes, so he left it without

further exploration.

Deciding that, logically, the best place to find clean clothes would be in a bedroom, he headed upstairs. But even his journey to the staircase wasn't without excitement. Passing through the dining room, he found himself standing outside the library. Inside, there were shelf after shelf filled with perhaps millions of leather bound volumes. Just a quick look wouldn't hurt, he decided.

He wandered over to a leather topped reading desk and flicked on the small reading lamp that rested there. Sitting in the centre of the pool of weak light was a fresh looking red leather bound book. It was held shut by a heavy golden clasp, but luckily it wasn't a lock. In bold type, the first page read **500 YEAR DIARY**. Turning the page, he found a single entry made in a tight, mathematical looking handwriting.

*Today, it read. Wish I had more time to write a diary.*

The rest of the diary was empty.

Moving upstairs was just as confusing. The first room he found was one of the bedrooms, complete with large four poster bed - fully made up - wardrobe, dressing table and teasmade. Flicking on a light - more to see if the electricity was working than because he needed it - he looked around. That was when he found the strange thing.

Lying on the bed, neatly pressed and in pristine condition, were his clothes.

They looked like they had been laid out by a butler, but he hadn't met anybody else on his travels. They also looked like they were his size, but he was sure they weren't his. They also suited his tastes - smart, yet practical.



They were also obviously needed, and he was sure he wasn't the sort of person to let a mystery get between him and a decent tailor, so he pulled them on.

Then he noticed the full length mirror on the far wall, and realised he hadn't a clue what he looked like. Not just in the suit, but his face as well. He strode over, and examined himself.

Something about the whole outfit felt right. Whether it was the shirt and tie, or the tweed jacket he felt he couldn't be sure. The red waistcoat gave him a moment's discomfort – he felt sure it should be a little more . . . distinctive – but in the end, he decided that it would do. But no matter how it looked, it felt incomplete. Something was missing. Then he noticed the pale Panama hat resting on the corner of the mirror and put it on. Resting underneath that, an umbrella with a question mark handle. He held it in his hand and looked back in the mirror. At last, everything felt right.

Then he let his eyes leave the clothing, and brought them cautiously up to the face.

He felt almost relieved when he saw it. Dark hair poking out over the ears, expressive eyebrows, thin laughter lines around the eyes. He realised he'd been anxious that he wouldn't recognise himself – because of the memory loss? No, that didn't seem right – but now he did, and that was fine. He realised he expected the eyes to be yellow – was that strange? – but they were a cool slate grey. Either way, the face failed to suggest a name to him.

Turning away from the mirror, he decided to continue his exploration.

Roaming around the top floor, he discovered two more bedrooms, an empty box room, and what looked rather like an office. It had a single tall

window at one end, and sat in front of that was an old Edwardian writing desk with the most bizarre contraption sitting on top of it. It looked rather like somebody had tried to create a computer out of general assorted bric-a-brac, and they had succeeded quite well. It had all the distinguishing features, anyway: keyboard, monitor, disk drives. It even had what he assumed to be a modem, hooked up to an old fashioned stick telephone.

Sitting on its own table next to the desk was an ancient and ornate chess set, set up for the beginning of a game. He looked at it carefully, admiring the craftsmanship of the individual figure: he could almost recognise the one-eyed white king in the broad brimmed hat, and the individual feathers on his bishops - not the traditional horses, but here two white ravens - looked as if they were ready to ruffle in a breeze. It almost invited him to make the opening move, but instead he wandered away: he'd been struck by the feeling that chess wasn't really his game.

But that wasn't what really interested him. He was captivated by the bookshelves that ran all around the room, leaving little room for an easy chair, a standard lamp, a coat-stand and the chess set. Here were the books that had overflowed out of the library downstairs, the reference books that were used on a more regular basis: he ran a finger along their spines, reading. A dusty leather bound tome called **THE PAGINARUM FULVARUM**, with another beside it entitled **SAEMUND'S EDDA** and a whole series of similar titles, the last of which was called **HEMMING'S EDDA**. Beside them was a large red book that had the words **ANCIENT LAW OF GALLIFREY** engraved on the front of it. He didn't like the way that felt in his hand, so he pushed it back onto the shelf.

There were enough books in this house to keep him in bedtime reading for the rest of his life. He briefly wondered whether they were his, or whether they and the house belonged to somebody else. He decided to cross that bridge when he came to it. For now, he still needed to find his name. Perhaps one of the books here would tell him, or remind him, or something. If he could find another diary, that should tell him, assuming that it was his, of course.

Sitting himself down at the table, he cleared himself a space and lit the candles he found there. As the small flames flickered and danced, he began to read.

‘Raise five,’ Wagner said. Nobody else spoke.

It had been Dorothea’s idea. Just a quick game of stud before she went on her way. Wagner didn’t mind – he had plenty of time before he had to be back with Sophie – and neither had the Sarge. Lars, however, had made his excuses and left quickly. He’d been spooked ever since she’d asked about Fawney Rig – lord, she was probably just a tourist or something. Wasn’t it some kind of old house or some such? Still, Lars had left, and now Wagner was sitting on a pair of fives. What the hell had he been thinking?

‘Too rich for my blood,’ the Sarge said, dropping his cards and picking up his cigarettes. The air filled with blue smoke as Dorothea casually regarded her cards.

‘So,’ the Sarge said, shaking out his match, ‘Dorothea’s French, right?’

‘Only in name,’ she smiled, her eyes still hidden behind those shades.

If Wagner could see her eyes, he'd know if she was bluffing. 'I spent a lot of time in France, and I thought it sounded better than Dorothy.'

'Dorothy?' Wagner asked, playing for time. He needed to know if she had a decent hand, or if she'd drop.

'My mother had a Judy Garland fetish,' she answered, dropping seven pound coins onto the table. Damn.

At the start of the game, Wagner had thought he'd be able to bluff her out of the game – after all, she was on foreign turf, she wouldn't know the signs. Now he was hoping he could just raise the stakes until she could afford any more. Trouble was, every time he put in, she followed right behind, pulling out another few pounds from God knows how much in her jacket pockets. He'd already gone in to the tune of fifty pounds – any more and he wouldn't be able to take Sophie out this week, which would go down well. She had to have something good – three of a kind or worse. And what made it all the more unbearable was that her cat was sitting right behind him, eyes on his back. It was starting to unnerve him. Only one way to go:

'Raise three,' he said, dropping a ten pound note onto the table.

'So where do you come from?' the Sarge asked, concentrating on his coffee cup.

'Perivale, originally,' she said, and all Wagner could see was his own reflection staring back at him.

The sergeant put his cup down, caught the woman's eye. Wagner could feel the tension in the little room rise. He'd never seen Murphy having to deal with anything more threatening than a hose-pipe ban, but he suddenly realised why he was the only cop in the village. They didn't need any others.

But Dorothea met his gaze easily, brown eyes appearing from behind the mirrored lenses.

‘You be staying here long, Miss McShane?’

There was a moments silence, then Dorothea smiled disarmingly, turning back to the game. With a quick flick of the wrist, her eyes were covered again and a twenty pound note sat on the table.

‘I’m just passing through, sergeant. No trouble, promise,’ and to Wagner: ‘Raise ten.’

It was no good. No-one bet like that without a good hand. No pauses, no twitches, no doubts. He could shovel a hundred pounds into the pot, she still wouldn’t sweat. Either that, or she was loaded, but he couldn’t afford to find out. He dropped his cards on the table, and motioned for Dorothea to take the pot. She didn’t move, and the Sarge started to chuckle.

‘What?’ Wagner asked.

‘She’s bluffing,’ snorted the Sarge, as Dorothea’s cards hit the table top. Nothing but ace high.

He stared at the cards for a moment, then started to laugh himself. He had been stitched up like a freshman. Behind him, he could hear her cat starting to purr softly. Dorothea smiled back at him, and he had to take a last pull on his beer to stop himself from saying something stupid.

‘You not taking that?’ the Sarge asked.

‘I’ve got a better idea,’ Dorothea answered, still smiling.

TWO

*“If caught in a no-win situation, remember to smile. If nothing else,  
this never fails to annoy your opposition.”*

UNIT Procedures Manual,

Broadsword Division.

**Little Sarfield: 23. November 2003**

**18:04**

The guard stood at his post, the first line of defence against the enemy.

His uniform was damp - as was he - but the holster at his hip kept his service revolver in pristine condition, ready. He wasn't sure what went on inside the Manor - who was? - but he knew it was vital to national security. He

knew it was something the enemy would love to get their hands on, or at the very least sabotage. It had to be important, otherwise he wouldn't be needed to guard it. The logic was inescapable.

It was thoughts like that that kept him going through the long, cold graveyard shift.

The guard post was in the ideal position, nearly at the crest of the hill on which the Manor was built. It offered a clear view of the only road up to the Manor, and also of the fields that lined the route up. Admittedly almost the entire left-hand side was masked by the woods - thick and dense greenery - but anybody trying to sneak up that way was in for a surprise. They'd soon find their way blocked by an eight foot high, barbed wire topped electric fence. No, the only way into Fawney Rig was through the gate, and the only way to the gate was through him.

If he had looked behind him, he would have seen the Georgian splendour of Fawney Rig rising up out of the grounds. It looked rather like a large brickwork box, lined with blank eyed windows and crawling with ivy. A long line of pale marble steps led up to a pair of hefty wooden doors, behind which sat another guard on a similar duty. But he didn't look behind him.

If he had looked to his right, he might have seen the village through the rain. He would have seen the scar of the railway line cutting the shortest route from Derby to the city. He would have seen the hundred tiny points of light that marked out the residential areas, or the dark cluster away from them that was the gothic structure everyone in the village called the house. But he didn't look right.

If he had looked to his left, he might have seen the fence ripple under



some force, or have seen the hint of movement in the dark green shadows. But he didn't look left. His eyes were on the pair of headlights making the journey up from the village.

The guard's hand slipped down to his holster, checking the revolver. He worked out that he had about a minute before the car got close enough for him to recognise it, if he could. A slim finger flipped off the safety catch. He knew the only person who could possibly be coming up to the Manor was the Listener, and he wasn't supposed to return until the morning. Unless he had discovered something important. Either way, it looked like it was going to be an interesting night.

The guard drew his revolver, and checked the rounds once again.

Wagner turned off the radio and tried to keep his eyes on the road. It wasn't easy. At first it had seemed like a fair deal: he'd give her a lift, he'd get to keep the money he'd lost to her. Now he found himself in the small car with nothing but her and the open road to look at, he was so sure. He'd quickly come up with a plan for staying out of trouble: it involved mostly ignoring his passenger, in particular the frighteningly pleasingly way her jacket fell open as she leant back in the seat, and especially how thin her T-shirt was. She was too busy watching the countryside roll by to notice. He hoped.

'Are you sure your cat will be okay?' he asked. She'd left it behind at the station, and it had bolted off into the undergrowth after dinner no doubt. He didn't know how she expected to catch up with again. In his experience, cats rarely came when you called.

‘Wolsey?’ she said, her glasses reflecting the trees as they rolled by.  
‘He’ll be fine. This sort of thing bores him.’

At least she had one mark against her then – she was one of those kooks who gave their pets human emotions. Like Sophie.

‘Tell me about Fawney Rig,’ she asked, seemingly casual.

He shrugged.

‘It’s just some government place up on the moors. Been there forever, longer than I have anyway,’ he grinned, taking his eyes from the road for a moment. ‘Name’s meant to be some sort of joke. Don’t get it myself. Must be a British thing.’

‘I don’t think so,’ she said, smiling back. ‘You’ve only just moved here, then?’

‘Moved here couple of months back, with my wife,’ he showed the band of gold on his finger. Dorothea nodded approvingly. ‘They call me the outsider. Least, I hope that’s *all* they call me.’

She laughed, a soft and gentle thing that he tried to make remind him of Sophie. It didn’t, though.

‘Reminds me of home. Where’d you move from?’

‘Can’t you tell? I’m from the good old US of A. Kansas.’

‘You mean you moved from America to here?’

‘Well, this sure ain’t Kansas, Toto,’ he grinned. She looked at him quizzically: ‘You’re mother wasn’t the only one who liked the Wizard of Oz.’

‘Oh, right. I’ve never seen it. What brought you here, then?’

‘Work, at first. My company got a contract with your government, and

they needed someone to liase,' he noticed the bewildered look on her face, and definitely didn't find it endearing. 'We make computers - I design them. IE? Heard of us?'

'Sorry,' she said, shaking her head, 'I've been out of touch for a while.'

'Yeah, well we were bigger in the seventies,' he conceded, throwing the car around a tight country lane. Dorothea barely even moved in her seat. 'Anyway, that was how I met Sophie, and it was her who persuaded me to stay here.'

'She sounds nice,' Dorothea said kindly.

'She is,' Wagner replied. 'She is.'

Wagner returned his concentration to the road, watching fields and bushes and trees a shoot by. You never really got roads like this in Kansas, not unless you really went out into the wilds, anyway. He remembered the first time he'd taken Sophie for a drive in the country - she'd been damn near petrified at the way he drove. He looked across at Dorothea - he couldn't imagine her being scared by anything.

'What about you?' he asked. 'What's your story.'

'Nothing exciting,' she said, eyes on the road. She could probably make out the Manor by now. 'Lived in London, went travelling, grew up, came home. Nothing special.'

'Nothing special?' Wagner laughed, loud and bass. 'The only travelling I did when I was young was to high school and back again.'

'Before you came here.'

'Before I came here,' he agreed. 'Where did you go?'

She smiled again, as if he'd said something really funny then. He couldn't help smiling back.

'What?' he said.

'Nothing, it's just it's probably easier to tell you where I didn't go.'

'Okay, where didn't you go?'

She lowered her shades, fixed him with those deep chestnut eyes of hers, flicked her hair out of her face and smiled.

'Kansas,' she deadpanned.

Wagner laughed so much he nearly had them both in a ditch. He didn't know why - it wasn't even that funny. Oh God, I'm sorry Sophie.

'Damn,' he swore.

Thinking of Sophie had reminded him - he'd missed his curfew. He glanced at his watch. He wouldn't make it back until seven now. She'd be having kittens.

'What's up?'

'I told Sophie I'd be back by six,' he said.

'I'm sorry. Blame it on me.'

Somehow, Wagner couldn't see that one washing. Sorry I'm late, dear. I was driving around in the middle of nowhere with some beautiful young woman I've never met before. What's for dinner?

'Yeah,' he said, 'I will.'

Although you couldn't call him relaxed, the guard was at least no longer

as tense. As the car slowed for the gate, he paced over to the driver's side. He recognised the driver - hell, he'd recognised the number plate when the car was still two hundred yards away - but there was still the procedure to go through. After all, it could just be some cunning enemy trick.

The window wound down and the Listener glared at him.

'Open the gate,' he ordered.

'Your pass please, sir,' the guard said, unmoving.

The Listener reached into his pocket, and although he recognised him, the guard tensed. It was still possible he was reaching for a gun, if not very likely. He pulled out a pass and handed it to the guard. The photo matched the face, and the paperwork appeared to be in order. The guard handed it back.

'Thank you, sir.'

He hurried over to his guard post and began to open the gate. As the car slid through, it paused and the Listener leant out again, calling to the guard.

'Yes, sir?'

'There's a woman who's going to make it up here sometime, he said. 'Find out what she wants and get rid of her.'

'Yes, sir.'

And with that, Lars wound up his window and drove up to the Manor.

Half-way through his book, he stopped, one ear cocked to the ceiling.

He'd thought he'd heard something.

He looked around for the source of the noise, but could see nothing. The candle on the desk had burnt down into nearly nothing, the hot wax pooling in the bottom of the holder. Every now and then, a fresh spurt of wax would drip down into the pool below. It wasn't that. Over the other side of the room, the door swung back on its hinges in a slight breeze. It wasn't that either. He couldn't pin it down.

He tried to return to his book - a dusty volume about some children who found a universe of new worlds by walking into a wardrobe. There was something familiar about it - perhaps one of the names was his? For all he knew, he could have written it. For all he knew, the wardrobe in the bedroom could be the one from the story, and if he walked into it, he'd find himself in the land of Narnia.

It was no good - he couldn't concentrate. He really did feel like he could hear something. He paused, cocking his head to one side and straining. He could hear the rain patting down outside, could hear his hearts beating, the grass growing. He couldn't hear what was disturbing him, though.

With a sigh, he closed the book and went to try and discover the source of his unease. Five minutes later, he found himself standing in front of the wardrobe, trying to think of a good reason why he should open the door. He couldn't think of one, but he pulled it open and stepped inside anyway. Somehow, he'd expected it to be bigger.

Feeling somewhat foolish, he stepped out again. He still didn't feel right.

It was then that he realised that was the problem. The noise that had

disturbed him wasn't a noise at all: it was a thought, it was a feeling.

Something had shifted imperceptively in the fabric of the universe, and he had felt it. And he knew it was up to him to do something about it. He just wondered what it could be.

There was only one thing to do, he realised. He had to find out what was wrong. All he had to do now was to find a suitable vantage point. If he could see enough of the world, perhaps he'd see what was wrong with it.

His eyes fell on the ladder that led up to the watch tower.

Perfect, he thought, and began to climb.

The guard tensed as the strange car pulled up to the gate. His hand dropped to the holster, flicking the safety catch off. This would be the woman.

The car pulled to a stop just in front of him and, before he had a chance to move, the passenger door opened. Out stepped the first problem, the woman. She was tall and slim, quite muscular but she didn't look like she would be much trouble. Her long coat flapped in the breeze as she bent down to speak to the second problem - the driver: big black man. Looked like he could be trouble if he wanted to be.

'Thanks for the lift, Steve,' she said, her voice soft but firm. 'You'd better get back home and scrape your wife off the ceiling.'

The black man smiled - white teeth unnervingly bright against dark skin.

'You sure you'll be alright?' he asked.

'I'll be fine,' she said. 'Get home.'

'Won't you need a lift back? Somewhere to stay?' he seemed unwilling to leave. Perhaps he did mean trouble, and all this was just a show for his benefit.

'I've got somewhere to stay, and it's nearby,' she told him. The guard tensed on his gun. 'Go on.'

'Right,' he said nervously.

As the car pulled away, the woman strode over to the guard's hut. This was it, he thought. She was on her own now, her friend was steadily disappearing down the hill. He moved in front of the gate and tried to look immovable.

'Good morning,' she smiled.

'You shouldn't have told your friend to leave, Miss,' the guard said evenly. 'It's a long walk back to the village.'

'That's alright,' she replied cheerfully. 'I'm not going back to the village.'

The guard wondered momentarily what was in the bag that was slung over her shoulder.

'Can I ask what you want, Miss?'

'People to stop reminding me of my marital status,' she snapped. The guard stared at her, impassively. 'The name's Dorothea, or McShane or at a pinch Ma'am.'

'Can I ask what you want here, Miss?' said the guard, deliberately.

'This is private property.'

For a moment, the woman just glared at him. Even though he knew she



wouldn't be any trouble, the guard couldn't help feeling just a little nervous.

She looked down at her black Doc Martins as she said:

'I was wondering if I could get in to see Michael Smith,' she fixed him with a cold stare. 'I understand he works here.'

'I couldn't comment, Miss.'

'Well could you let me in so that I can find out?'

The guard put his hand deliberately on his revolver.

'I'm afraid not, Miss. This is a government research centre. Only authorised personnel are allowed past this gate.'

She looked stumped, obviously realising there was no way for her to complete whatever mission she was here on. She'd run away home, faced with such stern opposition, and Michael Smith . . . well, the Listener would be interested in him. Conspiring with the enemy, no less.

He realised with a jolt that the woman was talking again.

'Is there any way I can get the proper clearance?' she was saying. The guard shook his head. 'Well in that case . . .'

With a start, the guard realised she was reaching into her bag. It took him a whole second to flick open the holster, and another one to draw and aim the revolver. The woman didn't even look worried as she fixed him with that stare again, looking down the length of the barrel..

'Are you going to use that, Private?' she asked calmly.

'Not unless you give me reason to, Miss.'

'That's Ma'am,' she said, and pulled a small black book out of her bag.

He kept the revolver trained on her as he took the pass. He was

already experiencing a sinking feeling when he saw the insignia engraved on the front in cool blue ink. A globe with wings. UNIT. He flipped open the pass, and a photograph of the woman glared up at him. McShane, Dorothea, no rank, born 20-08-70. The pass was issued on 23-11-95 by a Brigadier W. Bambara. Worst of all, she had BROADSWORD clearance. The guard saw his career flashing before his eyes: it was very short.

‘Is that authorisation good enough for you?’ she asked calmly.

The guard holstered his revolver, automatically flicking on the safety catch, and handed back the pass.

‘I’ll have to check with my superiors, Ma’am,’ he said, meekly.

Dorothea smiled charmingly, slipping her pass back into the denim bag.

‘You do that, Private.’

The guard saluted, and skulked over to the telephone. Things hadn’t exactly gone as he’d intended. Now the Listener could deal with the problem.

Lars stood by his desk, his tie loose around his neck. His eyes were wide as he looked around the room. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

On the desk, the telephone rang. Automatically, he picked it up.

‘Hello?’ he answered weakly.

‘Sorry to bother you, sir,’ said a voice - the over zealous guard on the gate. He was still there, then. ‘It’s that woman you wanted me to tell you about. She’s here.’

‘What does she want?’

‘Erm . . . she wants to talk to a Michael Smith. Do you know who that is, sir?’

He did. He was an Opener: not a particularly important job, but then it was the Listener’s job to know everybody. Nice enough chap, slightly Aryan, with a broad Yorkshire accent. He struggled not to bark a laugh down the telephone. It was probably shock.

‘I don’t think that’s going to be possible, Private,’ he said.

‘Yes, but, well sir,’ Lars couldn’t remember a time when he’d heard the guard less sure of himself - usually all he needed was a gun to boost his confidence. ‘There’s a problem, sir.’

‘You could say that,’ Lars said quietly.

‘This woman, sir,’ the guard continued. ‘She’s UNIT, sir.’

Oh God, not now. The last thing he needed on top of all this was UNIT poking their noses around. What had Smith got him into?

‘Get rid of her, Private,’ he said firmly.

‘But, sir,’ the guard protested, ‘she’s got clearance. She’s Broadsword.’

‘I don’t care if she’s got the Queen with her,’ snapped Lars. ‘I don’t want her in here. Do you understand?’

He didn’t wait for a reply before he slammed the telephone down. This was not part of the plan. There was no way that UNIT should get involved, and certainly not the Broadwords. He wondered briefly whether Smith was involved in something else, something other than Vali. It was unlikely. This whole thing was getting very, very badly out of hand. In fact, he thought as he scanned the room, that could well be a huge understatement.

The room just looked back at him with a dozen dead eyes, blood soaking the floor.

The guard put down the phone and smiled. At least now he had his orders, and whatever happened, he couldn't go wrong if he followed them. He unholstered his gun again, flicking off the safety catch.

'Well?' the Broadsword asked.

He tried not to smile as he told her the news. It was, after all, only a job. It wasn't his fault that he liked it so much.

'I've spoken to my superior, Ma'am,' he said evenly.

'Good,' she said, heading for the gate. 'Let's get this thing open.'

He wished he could have seen the look in her eyes when she heard the revolver cock, but those sunglasses she wore stopped that. He liked to think he would have seen fear there, or at least surprise.

'I'm afraid I can't do that, Ma'am. My orders are to keep intruders out of the grounds,' he grinned, 'by any means at my disposal.'

'But my clearance . . .'

'Doesn't change those orders,' he interrupted. 'If you have a problem with that you can let your superiors sort it out with my commanding officer. Until then, you are not getting through that gate.'

She looked him up and down then, a hunter. He felt she was checking for any weakness at all that she could use to her advantage. He glared at her, the revolver unwavering, and tried to look invincible. She smiled, a truly

disarming smile, and said:

‘Okay. Bye, Private.’

He tried not to sigh with relief as she turned and walked down the hill. Instead, he spoke with what he hoped was a resolute and threatening tone.

‘Goodnight, Ma’am.’

She didn’t turn as she walked, a fact for which the guard was truly grateful.

In the watch tower, he looked across the village, searching.

He saw the lights of a small cottage at the entrance to the grounds, and he saw the trees that walled the house swaying. He saw another old house - though not as old as his - sitting at the top of a nearby hill. He saw the lights of the village spread out far and wide and, further on the horizon, the brighter lights of the city. He didn’t see anything that could account for his unease.

He didn’t stop looking, though, because he had realised what he thought he had first heard. It had sounded like a group of people screaming out in agony, and then falling silent.

# THREE

**Little Sarfield: 23. November, 2003**

**18:47**

Wagner tried to drive, navigate, think about his wife, listen to the radio, and definitely not think about Dorothea at all, all at the same time. He wasn't having much success.

It didn't help that the road was so damned dark, or that the road was so slick. On either side of him overgrown trees reached out with their ghoulish branches to try and trap him. Had the British never heard of hedge trimmers for God's sake? Another turn like that one, with a low hanging branch just trying to crack his windshield, and he'd be road kill. It also didn't help that he hadn't a clue how he'd explain his lateness, or even why he'd decided he couldn't just tell the truth.

With a tut, he reached over to the glove box and popped the catch.

Resting inside was a map of Derbyshire, a box of tissues, a couple of tapes (Sophie's, he noticed. He must have borrowed them at some point) and a crumpled packet of Marlboros. With expert fingers, he teased one out of the box and slid it into his mouth. He pushed the lighter and waited for it to pop out again.

Goddamn Brits couldn't even make a decent cigarette - he'd never get used to the bizarre colour they printed on their filters. What was wrong with good old fashioned white? Seemed they only used that over here for menthols, of all things.

The lighter popped out again, and he pushed the hot end against the tip of his cigarette. Damned thing tasted like a low tar. They couldn't even put a decent amount of tobacco in over here.

*. . . They're not dumb, they were so wrong, sang the radio. She's not always fun . . .*

At last, he thought. A decent song.

Of course, he was supposed to be giving up. As far as Sophie was concerned, he had done: five years ago. She'd been adamant, telling him she didn't want to watch him die of lung cancer, so he'd thrown away the pack in his pocket. The next day he'd gone out and hid one in his car. The same pack that was still there now. The only time he really smoked now was when he went to the station for their weekly game of poker.

He wondered whether Dorothea smoked, and felt guilty because of it. She probably didn't.

That was when all hell broke loose.



The first Wagner knew about it was when the car decided to swerve suddenly over to the left, the handling like driving through treacle. The word “blow-out” skipped through his mind, but he was too busy to acknowledge it. He fought to keep the car on the road, thick arms straining, but the trees were leaping out all around him. He had only a few seconds to pray that he’d be alive to make it back to Sophie before the car dove nose first into the trunk of a tree.

He jerked forward as the car stopped, his forehead tapping the steering wheel lightly, his safety-belt straining to hold him back. He saw the windshield shatter, the tiny shards of glass flying all around him. One of them cut a thin line across his cheek on its journey - an inch to the left and he would have lost an eye. His cigarette was snatched out of his mouth and landed in his lap. The wind was knocked out of his lungs, and the branch of the tree poked him in the face.

It was then that he realised he was still alive, and he breathed in a lungful of precious air. It never tasted so good. Then he noticed the burning sensation in his crotch.

‘Jesus Christ!’ he screamed as he snatched at the fallen cigarette.

He soon found it.

It’s true, he thought as he took an experimental drag, smoking is bad for your health. The cigarette tasted disturbingly of burnt cloth, so he tossed it aside. Then he thought about petrol. He had just crashed, so it was highly likely that the gas tank had ruptured, and if that was the case . . .

Wagner didn’t think he’d moved as fast in his whole life as he did trying to undo the safety belt. It came off easily enough, but he had a moment of

panic when he found the door too bent to open. Only one thing for it, he thought, and began to climb out of the front of the car, carefully avoiding broken glass and damaged tree. He was surprised by how little he hurt - he'd expected at least a broken bone or two. Perhaps he had a charmed life.

The first thing he did when he climbed off the bonnet was to stamp out the cigarette that was lying innocently on the grass. The next thing he did was to laugh long and hard with the joy of simply being alive. He soon stopped that, though. If he was going to be rescued, he didn't want to be caught laughing like a loon.

He decided it might be a good idea to examine the car; make sure he wasn't going to blow himself sky high, whilst getting a head start on the insurance forms. It didn't take long to set his mind to rest on that score - the only part of the car to be damaged was the front where it had nose-dived into the tree, and the wheel of course. It had been a blow out, he could tell. In fact, most of the tyre had practically disintegrated.

Looking closer, he caught the glint of metal inside the rubber. A nail? He took a closer look, pulling the offending article out and holding it up to the dull light of the moon. No, it wasn't a nail. It looked more like a dart. It looked like . . . like somebody had deliberately tried to make him crash.

Wagner looked around him, suddenly aware of how exposed he was. Perhaps Sophie had been really upset when he hadn't turned up, and had hired a hit man. He decided it might be a good idea to get out of the open and into some shelter. But where could he go? It took half an hour to get to the village by car - how long would that be walking? There was always Dorothea, of course. She had said that she had somewhere to stay around here, and it

was an emergency. Sophie couldn't blame him for that, surely. After all, he needed to get out of the rain.

He wondered how in the hell he was going to explain this to her.

If he'd have known that he only had five more seconds of consciousness, he probably would have chosen to think something else. After that, he had no more time to think anything, because it all happened so fast. He heard the slurping crack of a dead twig breaking behind him and swung round like a startled rabbit. Three seconds left. Then he saw the massive shape advancing towards him.

'Who are you?' he said.

One second. He got an impression of great strength in a slender frame, and burning red eyes, before the figure lifted its arm and slapped him across the face. It would have been funny, if it hadn't snapped his neck round so fast that his head cracked into the side of his car. There was a flash of bright whiteness as his head struck the car, and then everything went fuzzy and grey. He was vaguely aware of the figure leaning in, and then of being lifted, before he sunk into oblivion.

He didn't even get the chance to consider himself lucky because he wouldn't have to think up an excuse for his lateness. In fact, he'd never need another excuse, ever again.

Dorothea trotted casually down the hillside, her mind hard at work on the problem, her boots leaving muddy imprints in her wake. It was really quite

simple: that pass should be able to get her into Fort Knox if she deemed it necessary, but it hadn't got her into Fawney Rig. Either there had been a simple cock up, or that place had a strict no-go policy (which would make it unique amongst the government installations she'd investigated) or they were doing something in there they didn't want UNIT to know about.

Not that it mattered which ever it was, the course of action was the same. If they were deliberately keeping her out, or if they were that hush hush that no-one could get in, then she'd just have to find her own way in. If it was a cock up, well she couldn't really report it to her superiors, otherwise they might start asking awkward questions about what she was doing trying to use her pass when she was officially meant to be on leave. So she'd still have to find her own way in. Of course, it would be easier to wait for Michael to come out and talk to him then, but if her research was accurate then that would be a very long wait: the staff lived and worked up at the manor, and they never got the opportunity to head down to the village.

So she was decided. Of course, if she was going to do it by the book, she ought to head back now under cover of darkness and attempt her covert intrusion. To be honest, she couldn't bring herself to try tonight. She could try to dress it up with some pretty excuses – like the fact that if they suspected her, they'd be waiting up now for her to try something - but to be honest, she just wanted a bath and a couple of hours kip. She could continue her career as a cat burglar after a good night's sleep and a bowl of muesli. Besides, she thought checking the small part of her that belonged to her sibling, Wolsey was off somewhere with a rabbit, and wouldn't want to be disturbed until he'd slept it off.

So she had decided, and once she'd done that, it didn't take her long to reach the house. Standing there in the dark, trees rising up either side of her, the light drizzle just slowing enough to stop being called rain, watching the gravel track wind its way past the caretaker's cottage and up through the woods to the house: it was enough to make Dorothea she was a teenager again, standing there for the first time, the Doctor at her side. And what a night that turned out to be.

Of course there'd been a different caretaker back then, not that she could blame her for resigning when she did. But the cottage hadn't stayed empty for long, and it meant there was always someone there to have a chat with when she came visiting. She was debating popping in to see him now in his disorganised little cottage when she happened to glance up at the house. Her heart skipped a beat.

It was still the same old creepy place, pale walls showing up the blank dark windows and the ancient architecture casting shadows in the oddest of places, but this time something was different. Looking up into the Doctor's study, Dorothea could see the pale flickering light of a candle.

She was heading off down the path before she even realised it.

She hadn't seen him in ages, she thought as she walked down the gravel driveway. The last time had been in '95 - God it was good to be able to use decent tenses again, something he'd never been particularly good at. He'd been there to see her sworn in at UNIT. She even suspected that he might have put in a good word for her - although whether that worked for or against her she wasn't sure. She remembered he hadn't wanted to meet Bambara, saying it would only cause complications. She'd had some fancy

explaining to do after the whole Aylesbury Incident, but it was easier once Bambera had met the Doctor. She believed anything now, if she said he was involved.

She reached the door on the right hand side and knocked three times, listening to the sharp rap of the knocker echoing through the house. Then she stood back and waited. After a few moments, the door swung open and there he stood. He hadn't changed one bit, but then he never seemed to as far as she was concerned. He looked down at her with those piercing grey eyes of his and said:

'Yes?'

Hardly the greeting she'd been expecting.

'It's me,' she said. 'Dorothea?'

He looked blankly at her. Something wasn't right here.

'Ace?' she tried again, and saw something spark in his eyes.

'Ace?' he echoed, looking at her face again.

'Doctor,' she said, 'are you alright?'

And then it was there, plastered all over his face. That huge grin that seemed to distort his whole face with the sheer size of it. His grey eyes danced again, and he seemed himself again.

'Doctor!' he said, ecstatic. 'That's what it is!'

Dorothea suddenly got the feeling it was going to be a very long night.

Somehow, they had naturally gravitated towards the kitchen. It brought

back memories, walking down the hallway and entering that grubby room. Memories of mugs of tea and discussions about the nature of the universe, or pasta and sympathy. It still managed to retain some of the life they'd poured into it back then, even though it must have been empty for nearly three years.

He pulled off his jacket and dropped it casually over the back of a chair.

'Tea?' he asked.

She nodded. All she needed now was a bath, a kip and some answers. She sat herself down at the table, expecting none of them.

'Has something happened?' she asked.

'I don't know,' he said quietly. 'I can't remember.'

He found some matches on a shelf and lit the gas under the kettle. As he scanned the room, searching for the teapot, Dorothea had a moment of realisation.

'You don't know me, do you?'

He smiled at her, warmly.

'Hello,' he said, flicking her nose with a finger. 'I'm the Doctor, and this is my friend, Ace.'

Dorothea smiled back – how long had it been since she'd heard that said?

'Milk?' he asked.

'Please,' she said, and when she saw the lost look on his face she added: 'Try the fridge.'

He wandered over to the huge white refrigerator and opened the door. Sitting on the middle shelf was a single bottle of semi-skimmed. Aside from

that, the fridge was empty. It didn't occur to her to find that odd, and it was out of her mind as soon as he poured a drop into her cup. He didn't take any.

'I'm not Ace any more, Doctor,' she said, as diplomatically as she could. He looked surprised. 'I'm Dorothea.'

'Dorothea,' he said, rolling his Rs, tasting the sound of it in his mouth.

She nodded.

'How long?'

'Since I left you? Ten years?'

'Ah yes, Ace, but how long for me?'

'Don't you know?'

'I can't remember,' he said. 'I woke up in the cellar about an hour ago. Before that . . .'

The kettle began to whistle. He whipped it from the stove and poured its contents into the teapot before the steam had touched the ceiling. He dropped the kettle back onto the stove and stood staring into the pot, watching the tea brew. Dorothea wondered what he could see there.

'I think it's all still there, Ace,' he said softly. 'I remember you and I remember . . . no, it's too vague. But with time, I think it will come. But there's something wrong, Ace. I can feel it. And I don't think we have much time.'

Dorothea moved to his side, poured out the tea, handed him his cup. He took it with a smile, looked into her eyes with his own deep grey pools.

'We'll sort them out, the three of us,' she smiled. 'Hello, I'm Ace, and this is my friend the Professor.'

He took a long gulp of his tea. Somehow, he managed to give the



impression that he was smiling all the time he drank. That was impossible, of course.

'Perhaps we should go down to the caretaker's cottage,' Dorothea suggested, sipping at her own tea. 'Maybe Chile knows something we don't.'

The Doctor fixed her with a stare, dropping his tea back onto the counter.

'Chile?' he asked urgently.

'Yeah. The caretaker.'

'Ace, I think I've just remembered something else,' he said darkly. 'I don't trust Chile, do I?'

Dorothea gave him a strange look.

'Trust him? You gave him the job.'

Sophie Wagner looked at the telephone, half willing herself to pick it up, half willing it to ring.

She tried to stop herself from worrying - after all, he'd be spending the night at the police station, and there really couldn't be a safer place than that, could there? But he was late, and not just a couple of minutes. It was getting on for an hour now, and he was usually home at six on the dot - either grinning widely and planning a night of costly romance, or else looking shamefaced and searching for comfort. It was usually the latter - he wasn't exactly a card sharp, despite what he told her.

The telephone didn't ring, and Sophie didn't pick it up.

Perhaps something had come up, and Sergeant Murphy had needed some help. It would be just like Stevie to offer to help. He was always doing odd jobs for the neighbours, just because they asked nicely. That was one of the things that had first attracted her to him - that and his broad frame. She liked her men to have their fair share of muscle - it was almost as if she were trying to make up for her own slight frame if they ever had children. It would be just like him to get caught up doing a favour for somebody and forget to ring home. No it wouldn't, not Stevie. He'd ring home if he had to stop to tie his shoelace.

Sophie tried to click her nails on the glass surface of the coffee table, but couldn't: they were bitten to the quick. It drove Stevie up the wall - he was always telling her to stop it: sometimes he offered to bite them for her. Half of the time she didn't even know she was doing it. The noise of the telephone not ringing was beginning to drive her crazy.

A car drove by outside and her heart skipped a beat. It had to be him - who else would be driving by here? She was just getting ready to speed over and scream something obscene at him when he came through the door, when she realised the car wasn't stopping. It wasn't him.

This was stupid. There was only one thing to do - she'd ring the station and find out what was going on. He was probably still there, playing cards, losing money. God help him if he was.

'Hello,' she said quickly as the phone was answered, 'Sergeant Murphy? It's Sophie Wagner here.'

She heard the sergeant mumble on the other end, then say:

'Ah, Sophie, good to hear from you. Thought I might actually have a

999 to deal with. If that husband of yours has told you it was me who won all of his money, then I'm afraid he's lying.'

'Er, actually that's why I'm calling,' time to spit it out, she thought. 'Stevie hasn't made it home yet, and I was wondering if he was still there for some reason?'

Murphy paused, leaning back in his chair. Now wasn't that interesting. Old Steve hasn't made it home yet, after giving our young stranger a lift out into the middle of nowhere. Now one of them was going to be in big trouble.

'No, I'm afraid he's not, Sophie,' he said, as diplomatically as he could, 'but I shouldn't worry. We had a visitor up at the station tonight, from out of town. They needed to get up to the Manor, and Steve kindly offered to give her a lift. He's probably on his way back right now.'

'Oh, right, thank you,' said Sophie. Poor girl was probably going out of her mind down there. 'I was just getting worried, that's all. Silly, really.'

'Not at all,' he assured her in his most comforting voice. 'And if he doesn't turn up soon, you feel free to give me another call and I'll see what I can do to find him. Okay?'

'Yes, okay, thanks,' she said. 'I'm sorry to bother you.'

'No bother at all,' he told her. 'After all, that's what they pay me for. You make sure you give that husband of yours a good ear-bashing when he gets home, okay?'

'Oh don't worry, I intend to,' she laughed.

'Good. Well, I'll see you soon then, Sophie.'

'Yes, okay. Bye.'

'Bye now,' he said and hung up.

He sat at his desk for a few seconds longer, shuffling the deck of cards, a distant look on his face. Then he came to a decision and reached over to the telephone again. Digging a battered note book from his pocket, he looked up the number and dialled it with a pencil. It was answered after a couple of rings.

'Hello, Tony?' he said. 'Yeah, it's Murphy here. Listen, Perivale's in your area isn't it? I was wondering if you could do a records check for me. You got a pen? Okay, it's a Dorothy McShane, probably about twenty-seven, twenty-eight, uses the alias Dorothea. Yeah, well you just ring me back when you've found something, yeah? No hurry. Okay, bye.'

Well, he thought, it never hurt to find out a little about a new poker hand in town, did it?

The guard stood at his gate, ready for anything. He had dealt with the UNIT spy; he could deal with anything the night chose to throw at him. It was almost getting pleasant now the rain had stopped. The clouds were still there, of course, but at least that meant for a warm night, and it wouldn't be long until he was off duty anyway. His relief was due any moment.

Above him, the moon struggled to shine through the dark clouds. To his right, the village slept. To his left, the woods shifted, ominously. Behind him, he heard an engine started.

He turned just in time to see the car drawing up to the gate, so he

managed to get the gate open before the Listener had to tap his horn. As the car slid out of the grounds, the guard waved cheerfully. The Listener didn't acknowledge it, the car rolling on past to the crest of the hill. Then it stopped, the red lights two burning eyes in the darkness. The reverse lights came on and the car crept back towards him. Close enough for the Listener to wind down his window and shout over at the guard.

'Private?'

'Yes, sir?'

'I'm going down to the village again. If anything should . . .' the Listener paused. Whether he was thinking, or whether it was just for effect, the guard didn't know. 'If anything should happen, call me immediately at the police station.'

'Yes, sir,' he knew he meant the UNIT woman. So, he was expecting her to return. Well, he could handle it: it was what he was trained for.

'Don't, I repeat, *don't* get yourself killed. Do you understand?'

The guard saluted.

'No, sir.'

The Listener ducked his head back into the car and drove off, away down the hill towards the village. It was comforting to know that his superiors were so concerned about his welfare. Perhaps a promotion was in the pipelines. But there was no time for idle thoughts like that: he had a job to do. Highly trained, and deadly accurate, the guard returned his attention to his duty: guarding the Manor.

Beside him, the bushes rustled again.

‘Stay behind me, Ace,’ the Doctor said, pressing the door bell. ‘There’s something strange going on here.’

The door swung slowly open, and there stood a tall coffee skinned man, dressed as if ready for bed. He took one look at the Doctor, and Dorothea behind, and smiled a warm smile. His teeth were a bright shining white in the darkness.

‘Doctor! What a pleasant surprise,’ he said.

‘Walker,’ said the Doctor, sternly.

A cloud passed over Chile’s eyes – Dorothea could see it. A shadow of something, unseen, unspoken. Then he shook his head slowly, looked solemn.

‘No,’ he said. ‘Not for a long time. Now I’m Chile Littlemore. Just Chile, little more.’

For a moment, Dorothea thought that the Doctor was going to push it, but instead the little man merely nodded.

‘You’d better come in,’ Chile said. ‘There’s someone waiting for you, Dorothea.’

There was something strangely comforting about walking into Chile’s home that Dorothea couldn’t quite put her finger on. Perhaps it was the gentle fragrance of flowers that hung around the place, even in winter when there were no blooms in evidence. It was almost magical, as if he could summon their aroma whenever he wanted through the black arts alone.

Perhaps it was just the thought that - despite the inconstant nature of the world outside - nothing ever really changed in the caretaker's cottage. Perhaps the junk scattered around the place got slightly higher year by year, but generally the whole pattern remained. There was still the same Victorian table in the corner - buried under the same pile of paperwork - with the same three dining room chairs sitting around it: the fourth of the set missing presumed firewood. And there was the same battered sofa she had sat on the last time she came calling.

'Cocoa?' Chile asked politely.

'No, thank you,' the Doctor said softly.

'Yes please,' Dorothea answered, adding: 'Who wants me, then?'

'He's on the sofa,' Chile called from the kitchen.

Dorothea looked more carefully, and saw him. She went to sit next to him, dropping first her bag and then herself onto the sofa. She was slightly annoyed that Wolsey was already here, sleeping quietly in a ball. Sometimes, she thought the kitling was getting too clever for his own good. The Doctor made himself comfortable on one of the dining chairs, dropping his coat over the back of it, his hat in his hands. He was looking around like a child in a toyshop, admiring every piece of Chile's extensive antique collection.

'You're quite a collector,' he said.

'I just have an eye for a bargain,' Chile said as he walked through into the front room, a tray in his hands. He handed Dorothea a cup of steaming cocoa and set a plate of biscuits down beside her. Taking his own drink, he pointed at a pair of book-ends on a shelf. 'Take them, for example. Got them last weekend for a couple of quid. They'll be worth twice that next year.'

'I didn't think you did it for the money,' Dorothea said, sipping her drink. It tasted like liquid gold.

'Oh I don't,' he said, clearing a space for himself at the table. 'I like being surrounded by beautiful things, is all. But it's nice to know other people think they're worth hideous amounts of money.'

'I can imagine,' she agreed, smiling. It came as quite a surprise to all if them when she yawned. 'I'm sorry,' she apologised, 'I've been travelling since yesterday. Didn't get a chance to sleep.'

'Quite alright,' Chile said with a magnanimous wave of his hand.

'It's just so relaxing here,' she continued, 'what with the cocoa, the flowers and everything.'

'The flowers?' Jacob looked confused.

'Can't you smell it?' she asked, afraid it might just be her.

'Begonias,' the Doctor suggested.

'Oh,' Chile said, 'that! That's the air freshener I use - I can lend you a can, if you like.'

Dorothea decided that it would be a good idea to drink her cocoa and keep her mouth shut. So the setting was different, but aside from that Dorothea was finding things incredibly familiar.

'You don't know what's going on, do you?' Chile asked.

'I can't remember. I woke up this evening. Before that . . .'

he let the sentence hang in the air. 'Something's wrong, isn't it.'

As far as Dorothea was concerned, something was wrong. Just when things were starting to get interesting, she was falling asleep. Her eyelids



were heavy, and her head kept nodding in a most embarrassing fashion. She decided to put her cocoa down before she spilt it all over herself, and tried to follow the conversation.

‘And the last I remember of you, you were called Walker.’

‘Amnesia?’ suggested Chile. Dorothea’s head dropped again, then jerked back up.

‘I don’t think so,’ the Doctor said, shaking his head.

‘The last time you were called Walker,’ Dorothea said, determined to stay awake, determined to be part of the conversation, ‘was just after the Doctor came back.’

‘Came back?’ asked the Doctor. ‘From where?’

There was a pause, and Dorothea let her eyes close, just to rest them.

‘You died, Doctor.’

Dorothea’s head dropped again, her chin tapping her chest, and this time it didn’t rise again. Her eyelids glued together, and her mind began to drift towards the Dreaming. As she fell asleep she heard the Doctor and Chile talking to each other, their voices fading away as if they were travelling far away from her.

‘The Cheetah Virus,’ she heard the Doctor say. ‘Tell me everything.’

And then Dorothea was asleep, curled up next to Wolsey, snug and safe.

FOUR

**Little Sarfield: 23. November, 2003**

**19:56**

The guard watched the road and surrounding fields for any sign of the UNIT woman returning. He had his orders now - he knew what needed to be done. And he was perfectly willing to do it. Stop the woman from getting into the base, then call the Listener at the police station. He had been entrusted with the safety of the Manor, and he wanted to justify that trust. He knew he could do it.

Over to his left, the woods shifted again.

Perhaps, if he proved himself to the Listener, this could be his route to the promotion he desired: after all, he didn't want to be on guard duty for the rest of his career. All he had to do was demonstrate he could be relied upon, prove he had initiative and skill, and those sergeant stripes would be his. He

turned his attention back to the roads and the fields. Nothing. Well, just let her try, he'd be ready.

In the woods, a branch snapped.

The guard spun around. So, she was using the trees as cover to get in, was she. Well, she'd be in for a surprise: if the electric fence didn't get her, he would. He drew his revolver, the barrel glinting in the gloom. He checked the chamber - full. He flicked off the safety catch and headed into the heart of the woods.

It took a precious few seconds for his eyes to become accustomed to the green gloom, seconds in which she could have attacked him if she was truly worth her salt. She didn't, and soon he could make out the individual shapes of the trees and see anything, if it was moving. He looked. He couldn't see any movement. If she'd seen him she might be hiding, waiting for him to give up. He wasn't going to. If she was here, he was going to find her.

In the bushes, it stood immovable. The weight over its shoulder was nothing, and it shifted it slowly so that it couldn't obscure its vision, but so that the creature could not see the movement. The whole woods stood out for it in glorious infra-red detail, thin red greenery snaking up around it, and wide red leaves masking it from the creature. It waited, watching for the creature's next move.

It was obvious to him now that she had seen him enter, otherwise he would have expected to see her moving towards the fence by now. So she was planning something. Well, let her try - he reckoned he could out fight her if it came to it.

He scanned the immediate area, looking for some trace of her. Nothing, just dark trees and greenery. He weighed up his options. He could wait for her to make her move, or he could flush her out. If he waited, she'd have the advantage. So he had to force her to make a move.

He looked around again, failing to spot the dull glint of metal in amongst the shrubbery. Checking his gun again, adrenaline flooding his system, he began to move ever so slowly forward.

God, he thought, this was what it was all about.

It watched him move through the redness. It took only 1.1 seconds for the following information to be computed and assimilated, and a course of action decided upon.

TARGET: HUMAN, MALE. HEIGHT 1M 72, WEIGHT 342.64KG, CHRONOLOGICAL AGE 25.2 ORBITS. TARGET **ARMED**. WEAPON ANALYSIS BEGINNING. ANALYSIS COMPLETE: WEAPON PRIMITIVE COMBUSTION FIRED PROJECTILE WEAPON. NO APPARENT DANGER. SUITABILITY OF HUMAN TARGET: ANALYSIS BEGINNING.

The human obviously had no augmented vision: as the male creature scanned the surrounding trees, it failed to see its bulk hidden behind a cover

of thin leaves. Even the simplest night vision enhancement should have been able to detect its form behind such flimsy cover, even without the tell-tale heat trace that it gave off. He was obviously part of a primitive species.

ANALYSIS COMPLETE - SUITABILITY OF HUMAN TARGET: NIL.  
TARGET DESIGNATED **HOSTILE**. WEAPONS SYSTEMS ON-LINE -  
SYSTEM RUNNING AT OPTIMAL. SEEK AND DESTROY.

Its course of action decided, it began to move.

The first the guard knew about was when he heard the sound behind him. He spun around just in time to catch a glimpse of the giant rushing towards him with impossible speed. It was carrying over one shoulder what appeared to be a body. He had just enough time to register that the giant had burst from a section he had thought empty before it grabbed him with a hand and lifted him off the ground. He found himself staring into a grim death's head, two slit eyes burning red into his.

'Who are you?' he managed to blurt out.

With a silent *snick*, a concealed blade in the giant's forearm extracted, pushing through a flap in its wrist. The blade extended out to its full gleaming length, almost as long as the giant's entire forearm. At least half of its length buried itself in the guard's neck. He let out a bubbling gasp as he suddenly found it impossible to speak.

The giant pulled the blade out of the guard's throat and then pushed it viciously into his stomach. He felt its sharp edge intruding into his gut, and

tried to scream as the giant jerked it up almost to the wound in his neck. No sound came, though, save for a forced bubbling. Apparently satisfied, the giant tossed the dying guard aside with a single impatient gesture. He landed in a heap on the floor, after crashing through two thin-trunked trees.

As the creature carried on its way towards the Manor, the guard's last thought was how chillingly impassive the giant's skull-like face had remained throughout. Then he died.

## DOCUMENT ONE



. . . but perhaps the most interesting aspect of the *Mysterious Lady of Paris* (188?) is that all the questions that the observer asks about the painting - who is this woman, where does she come from, et cetera - were the very same questions that were being asked by the artist as he worked.

The history of our *Mysterious Lady* is one that can only be pieced together using historical documents, the diary the artist periodically kept and - most importantly of all - intelligent guess work. Even this picture is more of a sketch, and an incomplete one at that. All we really know for sure is that our lady was called either Dorothee or Dorothea - records indicate the latter, whilst the artist uses the former, perhaps an indication of friendship? - and was a foreign traveller from an unknown country who was engaged - briefly - to one Count Constantin Sorin of St. Petersburg. If she used a last name, posterity has not recorded it.

It appears that our Dorothee arrived in Paris in the spring of 1887 at around the same time as another traveller - the Count of St. Petersburg. It seems that the two - perhaps drawn together by similar lifestyles - soon fell madly in love. The engagement was announced a mere month after their first meeting. As a celebration of this engagement, the Count evidently decided to commission a portrait of his betrothed and approached Duvall to this end. The artist - never being one to rush into his work, as we have discovered - proceeded to arrange four sketching sessions with Dorothee which occurred one a week for the next month.

We are quite lucky with regards this period of Dorothee's history as it coincides with another period of activity in the artist's infrequent diary entries. The first sketching session remains a mystery - perhaps little happened of note, or perhaps - more likely - our artist was too drunk to remember what occurred. With the second session, very little of note appears to have happened, as can be seen by the diary entry I have translated:

*'Met with Constantin's fiancée for sketching. Still annoyingly cheerful about wedding plans. Finish early.'*

In the penultimate session, again little of import seems to have occurred, yet it is important to note that Duvall did see fit to comment that Dorothee appeared less "*annoying cheerful*" about her impending nuptials. This could perhaps be put down to last minute nerves, of course.

What happened between this third session and the final meeting is a matter of legend amongst art historians.

There is a story - whose validity cannot, of course, be confirmed - that the close of this session saw the beginning of another of Duvall's infamous

drinking sessions. What seems quite extraordinary about this particular session is that - quite in contradiction to the conventions of the day - the artist was joined by an aristocratic lady, not the usual painted lady. It is widely assumed that this lady was Sorin's fiancée, Dorothee, and although there is no confirmation of this anywhere it is certain that something occurred between the final two sessions to form a bond between painter and model.

The next stage of the tale can be told by Duvall himself, from his diary entry of that day.

*'Sketched Dorothea for the last time today. It was all I could do to make the dear creature smile, such was her sadness. It was fortunate I was only finishing a study of her hands.'*

*Once the sketching was finished, I felt I must ask her what her trouble was. As I feared, it was Constantin. He is a dear friend, but all too dry to take this girl for life. I fail to see what she does in him, which is, I suppose, fortunate.*

*It seems poor Dorothea is sickening for her homeland. My suggestion that she and Constantin visit it after the wedding was not taken particularly well. It seems she too is wondering what it was she saw in my friend. When I ask, all she can really tell me is that he reminds her of an old love. But they are engaged now, and it seems as if there is little she can do.'*

This conversation that took place between them would certainly seem to explain the alternate title the *Mysterious Lady of Paris* sometimes goes by: *The Mirror of Love Lost*.

Unfortunately, this is the least well documented period of Dorothee's history - the next entry in Duvall's diary is from 1891, by which time the

painting is finished and Dorothee is long gone, and forgotten in a haze of opiates.

We do know that in the autumn of 1887, Count Sorin threw a party to celebrate the forthcoming wedding, so it is evident that the two were still engaged at that point. Most of the Parisian elite were invited to and in attendance at that party, including our Duvall. There is a story that circulates about that party that I offer here only as one possible version of events.

It seems that Dorothee indeed attended that party, and was again appearing not exactly enamoured with her up coming wedding. It is said that Duvall himself tried to cheer her up, to no avail, and by the end of the night he caught her in the garden with another traveller. This stranger - reported as being a professional of some description: perhaps a lawyer or a physician - had an amazingly beneficial effect on Ms. Dorothee, lifting her spirits to the point of hugs, tears and laughter.

When Sorin came to claim his fiancée from this stranger, young Dorothee is said to have called off the wedding there and then with apologies. It is said she left that night with the stranger, leaving Sorin heart-broken and humiliated.

This is not the only explanation for what we no to be true: there is another story that suggests Dorothee died that night, which would explain her disappearance but not the lack of documentary evidence. Another story - most probably started by Duvall himself - suggests that it was Sorin who broke off the engagement when he learned of his betrothed's night of passion with the artist. I myself discount this story because it does not seem - to me, admittedly - that such a headstrong girl as Dorothee would fall for somebody of Duvall's

nature.

All we know for sure is that the engagement between Sorin and the mysterious Dorothee never blossomed into marriage. Before Sorin returned to his native Russia, he visited England and took a wife there, a young girl by the name of Mary Wilson, and the Sorin line continued until it was severed in the 1940s, the name and title lost due to adoption outside of Russia. Obviously, he never asked for the painting to be completed and paid no monies to Duvall. He was given one of the series of sketches to keep as a memento - what has happened to it since is anybody's guess. The other nine sketches survive to this day in the Louvre.

It appears that sometime between the autumn of 1887 and the next diary entry in 1891 - presumably earlier - Duvall uncharacteristically completed the painting in return for no fee, and kept it up until his death in 1901. From there, the painting was sold to . . .

An extract from

The Paintings of Windsor (Cambridge University Press, 1972)

by Prof. Rachel Jensen

# FIVE

*'In conclusion, I find that Project Vali has been a costly and dangerous mistake. Indeed, if our society survives its consequences, we will find ourselves called to account for it to a much higher authority.'*

From a destroyed memo to the  
Prime Minister of Great Britain, 2003

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**06:30**

Dorothea was woken from dark dreams by a gentle patting on the back of her head. She didn't even need to open her eyes to know it was Wolsey, probably with some fresh kill to share. All these years together, and he still hadn't seemed to work out that she didn't need him to feed her. A nut cutlet and a mushroom risotto did just fine for her.

‘Good morning,’ Chile called, before she’d even had a chance to sit up. ‘I’ve got toast and juice waiting for you. There’s marmite, or guava jelly if you want it.’

She sat up on the sofa, pulling away the blanket someone had put over her and noticing that they’d also taken her coat off. Wolsey jumped away and finished his meal in the corner, as his sibling did her best to ignore it. Looking around the room, she noticed that the Doctor’s hat and coat were gone.

‘Where’s he gone?’

‘Down to the village. He has a lot of things to think about.’

Pulling herself to her feet, Dorothea padded into the kitchen. She saw Chile bent over the kitchen table, scraping the burnt bits off his toast. There was a pot of tea brewing in the corner – some bizarre herbal mix that only Chile knew the recipe to. It tasted like a autumn sunset, although after the whole flowers thing last night, she wouldn’t be surprised if it came from a packet. The threads of her dreams still clung to her, refusing to be shaken loose.

‘What’s going on, Chile?’

Chile put the toast down, resting both hands on the pine table. It was only when he fixed her with a soft gaze that she realised her sunglasses had been taken off her last night, too. It didn’t matter: she had nothing to hide from Chile, or the Doctor.

‘How much did he tell you? How much did you hear?’

Ace thought back:

‘Not much. But I had the dream again last night.’



She could feel the dream waiting to burst up within her again – she'd had it so often now she didn't know whether she remembered it, or just the first time. Trapped in the darkness of the cellar, Loki beside her – not the shaven-headed fake Captain, but Loki as they knew him later – and the Doctor just a beast in a cage. And as glass shatters all around her, she sees the Doctor lying, dying on the floor. And she feels herself change, the beast take her, as she launches herself at Loki. He just laughs, and laughs, and laughs.

'Dorothea?' she heard Chile coming in over the airwaves, and found that he'd manoeuvred her into one of the antique chairs.

'What happened?' she asked. Wolsey was rubbing around her legs again, concern coming off him in waves.

'You went,' the caretaker said softly.

Dorothea simply nodded. Of course she had. Chile pushed a steaming cup into her hands. It was sweat, warm, tasted of better days. His pale coffee hand was warm on her arm, his brown eyes reflecting her own. Wolsey didn't even react: there were only two people he let touch his Sibling, and both had been in the room the previous night.

'He came back,' Chile said softly. 'He came back for both of us.'

'I know,' Dorothea said, suddenly feeling like Ace again.

Chile frowned. He could read her mind at times.

'What?' he purred.

'I . . .' she stopped. No. This had to come out right. 'I'm so glad he came back. It was the worst year of my life, thinking he was gone. Worst, and

the best. I learnt a lot about myself, Chile. I learnt my limitations, what I could and couldn't do any more, I learnt to live with – I love Wolsey to death, but I had to learn to live with him, right?'

'And you had to live with what killed our mutual friend.'

'And then he comes back. Right as rain, the old –' she caught herself in time, seeing Chile's face tense slightly, '– the old him –'

'A new him.'

'It was the happiest night of my life, Chile, that night in Sydney. But it's hard to see him beat it, and to know that I'm going to live with it for the rest of my life.'

'Did he ever tell you how he beat it?'

'No. You?'

Chile shook his head.

'But I know this much. If he could've, he would've shown me.'

Chile stood, heading for the door. He stopped half way, and Dorothea had to twist to see that he'd picked up the Doctor's question mark umbrella. He'd be getting wet, wherever he was. Resting underneath it in a neat pile, were Dorothea's jacket and shades. Three guesses who'd put her to bed last night.

'It's possible,' Chile said, 'that he still might.'

'No.'

'You can see it as much as me. He's back. His travels took him from this plane, when Loki –'

'Killed him.'

‘But this is him back. When he’s finished here, he’ll go back to Sydney and he’ll find you again. Who’s to say he won’t cure you now?’

‘Look at him, Chile. You’ve spoke to him. He hasn’t got a clue how it happened. ‘Sides, I’m used to it now. Be like giving up an arm.’

She reached down, stroked Wolsey behind the ears. The kitling purred softly, then crawled away to rest by the radiator. Dorothea stood, pulling on her jacket, slipping her shades over her eyes. Chile looked concerned, standing between her and the doorway, but stood aside as she smiled. Poor Chile. He could never refuse her anything.

‘I’ve got to go.’

‘Looking after him again?’

‘He can look after himself. I’ve got work to do.’

‘UNIT?’ Chile asked, eyebrow raised.

‘I’m on leave. Personal project.’

Chile nodded, opened the door for her.

‘Anyone I know?’

‘Fawney Rig.’

Chile’s face hardened. For a moment, he looked like the old Chile, the Walker, but it passed in an instant. But as Dorothea tried to step passed, she found his hand on her arm, holding her back. She raised an eyebrow at him.

‘I’ll come with you,’ he said, a flat statement. She knew he’d brook no argument.

‘Okay,’ she said. ‘I could do with a diversion. Over-active sentry.’

‘Been a while since I had to deal with one of them.’

Dorothea smiled:

‘Don’t worry. It’s like riding a bike.’

And they set off into the morning mist.

Sergeant Murphy sat in his office and watched the sun come up over the village. It was a sight he never failed to miss, unless circumstance or exhaustion made it impossible. There was a certain kind of light he had only ever seen in the village at dawn, and nothing else could compare.

The sun was just cresting the other side of the valley now, spreading its warm orange light over the - mostly - sleeping village. The rough brick houses soaked up the light and the warmth gratefully, feeding it to their occupants until they were energetic enough to venture out into the light themselves. The train tracks glistened pleasingly outside of his office, two lines of fire running from horizon to hill-lined horizon. There would be no train today, he knew, and that only increased the feeling that the metal lines had only been put there to enhance his enjoyment of the morning sun. God had truly known what he was doing when he sorted out the sunrises, he thought playfully.

It was a hard job being the village’s only serving police officer, even harder if you actually cared enough to do the job properly. In theory, he was supposed to only work his shifts five days out of seven and when he was off duty any incidents in the village were relayed to the central station in the city. Bitter experience, however, had taught him that his comrades in the city had their own problems, and somebody using the vicar’s parking space came very low down on their list of priorities.

Usually, he popped in most days just to see if anything needed doing - he hadn't had a day off proper in the five years he'd been doing the job. It was only on rare occasions, however, that he found himself trying to grab a few hours sleep in the station before getting back to work in the morning. Occasions such as last night, for example. He'd dropped off to sleep in the early hours of the morning, only to be woken about half an hour ago by the incessant beeping of the fax machine his Chief Super had insisted he had installed.

When he'd checked it, he'd found a two page report waiting for him from his friend in London. It consisted of one page of general information and an old missing persons form, with a note scribbled on it that said *Is this what you wanted?* It was indeed. He wandered over to the kettle and flicked it on, then settled down to read through his faxes.

*Dorothy McShane*, the first page told him, *born 20th August 1970, Perivale, Gt. London. Mother Audrey McShane, Father . . .* All of this was very interesting, but it wasn't telling him very much. It appeared young Dorothea had been born in Perivale, lived there for a while with her mother whilst her father had gone AWOL. Nothing strange about that, more's the pity. He flicked on to the missing persons.

*Missing Person*, it told him. *Dorothy McShane*. It went on to give a description of the woman at eighteen, complete with nylon bomber jacket plastered with badges and a rucksack stuffed with numerous items, including a baseball bat. It sounded to Murphy like she had planned to run away, packing what she could and getting out one night. Shouldn't have taken long to find someone as distinctive as that, though.

He skimmed through the rest of the report to check the dates at the bottom: filed on 23rd November 1987 - she would have been seventeen. Then he saw the final line of the report, newer than the rest. It read: *File cancelled 23.11.93, on UN request.*

Now that was interesting. She'd disappeared ten years ago, with nothing on file for six years - not so much as a caution for loitering - only to reappear with the weight of the UN behind her. Were they picking up runaways now, he wondered. And if so, what for? To use as agents? He wouldn't put it past them - there'd been plenty of stories in the newspapers of late about UN cover ups in the seventies. Perhaps this was another one.

His train of thought was briefly derailed by the sound of a car pulling up outside. Duty calls, he thought as he wandered over to the door, expecting to see an aggrieved villager of some description. Instead, he saw Lars climbing out of his car. Murphy waved at him.

'Morning, Lars,' he said cheerfully. 'You're just in time - the kettle's boiling.'

Lars didn't smile back. He looked different to Murphy somehow - colder, more focused. He was certainly more dishevelled. His pastel blue suit had developed quite a few creases in it since last night. It looked rather like he had been sleeping in it. Under his arm, he was carrying a slim leather hold-all.

'Everything alright?' Murphy asked.

'I'm afraid not, Sergeant Murphy, no,' he said briskly. 'This isn't a social visit.'

Murphy felt his heart skip - a worrying sign at his age. This was something to do with the woman, he reckoned.

‘What’s up?’

Lars looked grim faced.

‘I shall have to ask you to address me as “sir”, Sergeant,’ he said coldly.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Murphy.

‘That’s better,’ Lars said absently. ‘I shall need your office.’

Lars paced past the Sergeant without even stopping, leaving him to spin around and watch him head for his station. Something must have gone seriously wrong. Not that it excused Lars for being this rude, especially when Murphy had no ties to the military. He hurried after his young friend, and only caught up with him when he was inside the station.

‘Can I remind you, sir,’ said Murphy diplomatically, ‘that this is my station and - officially - you have no jurisdiction here?’

Lars sat himself down in Murphy’s chair and carefully placed the bag on the table top. Then he looked up at Murphy with deep eyes and said:

‘Last night, Sergeant, we had what you may call an incident up at the Manor, yes? As a result of this incident, I have been forced to instigate the Valkyr Procedure. I am required to ask you if you understand what this means. Do you?’

Murphy’s face fell. When he had first taken the job here, he’d been told about Fawney Rig and the vital work they were doing for the government. Vital work that at some point may need the co-operation of the local police. If that was the case, then every available resource - the station, the man-power, even the stationary if they desired it - was to be put at their disposal. The

Valkyr Procedure.

‘Yes,’ said Murphy grimly, ‘I understand.’

‘Good,’ said Lars, pushing the black bag across the desk. ‘Now, do you see this bag?’

Murphy nodded. It was a small black leather hold all, in pristine condition. The handles at the top were tied together twice with thin red wire, and a large plastic seal kept it closed.

‘This seal,’ Lars continued, ‘is the British Government diplomatic seal. Only a high ranking Government official can break it - an official like me. Do you understand?’

Murphy nodded dumbly again, biting his tongue. This was not a good time to start snapping at Lars. It could lose him his job, and leave him spending his twilight years in a prison cell.

‘You are not such an official,’ Lars was saying. ‘Under no circumstances are either you yourself or anybody else to open this bag without my express permission. You will personally guard it for me until I - or some other identified government official - come to collect it. This does not include anybody claiming to be from UNIT. If you do allow anybody I do not personally authorise to open this bag, you will spend the rest of your life in jail. Do you understand that?’

‘I understand. Sir.’

Lars smiled, for the first time since he arrived. It was a weary smile, too tired to reach his eyes.

‘Good. I’ll have coffee, black, please Sergeant.’



Without a word, Murphy went over to the kettle and began pouring two cups of coffee. He didn't even offer a suggestion that he was trained and experienced to be more than a tea-lady. When the coffee was made, he carried the cups over to the desk and handed one to Lars.

'Thank you.'

'You might be interested in that fax on the desk, sir,' Murphy said evenly. 'It's about our visitor last night.'

Lars picked it up and gave it a casual glance, then dropped it back onto the table.

'I already know all that, Sergeant,' he said dismissive.

Of course you do, thought Murphy.

'One of the other duties I want you to perform,' said Lars, 'is to find that woman and arrest her. Understood?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now, Sergeant. Take the bag with you.'

Murphy glared at Lars over the rim of his coffee cup. The European stared back, stone faced. He calmly put down his coffee cup and picked up the bag. Before he left, Murphy turned back to Lars and asked:

'I don't suppose there's any chance you might tell me exactly what is going on here, sir?'

'No, Sergeant,' answered Lars. 'No chance what-so-ever.'

Thought not, thought Murphy, and headed out of the door. As he left, he saw Lars pick up the telephone and dial what appeared to be a twenty digit telephone number.

‘Alfather,’ he just heard him say into the mouth piece, ‘this is Vali.’

The sun had almost fully risen now, losing its burnt umber colour and becoming a more fiery yellow. It was shining down on what was turning into the worst day of Murphy’s life. He started walking down towards the village, his newly acquired bag in his hand, and a quiet rage beginning to burn in his chest.

Sophie Wagner was very slowly being driven insane. Somebody was doing it deliberately, that was the only explanation. She had wronged somebody horrendously - either in this life, or a previous one - and now they were extracting their revenge. That was the only explanation possible.

She looked up from her chair to see out of the window. Outside, row after row of the village houses sat with their curtains drawn, blank eyes staring out into the world. The new sun was shining down from over head, fresh and bright. It cast long shadows over the road that Sophie stared at. It was still empty. Soon it would be filled full of people on their way to Greater Sarfield, or to the village shop, or doing whatever it was her neighbours did on the weekend. She didn’t care: she was only looking for one familiar face.

She had spent the night travelling between the telephone and the window, alternately staring at the empty road to the silent phone. Once she had picked it up, expecting to hear nothing, but the steady pulse of the dialling tone sang out. Then she had hurried over to the window and flung it open. If he wasn’t ringing, then it could only mean that he was so near home that it would be pointless. Nothing. There was, of course, another reason why he

might not be ringing, but she wasn't thinking about that.

She had spent most of the early morning like that until, exhausted, she had fallen into a fitful sleep in her chair. She had dreamt that Stevie had come back, grinning all over his face, carrying box after box of shopping from the city, all the best stores.

'I won,' this dream lover had said, his bright eyes dancing, 'won so much damned money I just had to go out and spend some of it. Here.'

And he'd handed over the most beautiful clothes and knick-knacks, and it had been such an understandable explanation, that she'd just reached up and hugged him. He unloaded bag after bag, silk skirts, designer tops, jewellery that would make the queen jealous, the last book to complete her collection of children's' stories - the one that all the publishers had told her had been out of print for fifteen years and she would be very lucky to find - even a new book that she'd never even heard of. Stevie had handed them all to her, smiling all the time. He was so good to her, and she loved him so much.

Then she woken up and realised it had all been a dream. She turned to tell Stevie about it, and then woke up some more and remembered that Stevie hadn't come home. Then she cried.

And as the sun had risen, Sophie had dried her tears, knowing exactly what she had to do. She picked up the telephone and dialled the sergeant's number. She had to report Stevie officially a missing person. The phone hummed quietly to her, singing out an engaged tone. She put it down quickly again, in case Stevie was out there somewhere, trying to ring through. She would try the sergeant again in a couple of minutes. At least that would give

Stevie a couple more minutes to get in touch, before . . .

She remembered the first time she'd met him, both of them heading into Whitehall on differing business. He'd been there to discuss some contract his firm in America had set up, and she'd been there to try and set up a catering contract for the government kitchens. He'd been successful, she hadn't: she hadn't been too upset, her catering business was strong and could survive without them; and besides, she'd met Stevie.

Most men she met usually took a few hours to get over the guilt they felt for something that wasn't even their fault. Not Stevie. He'd held the door open for her, smiled cheerfully - the way he did - and talked to her like a normal human being. Perhaps it was something to do with being American. Whatever it was, she liked it. He hadn't even tried to wheel her down the corridor, wisely deciding to leave her to her own arm power.

By the time she'd come out of her meeting - feeling slightly upset that they had chosen her cheaper and nastier rivals for the contract - she'd found Stevie waiting outside for her. He'd smiled, asked how she'd got on and - after actually listening to her reply - offered to take her out for dinner to cheer her up. Before then, she'd never known it was possible for people to be that confident - the quickest she'd ever been asked out by anyone was after a wait of five weeks.

Of course she'd said yes, as she had when six months later Stevie had told her he was planning on staying in the country, in a little village somewhere out in Derbyshire, and asked if she wanted to stay with him. They'd been married just weeks later, a small ceremony without either sets of parents: Stevie's couldn't make it from America in time, and hers just wouldn't

make it. And now he was missing.

She picked up the telephone again and dialled the station. This time the telephone was answered by a gruff voice she half recognised.

'Hello?' it barked.

'Hello?' she said meekly.

'Allfather?' the voice asked.

'No,' answered Sophie, by now totally confused. 'I'm trying to report . . .'

'Then go away,' the voice interrupted, and the telephone was slammed down.

Sophie held on to the telephone, staring out of the window in bewilderment. She must have got a wrong number, that was the only possible explanation. She tried dialling the number again, watching her finger carefully in case it slipped onto a wrong number. It didn't, and the telephone was answered again.

'Allfather?' the same voice barked.

'I'm trying to reach Sergeant Murphy,' Sophie said as calmly and firmly as she could manage. 'Can you put me through to him, please.'

The voice on the other end of the telephone sighed. She was sure she recognised it.

'Sergeant Murphy is no longer in charge here, madam, and he has far more important things to do now than sort out your minor little problem. Please do not ring here again. Thank you,' he said, and the telephone was slammed down again.

Sophie stared at the telephone for a second of blank amazement. Then with a scream of rage she pulled the entire phone away from the table and flung it across the room. It sailed through the air with an almost graceful ease, spinning as it went, the receiver flying behind it like a comet's tail. Then it reached the window. It didn't stop. With a loud crash, it continued on, landing outside in the garden amidst a shower of glass.

Sophie barely even noticed. She was too busy crying into her hands. Stevie was missing, probably lying dead in some ditch, and now nobody cared, not even the police. She'd ring her mother, but she wouldn't care. And besides, the phone wasn't working any more. So instead, she cried.

'Excuse me,' said a quiet, calm voice.

She looked up to see a wire haired little man standing in her front garden, peering through the fresh new hole in the window. There was something about his clothes that struck her as odd, but individually the tweed jacket and the red waistcoat seemed perfectly normal, counter-pointing his five-year-old's smile perfectly. In his hands he was holding her battered telephone.

'I found this outside,' he said, still grinning like a small boy with a fistful of worms. 'I thought you might want it back.'

Sophie took one look at him, and burst into a fresh bout of tears.

SIX

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**07:13**

Wolsey the Hunter lay quietly curled up in a shaft of light coming in through the curtains. His claws occasionally dug deep into the polished veneer of a Chippendale table, his fur finding its way onto every last piece of fabric in the house. The sun felt good, warmed him through in ways that reminded him of being a kitten, that sunk into his bones. His stomach was empty, but the sun was so alluring that he could wait for food. He could wait for anything, as long as he was warm and dry.

And that was the problem. No matter how warm his antique bed was, there was a coldness rubbing at the back of his head that he just couldn't shake. A coldness that came from having a Sibling who insisted on traipsing out into the cold morning air and getting herself covered in the fine morning



mist. Wolsey could feel the nip in the air through her, feel the bite of the morning in her lungs, see the bright and warming sun darkened by her eye coverings. And even though it would take more than a trek up a hill to shift Wolsey from his rest, in some irritating way, he was right there inside her.

Not that he wasn't ready, at the slightest hint of a need, to jump to her side, all tooth and claw, Wolsey the Protector again. No matter how warm the sun, no matter how cold the day, he always kept one corner of his mind focussed on her, had since that first evening on the hill. He could see what she saw now, the green grass rolling away, the huddle of the village deep in the valley hiding away from the two houses overlooking it. He could see the dark Not-Brother beside her, his long dusty coat with scents from a thousand corners of the world – some Wolsey had smelled himself, some he hadn't and never would. He could see the mist catch on the stubble clinging to his head, see the sun reflect in the coffee skin. He could feel the warmth in the pit of his Sibling's stomach that she felt whenever he spoke, when she spoke to him. And he could hear what they were saying.

'How did they convince you to take a break?' the dark man asked, his feet sinking into the mud. Wolsey could feel it give beneath his Sibling's boots, hear her curse it even though the route was her choice. The only sensible choice, stalking up from behind.

'No choice,' his Sibling said, eyes on the horizon. 'Police Box incident in Edinburgh. The D-'

'*He's* travelling with Ace I take it,' the dark man interrupted. A flash of irritation, soon passed, soon past.

'Yeah, he is,' a smiled apology.

‘And the Manor?’

Wolsey felt something in her give, recognised it. Years together, and they could read each other as only Siblings could: a pang of that feeling he got when he remembered himself, his younger self, and the foolish things he did. Kittenshame.

‘Unfinished business,’ she said out loud, whilst Wolsey remembered Paris.

‘Because if it’s not important, I’d leave it,’ the dark man said, his eyes elsewhere. Wolsey’s ears twitched – a scent in the air, something familiar.

‘What d’you know about it?’

‘Government,’ he said. ‘Very high up. Very important. Very dangerous.’

‘And they wouldn’t let me in.’

‘They don’t let anyone in. Or out.’

‘This should get me in anywhere,’ he felt her pat the booklet in her pocket, felt the pride it gave her. ‘But not there.’

‘Built when King George was on the throne, a manor house for the local squire, five bedrooms, stables round the back. But you don’t want to know about that.’

‘No.’

‘Sold off in the late seventies, and renamed Fawney Rig about the same time by the new owners,’ he said.

‘What was it before then?’ asked his Sibling.

‘Wych Manor,’ replied the dark man, ‘after the elm trees, I suppose.’

And Wolsey saw it, as his Sister saw it, standing firm on the muddy

ground, eyes half-open, sizing it up. It sat in a den of shadows, despite the warm sun, the cool air. It brooded. All around it was a fence that Wolsey knew would bite, kill. The windows dark and shaded, no trees too close to the fence, only one way in, one way out. And it sat there, and challenged them: hunt me, chase me, take me if you can. Or I will take you. And still that scent hung in the air, tantalising, reaching out of the warmth of his table-top bed, half-remembered.

‘Most people assume the House is a manor house too,’ the dark man said, close behind her. ‘They never think to wonder why there’d be two of them, why they’re built so far from the village. But we know all about that.’

Silence. His Sister watching, feeling the remembered emotions of that day flood across her. Putting it behind her. He put an arm on her shoulder, and she let it stay there. It felt heavy, awkward to Wolsey, but she only felt the warmth radiate out. And he smelt the air, and his eyes opened.

‘Can’t you just jump in?’ he heard the dark man say.

‘It’s not something I like to do too often,’ the Sister replied. ‘It only makes the virus stronger.’

Half a second, and Wolsey the Hunter tensed every muscle in his body, his tail twitching in the light. His claws gripped the table, scarring the ancient wood. His legs tensed, flexed, pushed, and his mind opened. A second, and Wolsey the Protector landed in the soft mud, his claws sinking deep, the mist catching in his dark fur. He felt, saw his Sister see him, felt her heart jump with the shock of it, the guilt. And Wolsey the Protector smelt the air again, and tasted death.

‘Something’s wrong,’ he heard his Sibling say, but if she’d been paying

attention, if she'd been aware, she would have smelt it too. But there was no need for that: she knew. And Wolsey was already halfway to the Manor.

He felt his Sister in the back of his head, heard her racing silently behind, heard the dark man thumping down behind her. He knew she could see through his eyes, as he could see through hers, but neither would falter. Neither would tumble, as the double vision disorientated them, as they had in the beginning. They would use it to their advantage, each seeing, each knowing, but each remaining always themselves. And it was as it always was: Wolsey heading the charge, scenting the danger, and his Sister coming from behind, to protect him.

He was by the fence in a moment, not even looking at the Manor, but sniffing the air again. It was there, overpoweringly strong. Blood, raw meat, death. It only took a second to find the body, thrown casually into the guard's hut, crumpled on the floor, stained crimson red. The blood was dry, but the kill was fresh. Two wounds, one through the neck, one splitting the torso open. A clean kill, with a metal claw. The prey would have died quickly, and silently. Wolsey crept closer, senses aware for even the slightest hint of the hunter. Nothing, except his Sister and the dark man behind her.

'We're in trouble,' he said.

'Professional job,' she said. 'One through the voice-box so they can't scream, then gut'em like a kipper.'

'I'd better go in.'

'No,' she said firmly, her insides steel. 'We'd better go in.'

'Okay.'

‘Be careful, Chile.’

‘Always, Thea.’

And Wolsey left the meat: it had told all it had to tell. Whatever had hunted, killed, had been strong and fast, and left no scent. And he could feel that his Sibling knew it too.

‘Wait,’ the dark man said. ‘Electric fence.’

Wolsey felt the shock as his Sibling watched the dark man place his palms on the fence, expecting sparks to fly. Nothing. He turned briefly to her, smiling with flat teeth. Then the gate was opened, and Wolsey was where he should be: at his Sister’s side. The dark man bowed, stepping aside to let them through. Into the killer’s nest.

‘After you,’ he said.

Slowly, cautiously, they went in.

Sergeant Murphy walked through his village, as he had every morning of his life, turning at all the familiar places, eyes drinking in sights that had barely changed since he was a boy. But it was no longer the same, hadn’t been these last few years since *that* night. People had moved away, taking most of the village’s life with it. Those that stayed made sure they locked their doors at night now. The chapel up ahead was dusty and dark, its windows still broken, no-one coming to replace the windows or the verger. And since the House stopped taking in guests, no strangers came to Little Sarfield any more. Sophie and Steve were the only new people to move to the village

since it happened, and now Steve was missing, Sophie beside herself. He altered his route slightly: even though he was meant to be looking for Dorothea, he could still check on Sophie.

His new route took him passed the school house, all boarded up and dead, a symbol of what life in the village was now. Those children that still remained caught the bus into Bexston Moss, the next village along. They didn't play in the streets any more: their parents didn't like to leave them alone, and they didn't like the way the villagers looked at them, regrets tinged with envy. This was no place to bring up children now, not the sunny afternooned marble pit of his childhood. The village was slowly dying, and now this business with Lars and the Manor looked like it would finish them all off. Something in the bag tapping lightly at his side was going to kill all of them. He could feel it in the air, like he'd felt it that one time before.

He felt his heart skip when he turned onto Steve's road: he could see their neat little house sat as it always did, comfortable in its trimmed garden; he could see glass all over the neat lawn, see a hole where their window used to be. But even as he ran, he didn't let go of the bag in his hand, never forgot for one second its clammy feel against his palm, never stopped wondering what was in it, what would happen when it was opened.

And when he got there, he found himself staring through the hole in the window, looking down at Sophie in her wheelchair, pale and delicate still dressed for bed. Her head snapped round immediately, fixing him with such a stare he felt faint. But he saw her face fall in an instant, realising she'd hoped he was Steve. Then she caught his eye again, saying:

'Have you found Stevie?'

The Sergeant shook his head, slowly, feeling each string in his heart give and break for this broken woman. First nature had dealt her a cruel blow from childhood, and now she had lost the one man who she could love.

‘What happened to your window?’

She looked away, embarrassed.

‘I . . . had an accident with the telephone. But someone fixed it for me.’

Sophie motioned into the back of her home, across the always empty floor to one of the chairs in the back. There was a dark shape sat there, fingers arched, cup of tea at his elbow. He hadn’t noticed him before, concentrating on Sophie and with him so silent. For a second he wondered who this man was, so casually at home with Sophie, but then he saw the smile, those eyes. He felt his heart stop, his mouth go dry. He heard him say “Trust me. We’ll stop this creature now,” somewhere in the dark corners of his memory, the corners he didn’t like to go back to, filled as they were with dead children and tooth and claw.

‘How do you do,’ said the little whirlwind, rising to his feet. ‘This is my friend Sophie, and I’m –’

‘The Doctor,’ the Sergeant finished flatly, seeing the question in the man’s eyes.

The Doctor was here. So it was official. It was the end of the world.

The creature moved silently across the valley rim, its stealth belying its massive frame. It kept itself out of the sunlight as far as was possible, well

aware that it didn't want to be seen if it could help it. It was hunting.

SOLAR FILTERS ACTIVE. SEEK AND DESTROY TARGET.

DESIGNATION: HOSTILE HUMAN - **DANGEROUS**.

It stopped briefly, using a patch of trees to cover it while it scanned the surrounding area. To its left, open countryside of no tactical value - except that its centre would be an easy position to defend. To its right, hidden down in the valley, was the centre of human habitation. It would be an easy attack, coming down from the higher ground with superior firepower. They would have the advantage, and the humans wouldn't stand a chance. But first, it had its mission.

Its scan paused briefly on the lip of the valley. Running along the top of the hills was a regular metal track - presumably a guide for some kind of motored vehicle. An inefficient system, no doubt - without the manoeuvrability required of a weapon of war, and easy to disable. One well placed charge could destroy both track and vehicle. Sitting across from the track was a hut, crudely prefabricated from some kind of wood. Outside was another crude vehicle: a four wheeled motor vehicle, lacking in decent armour and weaponry. The target had been seen driving such a vehicle. It deserved attention.

SCANNING: MAGNIFICATION SCALE 200%.

The vehicle was empty and of no tactical importance - the creature itself was stronger than the vehicle's thin frame. The building too was no stronghold. It could make out one large viewing port made out of some fragile transparent material, and its one door was made of the same weak wood as



its shell. As a fortress it was sadly lacking, and could easily be taken. It had some kind of sign hanging above the door, the words POLICE STATION written on it.

The creature considered this.

REFERENCE: "POLICE STATION".

Within half a second, a stream of data entered its mind, giving it the information it required. The building was a base of operations for the local peace-keeping force. Records indicated that if the occupants were armed, it was unlikely that their weapons would be dangerous to it. There was, however, the possibility that the occupants could be dangerous, especially if they came into contact with the target. If nothing else, they were a respected symbol amongst the humans and could possibly orchestrate some form of resistance to invasion. It would be best if they were destroyed.

SCAN COMPLETE. BUILDING STRUCTURE WEAK. OCCUPANTS: ONE HUMAN TARGET - POSSIBLE CONVERSION. SCANNING FOR SUITABILITY.

The creature continued on towards the building, preparing itself for combat. All of its sensors were working at 100%, and its weapons systems were also ready. Then it stopped.

SCAN COMPLETE. HUMAN TARGET MATCHES BIO-SCAN FOR TARGET, DESIGNATION: HOSTILE HUMAN **DANGEROUS**. SUITABILITY: NIL. **TARGET TO BE ELIMINATED**. SCANNING FOR STOLEN DEVICE.

The creature continued forward, preparing to complete its mission.

Then the invasion could begin.

**SCAN COMPLETE: STOLEN DEVICE NOT PRESENT.**

The creature stopped again, assimilating this information. The target had stolen the device. It was vital that it was returned. The target no longer had the device. The only logical conclusion was that the target had hidden the device, and if that was the case then the elimination would have to be suspended. It was more important to retrieve the device, no matter how dangerous the target was. The logical approach would be to let the target lead it to the device, then destroy him.

**SEEK AND DESTROY PROGRAM: SUSPENDED. SURVEILLANCE ON HUMAN TARGET INITIATED.**

The creature settled itself in an easy to maintain position, careful not to reveal itself to the target yet also making sure the position could be defended if need be. It was willing to wait as long as it took. It had briefly considered capturing the target and torturing it to reveal the device's location, but it had been abandoned almost as quickly. Humans were notoriously treacherous, especially this one: it could try to use the device as a bargaining tool. It would be much simpler to allow him to lead it to the device in ignorance.

As it continued with its surveillance, the creature's processors stumbled across a message being relayed on some outdated radio-wave system. It hadn't discovered it at first, its processors scanning the more likely frequencies and systems: it was another mark of the weakness of any likely resistance that they still used such outdated communication methods. However, the signal was coming from the small "POLICE STATION" building,

and one of the speakers had already been identified as the target before the creature had even begun to digest the content.

‘He’s hear? Gott,’ the target said, deep inside the creature. ‘If he’s here it must be a full scale operation. Keep him there until I arrive.’

‘Alright, I’ll do my best. Got to go: Sophie’s at the door. Out.’

And the signal ended. So the target was on the move. The creature’s processors immediately came up with the plan: SURVEILLANCE – SEEK, FOLLOW, INFORM.

It didn’t have to wait long. It soon saw the target leave, heading for the vehicle. Now that it no longer had to scan through walls, the creature could obtain a visual confirmation of the target’s identity. It had the same distinguishing features - the blue colouring to the fabrics it wore, the shape of the face, all of these things - plus a few internal scans - confirmed its identity. It watched him climb into the vehicle and drive away.

The creature considered briefly following immediately, but it knew that the target’s vehicle would stay within visual range for several minutes, and there was still the problem of the “POLICE STATION” to be solved. If the humans had any weapons, it was likely that they would be stock-piled within the building. It would have to be destroyed.

As the car sped away, the creature rose and paced over to the station. A small panel opened up where - if it was human - its stomach would have been. It reached inside with slender digits and pulled out a small flat black dome. As it headed for the station, it pushed a single finger into the thin membranous surface of the device. Somewhere deep inside, a red light began

to pulse regularly.

Lars drove his car at a comfortable pace down towards the village, keeping a watchful eye on each of his mirrors. That was why, when he was deafened, he knew exactly what had happened.

First there was a flash of brilliant white light from behind him, then a loud *crump* that left his ears ringing. Then he saw the flames and the debris frying into the air behind him. It was all he could do to keep his car on the road as the surprise threw his heart into his throat. Someone had blown up the police station. No, he corrected himself, something.

So it had traced him there. He could only just have got out in time - there could be no doubt that the bomb had been intended to claim him. Well, he had escaped it, he was still alive, despite its efforts. Perhaps, he thought, it's not as invincible as we thought.

It was all he could do not to whistle as he continued down into the village. As he drove, he failed to notice a large shape following some distance behind, using the hedgerows for cover. It was moving just as fast as the car, the distance between the two never changing a millimetre. Steadily, tirelessly, the creature was following him.

# SEVEN

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**07:45**

Getting into the Manor was easy, a manoeuvre that had been practiced time and time again: Wolsey crept in through whatever gaps he could find, open windows, missing roof tiles, whatever. Once in, Dorothea directed him to the back door where, almost invariably, people always left the key in the lock: if not in, then definitely nearby. It was the same with the Manor – security became more relaxed when they didn't expect anyone to make it passed the front gate. With careful precision jumping and biting, Wolsey could extract the key, and carry it out to Dorothea outside. Then it was just a question of turning the key, and walking in.

'Neat trick,' said Chile.

'You should see him order out for pizza,' Dorothea replied, a wave of

pride ruffling the fur on Wolsey's neck.

The back door led into a scullery, which in turn opened out into the kitchens: five huge stoves clearly spaced around the room, looking like they could have coped with an army. Only two of them showed signs of recent use, the other three starting to grow a coat of dust and grease. Pots and pans hung down from the ceiling, knives left by chopping blocks half covered with onion, pots filled with water lay cold on the stoves. There was an uneasy silence that hung in the air.

'Looks like they left in a hurry,' Dorothea said, Wolsey winding around her feet, trying to hold her back, protect her.

'Be careful,' Chile whispered.

'Always,' Dorothea replied, half-smiling. But already her senses were dancing, tasting the air ahead.

With barely an effort, she made herself go, opening her eyes wide and seeing with Wolsey. She smelt through his nose, her senses his, his a thousand times sharper than hers alone, and as one they began to advance. There was a time when the double perspective confused her, left her clutching out blind for something to hold on to. Not now. Now it was the greatest gift she had ever been given, and it had saved her life more times that she had dared to count.

She saw the corridor from above and below as they walked from the kitchens out into the main hallway. She could feel Wolsey's anxieties merging with hers, feeding her adrenaline, feeding the virus. It didn't matter: there were more important things to consider. There was not a single soul in the house, and the air stank with blood. Something was very wrong.

‘Which way?’ Chile asked, but Wolsey was already pacing to where the scent grew stronger. It was another well practiced manoeuvre: the small kitling tested the ground ahead, often unseen, and then the muscle followed.

The kitling pushed through large double doors, slightly ajar, and paused, sniffing the air. Dorothea could feel the blood seeping into her, saturating her every sense. She could feel the excitement it filled Wolsey with, and didn’t hate him for it. Years of practice, they knew each other too well.

He was in a huge ballroom, high panelled walls holding up a high panelled ceiling. The floor was made up of thousands of tessellated wooden blocks, and would have once been polished up to a brilliant shine. Over in the corner of the room was a shoddily panelled over alcove that had probably - judging from the height and shape - once been a bar. In the middle of the ceiling there was a yawning gap where a crystal chandelier had once hung. The place looked like it should have been filled with a throbbing mass of people dancing the foxtrot, sipping on cocktails and discussing what Roddy was doing since he got back from the war. Instead, it had been gutted - everything of value stripped away and sold - and left for dead.

It wasn’t completely empty, however. There were massive metal benches dotted around the room, with power cables hanging down from the ceiling that once housed decorative lights. The benches were dotted with complex looking tools and old bits of wire, but also with clear spaces where obviously something else had sat. Computers sat on each desk, obviously very expensive and top of the range, obviously connected to a network. Each and every one of them was smashed to pieces, smouldering slightly.

‘Somebody’s cleaned the place out,’ Chile said.



Dorothea nodded mutely as they moved cautiously in, still half looking through Wolsey's eyes. When she saw them, she saw them twice: looking up at her, her looking up at them.

'Oh my God!' she said softly.

'What?' Chile started to say, but as he moved round the desks, he saw them too. Fifteen bodies, men and women all in the same plain khaki uniform, all dead. Wolsey was sniffing experimentally at one of them, a young woman barely into her twenties. Red hair and dull, glassy blue eyes.

Each of the bodies had been carefully placed, Dorothea realised, so that they couldn't be seen from the doorway. Anyone looking in would see the wrecked computers, but not the dead bodies. She had seen them first through Wolsey, and then moved to see them herself. She examined one of them carefully, guiding Wolsey's eyes over the body inch by inch. She had been killed by the same kind of sword that had done for the guard outside – her corpse was practically cut in half by the blade, the edges of the wound neat and clean. The throat was undamaged, so they had all been done at once, with some speed. This far away from the village, no-one would have heard their screams, not even the most supernaturally acute ears.

'Look at this one,' Chile said, crouched by a stockily built forty-year-old, an unreadable expression on his face. He had seen more dead bodies in his time than Dorothea could even imagine. Probably the same amount as the Doctor. 'Plasma burn cut right through him. Somebody's using some very advanced technology.'

'Anachronistic?' Dorothea suggested. Chile nodded. 'Come on, let's keep moving.'

‘Where to?’

‘Something killed these people,’ she said firmly. ‘Either they were working on something that somebody else thought was worth killing to get, or else what they were working on didn’t take to kindly to it. We’re going to find out which it was.’

Chile nodded, but Dorothea didn’t notice. She was already out into the corridors, her Kitling forerunner padding silently through the dark corridors and empty rooms. In some ways, the building seemed absurdly large to her, vast cavernous rooms viewed through Wolsey’s eyes. But as she followed behind, crouched ready to spring, heart pounding in her ears, she felt the weight of every brick and tile above her. The Manor was afraid, death stalking its gloomy corridors, and any visitor was an unwelcome one. If she could, Dorothea would have ran, turned and got herself back to the sunlight, a warm spot to curl up in. But she didn’t. She was Dorothea McShane, and this was what she did. She didn’t even reach out for Chile’s hand as he padded close behind her.

‘Thea,’ he whispered, but she held up a hand for silence. Wolsey had found something.

She felt the cold tiled floor under his paws, felt the light as it burned onto his retina, smelt the blood in the air. She didn’t follow him into the room – she didn’t need to. God knows what it had been in the days of the Manor, but now it was a small, sterile operating theatre. There was barely anything in there: just the central table, chromed and impassive; the white tiled walls, somehow giving off enough light to blind Wolsey after the darkness of the corridor; the large – and destroyed – computer at the head of the table; the

disembowelled corpse lying on the floor, the blood congealing on the pristine floor.

‘What is it?’ Chile asked, looking deep into her eyes, seeing only his own reflected back.

‘Operating table,’ Dorothea replied, flatly. ‘Dead surgeon. One through the neck, then through the chest. Looks like he was the first to go. No, don’t go in. There’s nothing you can do.’

‘They were working on humans?’ Chile asked. He was speaking to Dorothea’s hand again, as her eyes darted this way and that along the ceiling. ‘What?’

‘Shh!’ she snapped, still scanning the ceiling.

Every sense straining, ignoring Wolsey, stretching her ears out as far as they would go, willing her eyes to bore through the ceiling. She could hear Chile breathing beside her – despite his years of experience, he could never get quiet enough for Dorothea – practically hear his heart beating in his chest. She could hear her own heart pounding heavy in her ears, pushing the tainted blood through her veins. And she could hear . . .

Dorothea fixed Chile with a firm stare, and whispered softly:

‘There’s someone upstairs.’

Slowly, all eyes went to the ceiling.

**SCANNING. MAGNIFICATION: 150%.**

The creature hid itself in the alcove created by two of the weak

structured buildings and watched as the target pulled his vehicle up. His position wasn't easy to defend, the building constructed from an inferior baked clay composition and dotted with more of the fragile window coverings. If the target was hoping to entrench himself, he hadn't chosen a particularly strong place to do so. But he was in a built up area that he knew well - the home advantage could never be over-estimated. The creature would have to keep itself in the shadows, not betray its presence until it knew the situation: if the device wasn't inside the building, then it didn't want to forewarn the target. So it simply watched as the target entered the building.

VISUAL MODE SWITCHING: INFRARED SELECTED.

It watched the two humans - the human target and the undesigned target - walk through the building into a large room at the front of the building. The creature realised that it could now see all of the building's target through the windows, and switched back to its usual hi-resolution vision. There were three non-designated targets inside the building, all grouped together for an easy kill.

BEGINNING SCAN.

From the moment the stranger pushed passed her into the front room, Sophie hated him. She hated everything about him: the way he glanced down at her, contempt clearly etched on his face; the way he ignored her, as if it wasn't her home he was invading; the way he marched straight up to the Doctor and thrust himself into his face. Yes, she particularly hated him for that.

And when he spoke, and she recognised his voice, she hated him all the more.

‘Out to the car,’ the stranger snapped, his voice clipped and German. Harsher than it had been on the telephone. ‘Everybody. Now.’

‘Are we going on a picnic?’ the Doctor asked innocently, grinning the most genuine smile Sophie had seen in her life. If she hadn’t been so busy hating the stranger, she would’ve smiled right back.

‘Is this him, Murphy?’

Sophie saw the Sergeant eye the stranger cautiously, and immediately guessed that he hated him too. That was good. She liked the Sergeant, and she hated the stranger. But there was still undue respect in his voice as he answered:

‘This is the Doctor, yes. Sir.’

‘We don’t need UNIT here, do you understand?’ Lars snapped, nose to nose with the Doctor.

‘You don’t?’ the Doctor echoed, the picture of innocence.

‘I’ve put a call in to the Prime Minister himself. Within two hours, a whole troop of His Majesty’s finest will be here. They won’t need you lot getting under their feet. Do I make myself clear?’

‘As crystal, Mr . . .?’

The Sergeant tried to intercede:

‘This is Lars. He works at Fawney Rig.’

‘And you are going to come with me to the car, or you are all going to die. Do you understand?’

And that was enough for her. Wheeling herself forward, Sophie threw an accusing finger up at Lars, pulling her most harpy-like face. It wasn't difficult. She just thought about every second of last night, terrified for Stevie, terrified of being left alone. And she thought about Stevie not coming back yet, still out there somewhere, lost, hurt, alone. And she thought about a telephone being slammed down on her when she most needed a reassuring voice. After that, the anger came easily. It was easy to intimidate someone who was towering over you, but Sophie could manage it: the chair did most of the work, she just had to remember how much she hated him.

'No, you listen to me,' she snapped, all eyes on her. 'This is my home. I live here. I didn't invite you in here. You can't just barge in and start threatening us like that.'

'Madam,' Lars said, mind elsewhere.

'No, don't you madam me!' she was in a flow now, every second of her worry coming pouring out. She was so absorbed, she didn't even notice the Sergeant standing, bone white, staring out of the window. 'I'm not having a good day. My husband's missing. I refuse to put up with you as well.'

'If you don't do exactly what I say, you will die. This is not a threat, this is a statement of fact, yes?'

'Oh my God,' whispered the Sergeant.

All eyes on him now. The Doctor half turned, said:

'Sergeant?'

'Everybody get down,' he managed to say, already turning away from the window.

Then all hell broke lose.

A second passed. Then:

SCAN COMPLETE.

Another millisecond, then:

STOLEN DEVICE PRESENT. TARGETS IDENTIFIED AS: - KNOWN HUMAN TARGET DESIGNATION **DANGEROUS**, UNKNOWN HUMAN MALE (UNSUITABLE FOR CONVERSION), UNKNOWN HUMAN FEMALE (UNSUITABLE FOR CONVERSION). FINAL TARGET . . . REFERENCING.

For an eighth of a second, the creature paused, unsure what to do for the first time. Deep within its mind, data channels that had remained so far untouched were bursting into life, filling its mind with a flood of data. The device was present, the human target was present, it should complete its mission. And yet, it waited.

Two eighths of a second, then . . .

FINAL TARGET IDENTIFIED: GALLIFREYAN MALE DOCTOR TARGET. TARGET DESIGNATION: **EXTREMELY DANGEROUS**. *VEN MAQU IS* PROGRAM INITIATED. PRIORITY MISSION: ELIMINATION OF GALLIFREYAN MALE DOCTOR TARGET. NOTIFYING LIEUTENANT OF CHANGE IN MISSION.

The creature saw the *Ven Maqu Is* illuminated within its field of vision in a bright, lurid red. He was towards the back of the group, using their bodies

for protection. He was a good soldier, one who understood the value of his pawns for protecting his life. He would be a worthy kill.

It's kill in its sights, the creature powered up its weapons systems to full, stepped out into the road and aimed at the window.

The window exploded in a shower of glass, cutting the Sergeant's back to ribbons. The force of the blast knocked Murphy into the back of Sophie's chair, tipping it over and leaving them both screaming in pain on the floor. Lars was thrown into the Doctor's arms, who caught and righted him in one swift movement. Smoke and sunlight flooded into the room – whatever had forced them to the floor had also set fire to Sophie's floral patterned sofa. Which was supposed to be fireproof. No time for that now. She had to get herself back into her chair, before . . .

Before the ringing in their ears had stopped and the smoke cleared, the creature appeared in the gaping hole that had once been the front of Sophie's house. It stood a clear seven feet, filling most of the missing wall with its massive frame, the sunlight glinting off its polished body. It stood immobile, its head turning slowly from left to right.

WHERE IS THE DOCTOR? it said in a voice like thunder, and it was then that Sophie knew she was going to die.

They sat crouched in the corridor, silent, Chile's eyes on Dorothea,



Dorothea's eyes through Wolsey's. To Chile, she looked ready to pounce, her eyes hidden behind dark glasses, her mouth just a thin line. They had sat like this for several minutes, ever since Wolsey had jumped upstairs. Chile had no idea what she could see, who she could see, and although he wanted to know more than anything, he didn't say a word. He wasn't sure she'd hear him even if he did. Only a mother could love her when she was like this.

It was always the silence that got to him first. His ears weren't as sensitive as hers, his eyes not able to cut through the gloom. Even though he knew she could do it better, even though he knew she would be just as sensitive to world around her as the world around Wolsey, Chile kept straining to see either end of the corridor, to hear the killer approaching. He didn't like the idea of waiting for them to find him, find Dorothea. But he didn't like the idea of charging around blindly looking for them any more. He just wished Dorothea would say something.

A sharp intake of breath, and he saw tension ripple through the muscles in Dorothea's shoulders. He wanted to reach out, put a reassuring hand on her shoulder, but he was afraid of losing it.

'What is it?' he whispered. Nothing.

But he knew something was wrong. She was leaning forward, tense. He could feel her wanting to burst to life, run faster than she had run before, faster than he could keep up, but she remained still. He knew she could feel Wolsey's every movement as if it were her own, knew that the Kitling was in trouble, had seen something. It would have been sensible to run then, but only Dorothea knew which way to go: she had seen the face of the killer. Chile was still alone in the dark.

She moved forward, as if to pounce, and let a hiss of pain escape her lips.

Suddenly, the corridor was filled with the stench of burning hair, the smell catching in the back of Chile's throat, making him want to gag. He thought for a moment it was him or Dorothea, until he saw Wolsey frantically rubbing himself against Dorothea's legs, the hairs on his tail singed and smoking. Dorothea was on her feet in seconds, grabbing Chile's arm without even looking, pulling him back down the corridor. Without even thinking, Chile began running in step behind her, Wolsey pacing along behind them. He could see Dorothea's head flicking this way and that, looking for something.

'What is it?' he asked.

'We have to move,' she snapped, not looking at him, 'or we're dead.'

And upstairs, Chile could hear heavy footsteps pacing firmly along with them.

'What did you see?' Chile asked.

'This way,' was his only reply.

Dorothea dragged him again, leading them away from the kitchens, down another corridor, away from the front hall and the stairs leading up. Or down. He hoped she knew where she was going as door after door whizzed by, hoped some innate instinct was leading her to the sunshine, hoped it even as the corridor ended in front of them, leaving her circling, lost for a few seconds. She soon regained her composure, kicking open the door with a thud that made Chile wince, pushing them both through.

'Oh God,' he whispered, his eyes swinging from one corner of the room

to the other. Even Dorothea stopped for a moment, Wolsey tugging impatiently at her heels.

Chile looked at all of it, every last piece of equipment from every last corner of the Manor, thrown casually across the floor. Boxes of computer discs, paper files, blue-prints all thrown into a pile in the middle of the room. But not just that, other things too. Huge jars of sterile fluid with massive silver arms floating in them, half-dissected pieces of machinery, large silver hands lying disembodied, looking for all the world like deadly silver spiders. He watched as Dorothea paced over to a collection of large silver rifles, each one covered with input sockets and a single tiny blue screen. It looked like it was designed for one hand, but she had to hold it in two. She checked it over, expertly, in a second.

‘Dead,’ she said, but Chile had found something else.

‘Look in here,’ he said.

He motioned to a large door at the other end of the room, the glass mirror clouded over with frost. Despite the ice, he could just manage to see inside. There were five or six massive silver shapes, each a broad shouldered man of about seven-feet tall. Each made entirely out of some polished metal. Each of them was a slightly different design to the others – some had glass jaws, some merely a cloth pulled taut over the face – but each of them had three similar features: empty round eyes, thin slit-like mouth, computer embedded in the chest. He stood back so that Dorothea could get a clearer view.

‘Cybermen,’ she breathed.

‘What?’ Chile wanted to say, but found that his voice wouldn’t work. All

of a sudden, he couldn't get the words to come out, only a bubbling rasp that didn't seem to come from his mouth. He tried to look down, but his head wouldn't move. But out of the corner of his eye, he could see something sticking out of his neck, something that glinted in the light. Something so sharp, he hadn't even felt it.

Dorothea turned, a sentence half on her lips, and then she saw it.

In the second she had to save herself, she drank in every last detail of the scene. She saw Chile, stood dazed and confused, trying to speak. Saw the blade coming out of his neck, puncturing his voice box so he couldn't scream too loud when his belly was slit open. Saw the blade run from the back of his neck and into the giant's silver forearm. Saw the giant's other arm pointing at her, the hand dropped out of the way to reveal the barrel of a weapon embedded in the other forearm. Saw the giant staring down at her – actually registered that they had redesigned themselves again as she saw the face, immobile, like a skull painted in silver, with the familiar jug-handles swept up behind the head. It had two slit-like red eyes, two empty black nostrils, the familiar black slit mouth and wire-mesh chin. It looked like Death itself, and if she couldn't move in that one second, it would be.

The searing heat of the plasma bolt charred the hairs on the back of her head as it just missed her, diving for cover behind some crates. She only just made it.

SHOW YOURSELF, HUMAN, came a voice like thunder.

Something was wrong here. The Cybermen in the freezer looked like a standard advance party to an invasion force, but she had never known Cybermen from so many time periods working together. And now this one was

a completely new design to her, its weapons built in, its chest computer more streamlined and sleek. The whole impression of this new Cyberman was swift and powerful unstoppable death – and the skull face implied a psychological edge she had never seen before. And it had Chile, and it was waiting for her to make a move, toying with her.

STAND, it ordered, OR I SHALL DESTROY YOUR COMPANION.

Chile tried to say something, but the blood was pouring from his neck. He couldn't have long left. What the hell was it waiting for? The Cyberman didn't need to hold a hostage - it could kill Jacob and shoot her down before she even reached the door. But it didn't. It knew exactly where she was, but did nothing: if she didn't know better, she'd say it was afraid. No, if it wasn't attacking, then there was a logical reason for it. Her eyes fell on the cold weight of the Cybergun in her hand. The Cyberman didn't know it didn't work. She had a way out.

'Let Chile go,' she shouted, 'or I blow your head off.'

Chile was shaking his head. Why? The creature didn't know the gun was dead, otherwise it wouldn't have bothered with the hostage. What was she forgetting? The Cyberman was silent, thinking over her demands.

She saw its red eyes pulse ever so slightly. Oh God. Not thinking - it was scanning her. How could she be so stupid?

HAND WEAPON IS NON-FUNCTIONAL. TARGET DESIGNATION:  
VALID TARGET.

Half a second, Dorothea was already moving. She saw the Cyberman drop Chile to the floor, saw the creature's blade thrust deep into his gut, the

gun arm coming up to cover her at the same time. The door was still two metres away, too far. A second. It all happened at once. The Cyberman fired. Dorothea dived, the bolt still heading straight for her. Wolsey leapt out of nowhere, intercepting her before the bolt. She felt the Kitling's concern, felt its anger. Then a small corner of her mind blossomed open, and the whole world went white.

As the Cyberman watched Dorothea jumping out of the room, vanishing entirely, Chile had the good sense to lie back and quietly die.

## DOCUMENT TWO

Stories of immortality are always with us – the natural outcome of our fascination as a species with our own mortality, the only way to stave off the terror that comes with knowing one day we won't be here any more. Wouldn't it be nice if I never had to die, if I was immortal. From this simple, basic desire, have come such classic scenarios as Dracula, the Wandering Jew, even Peter Pan. But there are other, lesser known tales and folklore that deal with exactly the same subject, often in less complicated times being eagerly accepted as the truth.

Take, for example, the tale of the Devil Child of Northampton. This is a story I found not from the usual sources of stories passed down through the generations, but from the parish records of that fine Midlands city. The story goes that some time in the early 1600s, a child was born to a Jacob Renfield (a merchant recently moved to the area, and destined to remain over-seas for



the final years of his life) and his wife (a “dark lady of foreign climes”, presumably a black woman met on one of Renfield’s visits abroad). The name of this child is lost to history, but we do know that his mother always referred to him as Chile – a typical relaxation of child, common amongst Jamaican peoples. Hence when he became notorious, it was the “Devil Chile” tag that stuck.

Little of note seems to have happened to this Chile, until the Civil War broke out in 1642, whereupon he seems to have joined up with the Parliamentary forces against King Charles I. All goes well with the war, and Chile seems to have fought well, but without special commendation. However, when the Battle of Naseby begins (1644) Chile is mortally wounded by a Royalist musket, and is left on the field of battle to die. Which is why it caused so much consternation when he arrived back in Northampton the following day, his wounds healed without scar.

The scenes that followed are a perfect example of how word of mouth and exaggeration lead to the birth of myths. Whilst all that presumably happened is that the wound was not as fatal as first thought, the history handed down to us has it that Chile was immediately tried and found guilty of witchcraft and confederacy with the Devil. The attempts to execute him actually formed the basis of a popular comedy in the area in the 1700s.

The history books state that drowning was first attempted, but that the mysterious soldier “breathed the water like the fishes”. Next was fire, and though he “grew blisters all over”, within a day the wounds were healed and he was fit and strong again. Sword and pike wounds scabbed over in seconds, and were vanished entirely within a matter of hours, while the

strongest poisons were “as the water of life” to him. Hanging, beatings, starving, shooting, all proved similarly ineffective. In the end, the town was forced to accede defeat, and settled instead to banish Chile from the city for life – however long that would be for one in league with the Devil.

What happened to him after he left Northampton we can only imagine, but his story is typical of the wider . . .

An extract from

The Wandering Jew and the Devil (Methuen, 1998.)

By Benjamin Heyworth

# EIGHT

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**08:23**

Sophie lay as still as she could on the floor, trying to ignore the throbbing pain in her legs. Her wheelchair was lying on its side behind her, its wheel still spinning with the force of the explosion that had upended it. Lars was nowhere to be seen, nor the Doctor. He was unconscious. The sergeant was little more than a mass of blood half buried under a pile of broken brick and shattered glass. He let out a gasp, his last breath escaping. Sophie had never seen anyone die before.

The giant stood in the smoking ruin of the front wall, its skull turning this way and that as it surveyed the damage it had caused.

WHERE IS THE DOCTOR? it boomed.

Sophie hardly dared to breathe.

The creature was huge, a demon escaped from the very pit of hell. Its thick skin glistened silver, metallic. A robot? Its face was a frozen glaring skull, two thin red eyes burning around the room. There was nothing human about that face. Its right arm was crooked awkwardly, the wrist trailing slowly around the room. From her cramped vantage point, Sophie noticed a thin metal tube pointing out of the metal of the wrist. Some kind of weapon then, probably the one that had reduced her front wall to rubble. Probably what had killed the sergeant.

What the hell was it?

'I'm here,' she heard the little man say, stood in the doorway to the kitchen. Somehow, his diminutive figure didn't look ridiculous sizing up to the massive bulk of the creature. The fire in his eyes matched the creature's. Sophie noticed his eyes flick downward, and tried to see what he had seen. All she could see was the sergeant's bag, resting on the floor. 'What do you want?'

Without any other movement, the creature fired.

Sophie didn't see the bolt, only felt the searing heat and was blinded by the fire as it flew over head. It flew too fast to see. But not as fast as the Doctor.

Even before he had finished speaking, the Doctor was moving: diving forward, falling to the floor, reaching out with dextrous fingers. As he hit the rubble strewn floor, he rolled, narrowly avoiding a second bolt that melted the concrete floor. When he leapt back to his feet, he had the sergeant's small black bag in his hands. But the creature was just as fast.

Its gun arm swung up quick and smooth, trained on the little man. Nothing could stop the giant's shot. The Doctor flinched, and held the bag out in front of him like a shield: a ridiculous idea - the creature had him clean in its sights. He was a dead man.

HAND GUN: DEACTIVATED. DOCTOR TARGET HAS THE STOLEN DEVICE. DEVICE IS NOT TO BE DAMAGED.

There was no reason for the creature not to shoot, but it didn't. Its gun lowered, and it began to pace forwards. It was slow, but Sophie knew that it was also unstoppable. The Doctor didn't wait to find out, instead turning and bolting out the back way. The creature paced after him.

HUMAN TARGET DESIGNATION: **DANGEROUS** TO BE ELIMINATED.

As it passed by Sophie, its gun arm trained itself to her chest, ready to fire. For a few brief seconds, she was staring down the barrel into the dark shadows inside. If it chose to fire, she'd see the bolt as it flew down the shaft and hit her. She could see what it had done to her house: what would it do to her?

The whole world was nothing but that giant black hole.

Stevie, I'll always love you.

HUMAN TARGET DESIGNATION: **DANGEROUS** NO LONGER IN RANGE. DOCTOR TARGET HAS PRIORITY.

Then the gun passed by, taking the creature with it. It disappeared into the kitchen, and then there was a loud crash. Then, nothing. Sophie thanked the Lord that she was still alive, that the creature was gone. She hoped.

To be safe, she waited for a few minutes, not making a sound. The nagging pain in her legs tried to make her betray herself, whispering that her pain killers were only scant feet away, and that she just had to move and get them for the pain to be gone. But she waited until she could be sure the creature was gone. She didn't want to meet that thing again as long as she lived.

A second later, and Dorothea found herself face down in the mud, outside the perimeter fence. She could feel the cold weight of the dead Cybergun beneath her, being pressed slowly into the mud by her body weight. Wolsey crept up cautiously, nudging the side of her face. He wasn't happy, she knew, wanted her well away from here, from the Cyberman. But was well away from here away from them? How many more of them might there be, and how long before they activated the rest of the advance party? And then there was Chile. This was all getting too complicated.

It had seemed like such a simple plan when she'd come up with it. In, out, back to HQ before Bambera got back, ready to hear her complain again how much a couple of hints would have helped. Now the Cybermen were involved, and the Doctor was here, and it looked like she had a full scale invasion on her hands. And Chile had been sliced clean through, was still in there. She'd seen him survive worse, but she knew it would be at least another half-hour before he was in any state to move. And that was half an hour lying in that room, praying the Cyberman didn't realise its mistake.

She could tell Wolsey wanted her away from here, feel his concern.

She'd had no choice but to jump, but Wolsey knew what it did to her, how the virus took its strength from her, tried to reassert itself with every fragment of it she used, every inch of adrenaline burnt up. He knew she would want a few moments away from the heat of the battle, to calm herself, reassert her will over the virus, take back her body, her mind. He knew she shouldn't go back to the Manor.

And then there was the Doctor to consider. He still wasn't entirely on the ball, only just back from the dead. He was trying to recuperate, gather himself back together, take stock of what had happened. He wouldn't be expecting trouble so soon, probably didn't even know the Cybermen were here. He would have to be warned, if he was going to do anything to stop them, perhaps even call UNIT in.

So it was decided. Chile was a big boy, he could take care of himself. The Doctor would need to be warned. Dorothea would need to rest. There was really only one thing she could do.

And so it was that Wolsey looked after Dorothea, head cocked, as she stalked down the hill, heading back to the Manor, back to the Cyberman. If he had been human, like his Sibling, he probably would have shook his head in resignation. As it was, he merely pulled himself back to his feet and trotted back down the hill, after his Sister, unafraid.

The Doctor ran, faster than he had ever ran before in his lives, the leather bag clutched to his chest. Whatever was in it was extremely light, but the Cyberman hadn't wanted to destroy it, so it had to be important. Anything



that stopped the Cybermen killing was always important.

He knew he could outrun the Cyberman – speed was not their strong point with all that heavy machinery crammed into the giant figure – but the second he stopped, the second he tired, it would find him. They never tired, they never stopped, they never gave up. He was rather surprised to discover how quickly he was tiring, how soon his lungs had started to burn, until he realised he was expecting something else to give him strength. He was no longer running with the strength of a Cheetah, chasing his prey on the wind. He was the Doctor, plain and simple – well, relatively plain and simple – and running just wasn't his thing. Now if he could just remember what his thing was, everything would work out fine.

His talk with Chile had helped, although he suspected there was something the caretaker had been holding back, some pet theory perhaps. But most of it was there. He was the Doctor, he made things better. He fought things like the Cybermen and he won, mostly. But the thing that worried him was the gaps. There was a sizeable chunk of his memories missing: he remembered Jötunson, remembered the cage, the beast taking him over, remembered dying. Then there was just the cellar and waking back to the world. Nothing in between. But there had to be something, something before all the running and chasing and Cybermen. Something had brought him back, somehow, but neither he nor Chile nor Dorothea could tell him what it was, how it happened. But somebody, somewhere knew. They had to.

The Doctor tried to control his temperature, ease the fatigue racking his body, but he found that control was a lot easier with the virus to help. As it was, he would have to stop soon. It was now or never to try his plan.

Stopping carefully in one spot, the Doctor clutched the bag to his chest. If he did take too long, at least the Cyberman wouldn't shoot him down from behind. He hoped. Carefully, his eyes on the ground behind him, the Doctor started to walk backwards, each foot landing in a precisely chosen spot. He watched his feet fall as he ran, and now he matched his path exactly, heading backwards towards a tall overhanging tree in somebody's garden. Something like this would have been child's play, once. Now the jump up to the branch looked like a thousand miles. Hooking the bag into the crook of his elbow, the Doctor stretched out with his arms, tensed the muscles in his legs, and leapt.

He nearly didn't make it. His fingers only just caught the rough bark, and he found himself trying to dig his fingernails into the branch, his legs wildly peddling in the air. He felt his hat slipping from his head, the bag tapping him in the face, and he knew he was going to fall. He didn't even know what had possessed him to try such a stupid trick. One thing was sure – his days in the circus were definitely over. Then, just as he was sure he was going to drop neatly into the Cyberman's path, he managed to claw his way up onto the tree branch.

Allowing himself just one second to catch his breath, and jam his hat firmly onto his head, he looked around him. No time for self-congratulation, unless he wanted to get caught like a cat stuck in a tree. He grasped the bag firmly to his chest, he went down on all fours and started to crawl along the length of the branch. It bent alarmingly, creaking like an old woman, but held until he reached the end of it, hanging over the cottages fence, into the back garden. The Doctor looked down at the drop. Ten feet, but it looked more like a hundred.

Carefully lowering himself, grabbing hold of the branch and letting his feet swing in the air, the Doctor swung in the air. Then he dropped.

He landed in a heap on the ground, the bag slipping from its hold and landed on the grass by his head. He sat staring at it, wishing he had the time to open it. But the Cyberman would be by any second, and it wouldn't take long for it to realise he hadn't vanished into thin air. Gathering himself to his feet, picking up the bag and his hat, the Doctor scurried down to the end of the garden. When he reached the garden gate, he let it off the latch and quickly disappeared into the maze of alleys behind the houses.

Not a second to soon. Immediately as the gate swung shut, the Cyberman came striding around the corner, eyes to the ground, gun arm trained in front of him. The creature looked strangely at home pacing through the quiet streets of the village, the morning sun glinting off its smooth metal body, its demon eyes glowing like the pits of hell. No-one saw it as it walked down the road, it saw them and avoided them long before they got close. Soon it wouldn't matter. Soon the time would come to cleanse the area for the landing party.

INFRARED TRAIL OBSCURED, the Cyberman's central processor told it. BEGINNING SCAN.

The Cyberman stood stock still in the middle of the pavement, its head turning this way and that. Its gaze was a beacon of light that none could hide from. No matter that the Doctor had found some way to obscure his infrared trail – he would have left some other clue, some trail to his destination. No-one escaped the Cybermen, not forever. It stood there a full five seconds, its CPU clicking through every scan in its databanks. To no avail.

DOCTOR TARGET NO LONGER IN AREA. ACCESSING CENTRAL DATABANKS.

And deep inside the Cyberman's CPU, there was a hum of activity. It sent out panicked messages to all other units for some hint of where the Doctor had gone, where he could be. It scanned the available area again, its gaze falling on an overhanging branch some twenty feet back. The idea of checking the infrared tracks for a double trail – a sure sign of backtracking – was just about to occur it, the next logical step being to scan the branch for a trace of the Doctor, when a message came back from the central CPU.

ARCHIVE FROM LIEUTENANT. FOOTAGE SHOWING.

And as the Cyberman stood, it saw through the Lieutenant's eyes as a human female/hybrid was cornered in a dark room. It felt the Lieutenant raise its gun arm, fire – the only logical choice of action, under the circumstances – and watched impassively as the female vanished from the line of fire. It received the downloaded information from the Lieutenant's scan and discovered that the human female/hybrid had teleported clean out of the area, with the assistance of a feline male/hybrid.

POSSIBILITY OF DOCTOR TARGET POSSESSING SIMILAR ABILITY: 74%

The Cyberman's CPU considered this new information carefully. Teleportation would be a useful ability for the Cyberarmy to possess – this human female should be made a priority capture target, and prepared for conversion. It transmitted the suggestion to the Lieutenant, who agreed – of course – and transmitted the orders into the Central Databanks. However, the

*Ven Maqu Is* programme still held chief priority: the Doctor must be found.

SCAN COMPLETE, the CPU announced. PROBABILITY OF DOCTOR TARGET BACKTRACKING: 99.9%

And with it's mystery solved, the Cyberman turned and paced steadily, unwaveringly back down the track. But there was no triumph in its walk, no pride in solving such a complicated problem. There was just the cold impassive mask of its face, and the whirr or complex machinery. The Doctor had brought himself seconds, but nothing more. Nothing stopped the Cybermen.

Chile lay on the floor and did his best to look dead. It wasn't difficult. His neck had knit itself back together, but he had at least two pints of blood down his front. His skin was pale and cool, his neck and chest seeming burning hot as they healed themselves. He felt weak, waiting for his blood supply to build itself back to normal, and he couldn't have moved if he wanted to. All in all, he was doing a good impression of a man killed by the sword. It was just a shame for the Cyberman he hadn't gone the whole hog and died.

Hearing a noise outside – the heavy *clunk clunk* of metal footsteps – Chile lay back, let his eyes go glassy, and held his breath.

A second later and the Cyberman strode in, carrying a crate roughly the size of a washing machine as if it were made out of paper. It set it down with a crash in the centre of a pile of equipment which was starting to grow to roughly the same height as the Cyberman's chest. It had been doing this ever

since Dorothea had jumped out – wandering all over the Manor, then coming back with some new piece of fantastic machinery, which it dumped onto the heap as if it were last weeks newspapers. Chile had no idea what it could be doing – stockpiling for the creatures in the freezer, perhaps? – but he prayed it would keep it busy until he was strong enough to move.

However, it suddenly seemed like a vain hope. Normally, once it had deposited its burden, the creature immediately turned and went for another. This time, it was merely stood as if dead, glowing red eyes on the pile before it. Chile had no idea what it was doing, but he could feel his lungs starting to burn with the effort of keeping his breath in. He would have to breathe soon, or risk fainting. But still the creature did nothing.

Then, in one crisp movement, it thrust its fist into its stomach, the glimmering metal parting like water to allow it inside. When the fist withdrew, it was holding a small flat black dome. With a single digit, it pushed an invisible switch, and a small red light started to flash in the heart of the device. Chile had no trouble guessing what it could be. The Cyberman placed in calmly down in the centre of the pile, and strode unhurried from the room. Chile gave it a few seconds, then gulped for air that couldn't have tasted any sweeter.

Then he paused. The heavy *clunk-clank* of the Cyberman's footsteps had stopped. He listened carefully, straining his ears to hear the slightest sound. He could hear the bomb flashing almost inaudible to itself, but he couldn't hear the Cyberman. Not until the heavy *clunk-clank* started again. Coming back into the room.

Before he could even try to hold his breath again, Chile found himself hauled up to his feet, his face thrust into the black mask of the Cyberman's.

He expected to feel the dank rasp of the creature's breath on his face, but there was nothing. The creature wasn't breathing. Too weak to resist, Chile closed his eyes, anticipating the ice numb of the blade, or the burning heat of the plasma rifle. Neither came. With a slight click, a speaker in the creature's throat came to life, and it thundered calmly at him.

YOU ARE NOT DEAD.

There was no surprise in the creature's voice, merely a cold statement of fact. Chile started to realise he was in over his head. He tried to speak, but merely croaked. His mind was on the bomb in the corner: would the creature forget it? Would he survive it, in his weakened state?

The creature shook him casually with one hand. He felt his brain bounce off the walls of his skull. It wanted to slide into darkness, let it all melt away. He fought to keep control.

YOU ARE NOT DEAD. WHY?

'You can't kill me,' Chile croaked, feeling his throat tear again, hoping it was true. 'No-one can.'

There was a pause. Chile waited for the explosion, for the pain and the heat. He knew what it would feel like – he'd lived through them before.

YOU WILL BE LIKE US, the Creature said, and threw Chile over its shoulder like a sack of grain.

Without hurrying, it had them out of the room and at the other end of the corridor by the time the explosion reduced the room to ash.

Sergeant Murphy held his foot to the floor and tried not to think about how many traffic violations he was notching up. He tried not to think about a lot of things. He tried not to think about the pain in his back, half a million shards of glass slowly worming their way into his flesh. He tried not to think about Lars and how he had left them to the creature, speeding off in his car whilst they lay in the wreckage of Sophie's once picturesque house. He tried not to think about what Mathew Clark would say about the Sergeant hot-wiring his car and driving it off so recklessly. And he tried not to think about how much the woman beside him was starting to annoy him.

It had started as soon as he had come round after the explosion. The silver giant he'd seen in the street was gone, and so was most of the front wall. He'd felt the fire in his back, wanted nothing more than to curl up and die in a corner, but as soon as she'd realised he was alive – not dead, as she'd thought – she'd started screaming at him. What the hell was going on, how were they going to get out of there, what the hell was that thing? He'd tried to explain calmly that he hadn't got any more clue than her, but she just wouldn't accept it. Perk of the uniform – everyone thought you knew everything.

'I can't believe the Doctor just abandoned us like that,' Sophie Wagner snapped beside him, distracting him yet again as he tried to take another corner at ninety.

As far as Murphy could see, the Doctor had saved them both. He'd led the creature away on a lead, leaving them to get out while they could. That was the Doctor's way – diving in to save the little people, not caring about himself. Usually cause it was his fault the little people were in trouble, but at least he meant well. Not that he was going to tell Sophie that – he'd been



brought up not to answer back to people in her condition. Sometimes, though .

..

‘Where’re we going?’ Sophie asked, tongue lashing the Sergeant’s wounds.

He tried to stay calm. Tried not to think how heavy she’d been as he’d lugged her out to the car, her wheelchair mangled beyond recognition. Tried not to think about how much damage the strain had done to his back, never good at the best of times, still in shock from the explosion. He tried to remind herself it was only shock making her like this – probably making him like this too, to be honest – that she was normally a lovely person. She was just tired and scared and looking for answers. But it didn’t help.

‘I want to get you to safety, then I’ll –’

‘No,’ she snapped, turning on him with pointed finger. ‘I want you to take me to Stevie. He’ll look after me.’

‘I don’t know where he is, Sophie,’ the Sergeant said, trying to stay calm. ‘I’ll find him once –’

‘No. Take me to him.’

And that was quite enough. It had been an awful day, with first one person then another barking orders at him, with silver supermen firing missile launchers at him, and he’d just had enough. This kind of thing wasn’t in his job description. He turned his head to bark something at her, God alone knew what, took his eyes off the road for just one second. Before a word left his lips, Sophie was screaming: shrill and piercing, it felt like it would make the Murphy’s ears bleed.

He looked back to the road, and narrowly avoided ploughing into the Doctor as he bolted out in front of them.

He slammed on the brakes, the car skidding, just as the Doctor turned, trying to stop himself. For a moment, it looked like he would go straight through the windscreen, imbed himself in the radiator. Then with a twist – a kind of manoeuvre that it hurt his mind to think about later – he managed to spin himself out of the path of the car, coming to a halt by the passenger side door as the car screeched to a standstill. The smell of burning rubber was in the air as the Doctor casually pulled open the back door and climbed in, still clutching – the Sergeant noticed – Lars' brown leather bag.

'Good morning, Sergeant,' the Doctor said cheerfully, as if he hadn't just been one second from an early grave. 'Any chance of a lift?'

'Where to?' the Sergeant asked, still shaken.

'Away from that, very fast,' the Doctor said, pointing back the way he had come. The sergeant followed the finger, and saw a massive silver shape moving at speed towards the car.

'Hold on,' the Sergeant said, throwing the car into gear and pushing the accelerator down hard.

As the Cyberman burst out of the alleyway, it was just in time to see the car squealing off down the road, heading up and out of the valley. It trained its gun arm on the vehicle, but did nothing but stand and watch. Then, with no sign of anger or disappointment, it steadily started to jog in the footsteps of the car. Eventually, it would catch them. Eventually.

NINE

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**08:56**

Lars stood on the rim of the valley, the House and the Manor on the opposite rim, the village far below him, binoculars to his eyes, searching. He could expect the troops within half-an-hour, forty-five minutes at the most. They were well trained, they knew what to expect. They could handle the Cyberman, possibly even bring it down without too much damage. Of course it was possible that by the time they got here, everyone in the village would be dead. Omelettes and eggs, he thought. Omelettes and eggs.

Chile tested his muscles as he watched numerous corridors and staircases vanishing behind him. Nothing. His strength was coming back, but

slowly, so slowly. And even if it came back to peak performance in the next five seconds, he'd be no match for the silver giant casually carrying every stone of him over one shoulder. It held him firm with one hand, striding casually along, eyes firmly on its destination, not even registering its cargo. Any door that stood in its way was soon a pile of matchwood on the ground. Things didn't look good.

'Where are you taking me?' he tried to ask, the words just a breeze in a forest. He would have to keep quiet – each attempt meant another few precious minutes before he was fully healed. And, besides, the Cyberman refused to answer him. It just kept going along at that unstoppable pace.

As far as Chile could tell from his strange vantage point, the Cyberman was taking him up to the attic. At least, they'd gone up three flights so far, and it didn't seem to be slowing. There could only be an attic left. Room after room went by, Chile straining to see in – every now and then catching a hint of a carefully concealed corpse. The Cyberman was taking no chances that the casual observer might spot something wrong – what were they afraid of? When the invasion force landed, no-one would care for a few out of the way scientists. How long did they have, he wondered. How could he make it tell him, when it seemed content to remain silent as the grave. Hadn't it ever seen a war movie? Right about now it should be boasting about its plan, giving them a chance to escape.

The creature stopped dead, its head turning left, then right. Perhaps this was it.

Without a second's warning, the Cyberman suddenly leapt into the air, its free hand a fist leading the way. The silver fist struck the ceiling, didn't

stop, pushed through in a shower of splinters and plaster. Chile felt the dust catch in his throat, forcing him to cough, rip his tortured neck open again. The creature paid him no heed, first its head, then Chile, then the rest of its massive silver frame swallowed by the hole in the ceiling. Chile shut his eyes, tried to keep the dust away, keep himself from coughing blood.

When he opened his eyes, all was darkness. He could see light pouring through the hole in the floor, illuminating the dust that danced and wheeled in the narrow space, but all else was black. He could feel the roof close in around him, walls not too far away, and he could feel the Cyberman starting to stoop. The attic, then: his guess had been right. But why? What was there up here?

Then he sensed the other creature in the room.

He couldn't see it, all he could see was the Cyberman's back and the floor, its eyes on the attic's other occupant. But he knew it was there: it didn't breathe, it didn't speak, but it exuded *presence*. And the Cyberman was taking him to meet it. Somehow, he didn't think it would be for cocoa and biscuits. The Cyberman stood stock still, Chile draped over one shoulder, for at least a second, not a word passing between it and the unseen creature. But Chile guessed they were communicating. He wished he could hear what they were saying.

Then, suddenly, he found himself lifted from the shoulder, and turned to face the machine.

It sat hunched over in the corner, scowling down at him. It looked uncannily like a giant silver Gorilla, small silver skull set into broad shoulders, atop a huge curved metal belly. It had stick-thin silver arms coming out from

behind its head, that ended in crude three-fingered pincers that danced and snapped in the air around him. They looked like they couldn't take the strain of a good sized mouse, but if the Cyberman's grip was anything to go by, they could probably lift Chile as easy as look at him. There were three more pincers at intervals around the creature's back, holding it firmly to the wall, grasping on to a frayed power line that snaked and twined there.

Most disturbing of all, though, were the two glowing red eyes, the thin slit mouth, the dark nostrils, and the way they mirrored the Death's head of the Cyberman. They were obviously peas from the same pod. Chile wondered almost casually what the creature in front of him was, if the Cyberman was so obviously the foot soldier. He wouldn't have to wait long to find out.

SUBJECT IDENTIFIED: MALE HUMAN SPECIAL, the Forge's CPU told the Cyberman. CONVERSION BEGINNING.

Without a word, the Cyberman behind him turned and headed back to the makeshift entrance. Was it just going to leave him here to bandy insults with the Gorilla? Or . . .

The Forge's pincer arms shot out, fast as vipers, clutched Chile in an iron grip. He tried to struggle out, but the creature's strength, his own weakness, it was doomed to fail. For a moment, he held the creature's blank stare, defiant. Then he had to look away as he saw a thin line of brilliant light split its bulbous stomach in two. Squinting, Chile could just make out the shape of the Gorilla's stomach opening out to reveal a hollow space within. A space roughly the size of a seven-foot tall giant, bent over in the foetal position.

YOU WILL BE LIKE US, the Forge's soft, reedy voice whispered, before the spindly arms thrust the unresisting Chile into its stomach.

The last thing Chile saw was the thin crack of daylight sealing itself shut as the Forge's stomach closed around him.

'Where are we going?' Sophie asked, for the third time. She knew it must be annoying - Christ she could hear it herself, that thin, whining edge to her voice. The cutting tone of a spoiled child. But she wasn't spoiled: she was terrified and alone, and she wanted her Stevie back. Now. 'Please.'

'We're going up to the Manor,' the Doctor said softly from behind her, his Scot's burr taking the edge from her panic. 'From what I can gather, that's where things seem to be concentrated.'

'Is that where Stevie is?' she could see the Sergeant's mouth become a firm, flat line. Didn't he have anyone to worry about?

'It's the last place anyone saw him,' the Doctor whispered softly. 'If he's anywhere, he'll be there.'

Sophie tried to take comfort from that, tried as hard as she could to imagine Stevie waiting for her, a brilliant white smile shining out. Imagine him sweeping her up in his arms, carrying her back to their home, laying her down gently. But their home was a wreck. The creature had seen to that. And she couldn't help hearing the Doctor say 'If he's anywhere,' and knowing what that could mean.

'It's still following,' the Sergeant said, his eyes firmly on the rear-view



mirror. He should keep his eyes on the road, the speed he was going at. But she wouldn't tell him: she knew what response she'd get.

'Hmm,' was all the Doctor said, twisting around in his seat to get a better view.

Sophie tried to look too, but all she could see was a vague glint of silver back down the road. It was hard to equate that tiny speck with the hulking creature that had turned her front room, her life, upside down with such impassive power, hard to worry about that when Stevie was only moments away in her memory. And yet the thought did flash into her head, watching that speck move closer and closer: what would happen when it caught them? And how would she run with no chair to help her?

'Let's have a look at what they find so important, shall we?' the Doctor said, reaching for the leather satchel by his feet. The Sergeant jerked round, pulling the wheel and nearly running them all into the side of the road.

'Sergeant!' Sophie screamed, and instantly regretted it.

'Don't worry,' he snapped back instantly, eyes on the road, as if nothing had happened. 'I know what I'm doing.'

'Something wrong, Sergeant?' the Doctor asked softly.

'I was given very clear instructions about that bag, Doctor. They didn't include anyone but Lars opening it.'

'No,' said the Doctor.

'The consequences would be grave, was what was said,'

'I'm sure.'

'Which leads me to conclude that there's something very important in

there.'

'Indeed,' agreed the Doctor, his fingers stroking the bag softly, like a lover.

The Sergeant sighed. Sophie just knew he wasn't going to let the Doctor do what he needed. No matter what was in that satchel, no matter how immediate the danger, no matter how close that creature was on their heels. Even when that satchel might contain the only chance they had.

'I've known Lars for a long time, Doctor,' the Sergeant said, jaw set. 'He's been a good friend all that time. You, Doctor, have only ever brought pain and suffering to the people of this village.'

'I'd rather we didn't talk about that,' the Doctor said, adding under his breath, so Sophie could only just catch it: 'It hasn't happened yet.'

'And today, Lars treated me like the lowest squadie at the bottom of a pile of scum,' the Sergeant continued. 'Open the bag.'

'Thank you, Sergeant,' the Doctor said, and set to work on the bag.

First he tried to snap the plastic threads with his fingers - they only cut his hands. Digging into his coat pockets, he started searching for something. Something that remained elusive until he took his hat from his head and pulled it from inside: a small Swiss Army Pocket Knife. Using a carefully selected blade, he slit the threads and cracked open the catch. As the bag opened, Sophie half expected to see light flood out from within. Either that, or a solitary moth to fly drunkenly out. Neither did. The Doctor craned over the bag and peered inside. His face crumpled like an old newspaper, his brow practically touching his bottom lip.

'What is it?' Sophie asked.

'Doctor?' echoed the Sergeant.

'Nothing,' the Doctor replied. 'I just wish I'd opened it before I'd started running round the village.'

And reaching in with his thumb and forefinger, the Doctor pulled out a tiny square of plastic, dotted with minute networks of silver threads.

'What is it?' Sophie asked again.

'Some kind of circuit,' the Doctor said, fumbling again in his pockets and pulling out a jeweller's eyeglass. Looking through the lens, he scrutinised the microchip. 'A Cyber control circuit.'

'A what?' growled the Sergeant.

'One of the most basic building blocks of that creature behind us,' Sophie's eyes immediately went to the silver dot behind them. 'Normally, you'd have to hack through a fair amount of Cyberman to get to these. This one isn't damaged at all: it looks brand new. Possibly our friend back there. Ah!'

'Doctor,' said Sophie.

'What is it?' the Sergeant asked, straining to see and keep the car moving at the same time.

'It's a relay link,' the Doctor said, squinting into the eyeglass. 'It keeps them in touch with the CyberController.'

'Doctor,' said Sophie.

'Who?'

'The leader. The one who tells the Cybermen like that one what to do.'

It's their link across the vast distances of space. If this belongs to that Cyberman, then it's totally alone. It can't contact the rest of the invasion fleet.'

'Invasion?'

'Without a doubt, Sergeant. It's what they do: contact, conquer, convert.'

'Doctor!' said Sophie, insistently.

'Sophie?'

'The thing following us,' she said, eyes on the road behind. 'I think it's stopped.'

They all flew forward as the Sergeant slammed the car to a halt, spinning it slightly, so that now Sophie could stare straight down into the valley and see the small speck of silver, still, unmoving. The Doctor's head appeared in between the two seats, his eyes fixed on the creature, his face dark. Sophie could almost believe he could see it in hawk-like clarity. She heard him breathe next to her ear - slightly too slow to be normal. The Sergeant kept the engine ticking over, ready to move again if need be.

'What's it doing?' Sophie asked.

'I don't know,' the Doctor admitted.

'It's moving,' the Sergeant said.

Sophie looked again and could see that it was. But not up towards them: off at a tangent, to one side. Heading for the opposite wall of the valley to them. The dot barely seemed to be moving from this distance, but down there Sophie could imagine it striding through the narrow streets at pace, leaving even the fastest runners far behind, catching up with even the most

hasty retreat. Looking up at the other wall of the valley, Sophie could just see what it was making for: snaking down towards the village on the main road to Greater Sarfield was a line of green vehicles.

'What are they?' Sophie asked.

'My guess, the army,' the Sergeant said, sounding almost relieved.

'Lars said he'd called them in.'

The Doctor's voice was stone, cutting through their relief with a cold edge:

'How quickly can you get me down there?'

Sophie felt her heart fall, even as she saw the Sergeant spin round in his seat. She knew then that she'd never see Stevie again.

'Are you mad? Let them deal -'

'Sergeant Murphy,' the Doctor interrupted, firmly, 'Unless you get me down there before that Cyberman reaches them, every one of those soldiers will die. Do you understand?'

There was no arguing. Wheels squealed, and the car threw itself back down the hill. Back towards the monster.

The first thing Chile felt was the darkness - the crushing true black darkness of the nights of his childhood. Except there was no camp-fire to huddle round for warmth, no rabbit and thyme to fill his empty belly. He tried not to think about bellies. The next thing he felt was the hiss of water flooding into his tiny prison, within seconds up around his neck, higher. He tried

holding his breath, clenching his entire face shut, but to no avail. In the end he had to breath in. He hoped it wouldn't matter: hoped that whatever demon keeping him alive was still looking favourably on him. The next thing he felt was surprise: surprise to find that he could breath the water as easily as the air, without the angry burn he usually associated with drowning.

The next thing he felt was the slight pin-prick of an injection, then an all prevailing sense of ease.

He didn't panic as he felt the bright green line burn up and down his body, scanning him inside and out. He didn't panic as he swam in the water, breathing it, feeling it in every pore of his body. He didn't panic as he heard the quiet digital babble begin, soft and lulling like a mother singing to her child. He didn't even panic as he began to feel other things in the water with him - small tube-like arms, spindly fingers brushing out to him. They felt like a tender caress from a loved one, the reassuring touch of a parent.

STAGE ONE CONVERSION BEGINNING, the Forge told itself.

He didn't even panic when he felt the water starting to thrash about around him - the babble and the caresses ceasing abruptly, light burning his face again. He didn't panic as a shrill screeching started to fill the narrow chamber, even as he felt something new and sharp slice across his forearm. Then he felt fur - damp, sticky, clotted fur - brush against his face, and adrenaline licked in, panic following soon behind.

IMPURITY DETECTED. SUBJECT: UNSUITABLE. CONVERSION ABANDONED.

Just a second later, he saw the stomach begin to split open from the

inside, the light falling on a speeding black shape as it darted out, on two thinner black shapes as they reached in and dragged him out.

As the adrenaline and the panic started to take the edge off the drugs, Chile found himself lying on the attic floor in a pool of thick, gelatinous liquid, coughing up more of the stuff from the very pit of his lungs. Shaking himself vigorously by Chile's head, trying to throw more of the gunk away from his matted and slimy fur, was Wolsey. Turning his head slightly, Chile could see Dorothea behind him, jamming the crack in the Gorilla's belly open with the silver Cybergun. Her eyes were covered by the shades, but he knew she was looking at him.

MALFUNCTION, the Forge told itself. ATTEMPTING TO CLOSE WOMB.

Chile coughed, and another great glob of jelly hit the dusty floor.

'What did you do?' he choked out.

'Same old trick,' hissed Dorothea through gritted teeth. 'Sent Wolsey in to get you. Once it finds him in there, it assumes it's part of you. Bingo, you're no longer good enough to be one of them.'

With a final grunt, Dorothea pushed back and flew away from the Gorilla's stomach, just as the pincer fingers made a grab at where she'd been. She rolled as she fell, and was on her feet even before the doors had snapped shut around the gun. As Wolsey scurried away to the hole in the floor - leaving a trail of sticky paw-prints in the dust - Dorothea was grabbing Chile, helping him to his feet, urging him to run.

'What's the hurry,' Chile complained hoarsely. 'I thought the gun didn't

work.'

'It works,' Dorothea said, dragging him to the hole. 'You just need to be a Cyberman to make it fire. But any old Broadsword can get it to overload.'

And as they dropped through the hole in the floor, the gun exploded, showering the corridor with bits of plaster, tiles, dust and a large proportion of the Forge. As Dorothea's head lifted up again, all she could see was Wolsey at the other end of the corridor. The kitling was covered with slime, and most of the dust loosened by the explosion had stuck to his fur. He looked at her with eyes full of disgust, and she could feel how evil the mixture felt against his fur. Later on, she'd feel how bad it felt against his tongue, too.

'What about the Cyberman?' Chile groaned beside her.

'Gone,' she answered. 'Head down to the village a few minutes ago. Looks like something pretty big's happening without us again.'

'Our mutual friend?' Chile asked, meaning the Doctor.

'Got to be,' Dorothea replied.

Somehow, she didn't think it was a good day to be a Cyberman.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS LOCATED, the Cyberman had told itself.

SCANNING.

It had seen the four trucks the moment they'd crested the horizon, immediately recognised them as military. That put them down as immediate priority number one: past experience had proven that if the *Ven Maqu Is* was allowed to ally himself with the military, then defeat soon followed. Their target



priority became even higher when the scan revealed three things: there were two hundred of them, all human targets; they were carrying one hundred CyberWeapons, all active; the target designated HUMAN TARGET **DANGEROUS** was riding with them, in the lead vehicle. Such information had to be immediately passed on to the CyberLieutenant immediately.

INTERCEPT, the response came almost instantaneously. TARGET VOLUME 15% TOO HIGH FOR ONE UNIT. AWAIT ARRIVAL OF CYBERLIEUTENANT.

And so the Cyberman abandoned its primary course of action, turning off instead to head down on an intercept course with the military units. It stopped for nothing, and its only response when it received the final few moments of the Forge's life via its video-feed link was to contact its Lieutenant again, with the message:

CYBERFORGE OFF LINE. OBTAIN SUITABLE SUBJECT FOR REPLACEMENT.

And without pausing, it kept on, crashing through the countryside.

TEN

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**09:39**

‘Shouldn’t we follow it?’ Chile asked, creeping along behind Dorothea as they wormed their way into the heart of the Manor.

‘I think whatever’s going on in the village is just a diversion. This seems to be the centre of its operations,’ adding over her shoulder: ‘Don’t worry. He can look after himself.’

Don’t I know it, Chile thought, but said nothing.

‘Something’s wrong,’ Dorothea said firmly, eyes flicking this way and that. Wolsey had gone on ahead, and Chile knew she was using his eyes as much as hers.

‘Is it still here?’ a thrill of fear: a new feeling.

She shook her head, giving nothing away. Then:

'I don't get why they destroyed the ice-pops. Why blow up your own invasion force?'

'Unless it wasn't an invasion force.'

'What else?'

'I don't know. A liability.'

'That would make sense. And why so many from different time periods?'

'And why kill everyone here? Why not -' a brief flash of calm darkness, water in his lungs. 'Why not convert them. With everyone who was here, they'd have an army by now.'

Dorothea shook her head again.

'Not their way. They get very picky over who gets to join them. Got to be a perfect physical specimen.'

'I thought they just replaced all the body parts,' Chile said, trying not to think too hard about it.

'Not replace,' Dorothea corrected: 'Augment. That's why they chose you. If they replaced every bit of your body, they'd lose what it was that made you special.'

'I'm touched.'

'Their Forges inject chemicals and machinery into the living tissue, and they slowly turn the muscles into machines. They boost performance by 200%, sometimes 300%. If you were Linford Christie to start with, now you could run like a Cheetah. But if you could barely hobble to the shops before,

then you'd just be able to run, after.'

'You know a lot about it,' Chile said softly, wanting to put a hand on her shoulder, but not doing.

'I've seen it happen to some good friends,' she said, eyes far away.

Chile saw her then, silhouetted against the light at the end of the corridor, and decided he didn't want to know any more. And that she wouldn't want to tell him if he did.

'So everyone here was unsuitable?' he asked, thinking of all the bodies they'd seen so far, the tip of the iceberg.

'Anyone who's smoked more than 5 cigarettes in the past 48 hours is automatically out,' she said, reeling off the list from memory. 'Anyone who happens to have a cold or something. Anyone who's not of at least above average fitness and intelligence. Some of them would have had diseases that they haven't even noticed yet: cancer, Parkinson's, asthma. But still . . .'

'You would've expected at least one or two to make it past the entrance exam.'

'Unless they were somehow a threat to the Cybermen.'

'If perhaps they'd made intimate studies of them - perhaps had four or five specimens locked in a freezer, and God knows how much equipment lying around.'

'Then they'd have to be killed, yeah, and the specimens destroyed. I can't believe I missed that.'

'So somehow the Cybermen found out about this place.'

'And sent a suppression team to wipe them out before they found out

anything useful.'

'So what now?' Chile asked, but Dorothea wasn't listening.

She had stopped suddenly in the middle of the corridor, tensed ready to pounce, eyes elsewhere. She had that look on her face that said Wolsey had found something, and she was seeing it through his eyes. Whatever it was, Chile could tell that it had freaked her. He immediately thought of silver death-masked giants, striding down the corridors, ready to obliterate anybody who had dared to try to learn their secrets.

'What is it?'

'No,' Dorothea said, not hearing. 'Not him.'

And a second later she was hurtling down the corridors at breakneck speed, leaving Chile to run after her, head full of silver and dark.

Nine forty-one and fifteen seconds. Lars sat in the lead truck, the Sergeant at Arms next to him, formulating their plan of attack. The Project had obviously made its base up at the Manor - would return their once the villagers were all eliminated. A small squad of the CyberMusketeers would be sent in to the building to flush the Project out, into the waiting arms of the squadron. Once it was out in the open, the weight of numbers would be in their favour - they could only expect loses of seventy percent, seventy-five at the most. He just prayed that the Project hadn't managed to kill the Doctor yet: if it got the com device back, then this whole thing could get out of hand, fast. He turned to the Sergeant at Arms:

‘Don’t forget, Sergeant. Shoot to kill.’

The Sergeant at Arms reached for his radio. Nine forty-one and twenty-five seconds.

‘Sir,’ said the driver, pointing to the road ahead.

‘We’ve got company, sir,’ said the Sergeant at Arms.

Nine forty-one and thirty-one seconds. Lars looked and saw a blue family saloon car speeding down the road towards them, bouncing this way and that, dragging torn and battered greenery behind it, a sure sign of a cut corner or two. He could just make out three passengers - all dark shadows behind the glass. He turned to the Sergeant at Arms, an order half on his lips.

Nine forty-one and thirty-one seconds. The Sergeant threw the car down the side of the valley, ducking through fields and gardens when the road twisted just too much. He could see the convoy in front of them, four green cloth-covered trucks, moving ponderously up towards the Manor. He would have flashed his lights, sounded his horn, done *something*, but it was all he could do to keep his hands on the wheel, stop the car sliding into a ditch. It had been too long since his Police driving training. It didn’t matter. What ever he did wasn’t enough for the Doctor.

‘Faster, Sergeant,’ urged the imp at his left ear. He resisted the temptation to suggest he drove: he was afraid that he might take him up on the offer.

If he squinted, the Sergeant could just make out the driver of the lead

truck pointing up at them. God knows what they thought was going on.

Terrorist attack, local copper gone crazy, anything but the truth.

Nine forty-one and thirty-three seconds.

'We're too late,' the Doctor whispered.

And just off to the side of the trucks, the Sergeant thought he could see two silver dots, converging.

Nine forty-one and thirty-five seconds.

The Cyberman stopped, scanning the area, waiting for the signal. It had located the targets - the four large transports, filled with the armed human targets, the smaller transport filled with three unarmed human targets. The armed targets took priority: that was why it centred its scan on the four trucks, why the Doctor went unnoticed for at least another minute. That was why its first target was the second truck in the line, why its first grenade was destined for that.

It began booting up the appropriate programme, its vision clearing, everything coming into sharp focus. A small screen appeared in one corner of its vision, filled with the same picture of the four covered transports from the other side: the CyberLieutenant's view of the targets. Sub-processors deep within its mind worked out just the correct proportions of adrenaline to release into the system to allow its wetware components to function at optimal efficiency. It even had a spare millisecond to scan for a suitable replacement for the Forge: perhaps one of the occupants of the smaller transport?



Nine forty-one and forty seconds. The signal came.

CYBERLIEUTENANT IN POSITION. COMMENCE ATTACK.

One second later, and the grenade hit its target.

The first grenade hit with enough force to force the first two trucks clean off the road and into a neighbouring field. The first truck landed on its side, shaking the occupants but only killing a few. The second truck was a smoking ruin lying gutted in the grass. The driver of the third truck didn't have long to think about that, though, because a millisecond later and another grenade had hit his truck. A moment later, and there were two smoking ruins in the field, and two over-turned trucks with shaken soldiers starting to crawl out of them.

TARGET NUMBERS REDUCED: 50%. REMAINING PERCENTAGE ARMED: 50%.

Lars was the first to crawl out of the lead truck, scrambling over the body of its driver, impaled on the steering wheel. He was followed closely by the Sergeant at Arms, who quickly assessed the situation and began barking out orders.

The troops quickly filed out of the wrecks - Lars guessed they had half as many as when they started - and began scrambling round for cover. The Project had chosen the site for its attack well: the only protection in the field was the smoking ruins of the trucks. Lars could see the silver glint of his troops CyberGuns, and the CyberGloves the troops wore to confuse the guns

into thinking they were being held by their true masters. The fingers ended in tiny jack-plugs, linking directly into the guns, sending the correct protocols to the weapons faster than most human computers could handle. Within moments, the pulse of plasma rifles filled the air, the energy bolts raining both ways. He could see his troops - only those armed with the CyberGuns - being carefully picked off one by one.

‘Stop the car,’ the Doctor ordered abruptly, and the Sergeant instantly obeyed. ‘Sophie, take this.’

Turning in her seat, Sophie saw that the Doctor was offering her the small circuit from the bag. She held out a hand and took it carefully. It felt cool in her palm. The Doctor’s face was grave as he looked deep into her eyes.

‘That is the most dangerous thing you will ever hold,’ he warned. ‘At the first sign of a Cyberman, you get far away from here. Do you understand.’

She nodded, mute.

‘Good. Stay here.’

And with that, he opened the car door and was gone.

Instinctively, the Sergeant reached for his door, wanting to be where the action was, where he could protect his village. Sophie reached out a hand, held his arm, shook her head.

‘Didn’t you hear him?’ she said. ‘How am I meant to get away if you go down there?’

And the Sergeant’s eyes dropped to her useless legs, there in the passenger seat, and he stayed put, hands on the wheel, fingers drumming nervously. Sophie looked down at the circuit in her hand, then out at the

carnage in front of her.

*VEN MAQU IS LOCATED. REFERENCING.*

Both Cybermen saw the Doctor at the same time, highlighted in brilliant flashes of red against the dull green of the unarmed targets and the oranges flashes of the armed. They both had the same thought at the same time, even as they continued picking off the armed targets one by one. A thousand different protocols began to whirr into life, preparing to change the focus from one target to another, when they were halted.

*VEN MAQU IS PROGRAMME SUSPENDED. ARMED TARGETS PRIORITY.*

And so the Doctor escaped for another few seconds, not even realising.

It took Lars a few moments longer to realise the Doctor was on the field of battle. He was too busy watching all his plans fall apart, as easily as the CyberMusketeers were being picked off, one by one. There could barely be twenty-left now, and the regular troops were next to useless against the Project's armour. He couldn't understand how it was out-maneuvring them so effectively - they hadn't even clapped eyes on it yet, and it seemed to be moving all around them. Then the Doctor appeared at his side, and everything went from bad to worse.

'Have you got Glitterguns?' he asked urgently.

'What?' Lars shouted over the sounds of people dying.

'Gold dust,' the Doctor yelled back.

'Not effective.'

‘Not effective?’ the Doctor echoed in disbelief.

‘Redesigned breathing apparatus. Gold dust isn’t a viable weapon any more.’

‘Radiation?’ a shake of the head. ‘Solvents?’

‘None of those things are effective any more, Doctor. We ironed out all those problems.’

‘We?’ realisation, starting to dawn.

‘It was meant to obey its superiors,’ Lars said.

‘Look around. Do you see anything superior to that?’

‘We had no idea what we were doing.’

‘What *were* you doing?’

Lars turned to him, and the Doctor could see the fear in his eyes. He could hear the bitter sarcasm in his voice, even above the sounds of the battle.

‘It took thirty years of careful research, but Project Vali finally managed to reach completion. The creation of a super-soldier for the European army: a human Cyberman hybrid,’ the Doctor’s face went hard as stone. ‘It seems to have picked up the family traits quite well, don’t you think?’

ARMED TARGETS REMAINING: 18.

The Cyberman took careful aim, the crosshairs in its vision falling smoothly over one of the flashing orange targets. A milliseconds pause as the weapons systems brought themselves up to full strength, then a flash of

darkness as filters dropped into place to protect the delicate visual circuits from the glare of the weapon. Down in the field, there was a flash and the orange target vanished. Its vision cleared as the filters lifted, and it started scanning for the next target.

ARMED TARGETS REMAINING: 17.

A flash from the CyberLieutenant's weapon, and another orange target disappeared.

ARMED TARGETS REMAINING: 16.

A sharp ping of the scan locating something of vital importance. In the smaller vehicle, resting at the crest of the rise to the North, was the stolen device. There was a pause as the Cyberman's computers reassessed the situation, arranging a list of priorities. In the brief pause, there was a flash, and another target disappeared.

ARMED TARGETS REMAINING: 15. ARMED TARGETS DROPPED BELOW PRIORITY LEVEL. *VEN MAQU IS* PROGRAMME REINITIATED.

Something else to consider. It took nearly a full second for this new information to be assimilated.

CYBERLIEUTENANT TO FULFIL *VEN MAQU IS* PROGRAMME.  
CYBERUNIT TO REGAIN STOLEN DEVICE.

And with that decided, the Cyberman rose, and started working its way around to the small vehicle, still raining plasma bolts down on the troops below, with deadly accuracy.

'Humans!' the Doctor cursed loudly.

'Volunteers,' laughed Lars bitterly, misunderstanding.

The Doctor drew himself up to his full height, past his full height, towering over Lars, a giant of darkness. The European man cowered below him, glancing fearfully up, terrified more of this dark vision than the tower of glinting metal he had helped create, that would ultimately destroy them all. As the Doctor spoke, there couldn't be a soul in that field - in that village - that didn't look at their lives, find them wanting, promise themselves that it would be different, that they would be different.

'Look up there. Look around you. That creature up there is the machine world's perfect answer to evolution: man and machine in ghoulish harmony. They change, they adapt, and with each change, each adaptation, they grow stronger, harder to kill. And you took it upon yourself to help them, to add your own twisted amateur knowledge of death to theirs? Do you think they needed it? You can barely understand the complexities of your own brains, and you thought you could understand the multitude of protocols and counter-protocols that make up even the tiniest layer of the cybernetic brain. Did you? Look at it, look around you. What do you see?'

And Lars did look, saw death raining down around him, not touching him, never touching him, and thought of his grandfather.

'I see the Fuhrer's dream come true. *Urbemensch*. Supermen. That's why I had to do it.'

'You had to?'

And Lars knew then that the Doctor had to know, had to understand. Because there couldn't be long left, for any of them.

'I had to. It's unstoppable, Doctor. But they wouldn't listen, wouldn't terminate the project. So I had to let it escape, so they'd send troops, destroy it. I didn't want to take Europe back to the dark ages, with this government trying to re-enact Hitler's dream. I thought it would be easy, with what we knew. I took the com circuit, to stop them transmitting the new designs to the CyberController - even thought we could track it down later and destroy the entire CyberRace. But I was wrong. You have to destroy it, Doctor. All of it.'

And the Doctor looked down on him, felt his hearts break.

'Lars,' he said softly.

Then it happened.

Sophie saw it first, watching the edge of the battle. She reached out with a clamp-like grasp, but there was no need. The Sergeant had seen it too. A giant silver shape heading down into the fields below. Fire sprouted from its arm, and men on the field simply disappeared. They could both see where it was heading.

'It's going for the Doctor. We've got to do something.'

A seconds pause. Sophie screamed the Sergeant's name again, demanded he do something. Then a crunch as he threw the car into gear, a lurch as he planted his foot firmly on the accelerator.

'Hold on,' he said through gritted teeth, feeling every one of the shards

of glass worming their way into his back.

And at breakneck speed, the car bounced through the fields, towards the battle. Heading straight towards the Doctor.

As the Doctor watched, he saw a small dot of red appear hovering over Lars' heart. Before he had registered anything - not even that the noise and confusion all around him had suddenly grown louder - the dot blossomed into a flower of brilliant yellow, and he had to throw a hand up to protect himself. But he didn't close his eyes. He watched, horror stricken, as Lars exploded into dust, right before his very eyes.

It took him a second to register what had happened. A second too long. He spun round just in time to see the silver giant striding up to him, one arm pointing accusingly at him. The only thing that had saved him so far was the number of soldiers who ran into the line of fire, trying to get a clear shot at the Cyberman. It swatted and slashed its way through them all, making a steady path towards its intended target. The Doctor.

By the time it registered that he should run, it was already too late.

The Cyberman stood in front of him, gun arm pointing straight at his chest. The blast would obliterate both of his hearts, but that didn't matter: he wouldn't have a chest to keep them in any more. He thought he could just hear the slight whine of its weapons systems powering up.

'This isn't fair,' he said. 'I've already been dead once.'

And then it happened.



A blue saloon car came flying through the air, planting itself firmly into the Cyberman's side. The Doctor glanced up, saw Sophie and Sergeant Murphy jolted behind the wheel as the car's forward motion stopped suddenly. The Cyberman barely moved, barely even registered the hit, but the entire bonnet of the car crumpled, a concertina. It stopped just before the windscreen, stopping the driver and his passenger from being killed instantly by the engine.

The Cyberman paused for just a second, assessing the threat of this new arrival. By the time it decided that the Time Lord took priority, it was too late.

One of the CyberMusketees - quite possibly the last one left alive - managed to line up his shot, and pulled the trigger.

A tiny pinprick of red appeared on the back of the CyberLieutenant's head, quickly blossoming into a flower of brightest, most brilliant yellow. Although the entire back of its head vanished, the Cyberman's death-mask face was still glaring down at the Doctor as it lurched forwards. He only just managed to jump out of the way in time, narrowly avoiding being the CyberLieutenant's last victim, crushed beneath its giant frame. As it fell face down in the grass, the Doctor looked down at it, and felt both of his hearts shift from his throat.

It was a full five seconds before the fifteen soldiers left alive started cheering.

# ELEVEN

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**10:13**

The Cyberman watched from the crest of the hill as its target raced away, down the hill, towards the *Ven Maqu Is*. It watched as the CyberLieutenant found its target - the *Ven Maqu Is* himself - lined him up in its sights. It watched the vehicle plough straight into the Cyberman, barely even denting its armour. It watched as one of the armed targets lined the CyberLieutenant up and destroyed it with a single shot.

CYBERLIEUTENANT DESTROYED. UPGRADING THIS UNIT'S DESIGNATION.

Once the programme was complete, the CyberLieutenant looked down on the field of battle and saw the human targets in celebration. This was

illogical if they thought they were under threat, so it followed that they thought there was only one CyberUnit. They obviously had no information regarding the conversion of the Human Target Designation: Suitable the previous night. This required a different tactic: stealth.

PRIORITIES: ACQUIRE THE STOLEN DEVICE. COMPLETE *VEN MAQU IS* PROGRAMME. TRANSMIT NEW DESIGN PARAMETERS TO CYBERLEADER. BEGIN.

Steadily, cautiously, the CyberLieutenant started to move down towards the field, ready to fulfil its priorities.

'Are you alright?' the Doctor asked urgently.

'Yeah,' said the Sergeant.

'I think so,' Sophie said, looking down at the circuit in her hand. It was unbroken, barely scratched.

The Doctor nodded, pulled open the door to the drivers side, then moved round to the passenger side.

'Good. Quickly - everybody out,' he ordered, and added: 'Thank you. You saved my life.'

Then, with barely an effort, he hoisted Sophie into his arms and carried her away from the damaged car, heading for the last truck in the line. Already the remaining soldiers were crowding round it, using their combined strength to bounce it back onto its wheels. It was dented, but would still run. The Sergeant was rushing up beside them, trying to establish a chain of

command, but the soldiers were mostly ignoring him. It was only as the Doctor approached that they paid him any attention.

‘Sergeant,’ he called to Murphy. ‘Get one of those Privates to make sure no-one touches that Cyberman.’

‘Yes, sir,’ the Sergeant snapped back, and the Doctor dropped him a wink. From that moment on, all the soldiers left standing listened intently to what Murphy had to say.

Carefully, with a gentleness that reminded her of Stevie, the Doctor placed her in the cab of the uprighted truck. He smiled at her, warmly and said:

‘You’ll be alright here. I’ll be back soon.’

And then he left, joining the bustle of people running around the dead Cyberman. Left Sophie looking down at the cool circuit in her hand, wondering how many had died because of it.

The CyberLieutenant saw the stolen device glowing red in its vision, and the flash of red that was the Doctor in the distance. It saw the human female that held the device, and saw that the vehicle she was in could easily out pace the Cyberman for at least a short while. It would have to be careful that it didn’t give her opportunity or reason to fly. As it casually reached down and impaled a soldier running around the back of the truck with its sword arm, the CyberLieutenant noticed that the Human Female Target was damaged, that her legs were non-functional. Then a plan of action occurred to it.

Sophie saw it suddenly in her field of vision, stood beside her arms outstretched. She tried to shout, but her voice refused to work. She could see that none of the others had seen it, crowded around the dead Cyberman.

GIVE ME THE STOLEN DEVICE, it said, to her and her alone.

She looked down at the circuit in her hand and made a stupid decision. She shook her head. The Cyberman seemed to understand the gesture.

OUR KIND WERE ONCE LIKE YOU, the creature said, softly, its voice aimed at her and her alone. WEAK. FLESH AND BLOOD. INOPERATIVE FLESH AND BLOOD.

Without thinking, Sophie's hand dropped to her legs, cold and useless. She couldn't even feel her fingers on the skin.

BUT WE ADVANCED, the creature continued. WE DEVELOPED SURGICAL TECHNIQUES TO REPLACE INEFFECTIVE LIMBS.

Sophie's eyes dropped to the creature's silver legs, muscular, strong, then to hers.

GIVE ME THE DEVICE, said the creature, AND YOU WILL BE LIKE US. YOU WILL WALK AGAIN.

'I've never walked,' she managed to whisper, but the creature said nothing.

She sat there, her mind full of memories. Sat in her chair whilst the other girls played hockey. Sat at her wedding, Stevie having to bend down to lift her veil and kiss her. Stevie having to pick her up and put her in the bath, in the car, on the bed. The Sergeant trying to push her along in her chair one

day at his house for a barbecue. The Sergeant struggling with her to the car when they needed to escape the house, because . . . because . . . She couldn't help it. She knew what she should say, what she should do, what she had to do.

There were tears in her eyes as she held out the circuit to the giant.

'Okay,' she said. 'Please.'

With surprisingly gentle fingers, the Cyberman reached out and took the circuit, slotting it into its slit mouth and swallowing it into whatever passed as its stomach.

STOLEN DEVICE RETRIEVED. CONNECTING.

The Cyberman stood for a second, receiving information, looking down at the Female Target in front of it. Several things entered its brain at once. It was informed that the device would take five minutes to connect and be brought up to operational status; it was informed that the vehicle in front of it could only be worked by targets with functioning legs; it was informed that, therefore, the Female Target was no threat and could safely be ignored; it was informed that the *Ven Maqu Is* programme still needed completing.

'What about me?' Sophie said. 'What about me?'

Ignoring Sophie, the Cyberman stepped out in front of the truck and tried to take aim, pacing steadily forwards as it did.

Because it ignored Sophie, it failed to see her realise her mistake, realise that the creature had lied. It failed to see a glint of determination spark

in her eyes as she saw the creature take aim at the Doctor. It even failed to notice as she turned the key in the ignition, dropping to the floor of the cab to pump the accelerator with her hands. It only noticed her, in fact, when its proximity sensors warned it about the approaching vehicle.

Registering its mistake, it formulated a plan. Its first decision was to let the truck hit. That was referenced against its databanks and queried due to the manner of the destruction of the previous Lieutenant. Given the similarity of the circumstances, the plan was abandoned, and a new one formulated. The vehicle would have to be destroyed. And so, a fraction of a second before the truck hit, the Cyberman raised its gun arm and fired at full power.

‘Doctor, look!’ Murphy shouted, pointing behind them.

The Doctor turned just in time to see another Cyberman - it had converted someone, why hadn’t he guessed that it would? - fire at point blank range at a truck hurtling towards it. There was a brilliant flare of yellow, which everyone but the Doctor was forced to turn away from. The sound of the explosion washed over them in a wave, deafening a few of the surrounding soldiers, obliterating the sound of the Doctor screaming out a single word.

‘Sophie!’

And as the light died, the Doctor was the only one who could see the wreckage of the truck - the entire front of the vehicle melted away into nothing, the rest of its frame burning with a blue fire. He was the only one who could see that nothing could have escaped that blast, nothing human. And he was the only one to see the tarnished silver shape of the Cyberman striding out of



the flames, devil's eyes glowing brilliant red.

And he was the only one to see it raise its gun arm, point it straight at him.

The CyberLieutenant struggled out of the wreckage, and did a quick damage assessment. Even before the results were in, it was aiming its gun at the *Ven Maqu Is*, sending the signal to fire. Even before it registered that it's vision was black, blinded by the explosion's glare. Even before it realised that the weapon had failed to fire.

DAMAGE REPORT, came the CPU's response. HAND WEAPON NO LONGER FUNCTION. ARM BLADE CAN NO LONGER EXTRACT. VISION IMPAIRED - SWITCHING TO SONAR.

Suddenly the world sprung to life around it again, created as a three dimensional image in its CPU, imagined from the sound waves bouncing back into its damaged receivers in its head. It carefully filed the information of the failure of its new tactic in its data-banks and waited for a new plan to be suggested.

PERFORMANCE DOWN TO 45%. *VEN MAQU IS* PROGRAMME SUSPENDED - TRANSMISSION OF DESIGN DATA PRIORITY.

Then came a word that the CyberLieutenant wasn't used to seeing at all:

RETREAT.

The Doctor watched as the Cyberman stood for a second, gun arm unwavering. Then he saw it turn, quickly, and disappear into the greenery around the field. It was only then that he realised he'd been holding his breath.

'We were only told about one target,' a private said behind him.

'They multiply. It's what they're best at,' the Doctor said.

The Sergeant was at his side in an instant, saying Sophie's name softly. The Doctor shook his head sadly.

'Where's it going?'

'It's damaged.'

'How can you tell?'

'It didn't kill me,' the Doctor said flatly. 'I have to get to the village.'

'Why?' Murphy asked, trotting along beside the Doctor as he rushed to the other end of the field.

'Transport,' he called over his shoulder. 'I have to follow it.'

Murphy stopped. The pain in his back was too much to bear, almost as great as the pain in his heart.

'Why? Where's it going?'

The Doctor didn't stop, just shouted back:

'To the Manor. Where else?'

## TWELVE

**Little Sarfield: 24. November, 2003**

**10:20**

Chile rested the body down gently on the grass. The cold winter sun merely highlighted how pale it was, how vivid the red slash all the way down its front. Dorothea stood back and looked down at him, an unreadable look on her face. Chile wanted to ask why they'd carried one body out of the abattoir, why that one out of a hundred, wanted to put an arm round her and tell her it would be alright. He didn't do either, of course, but he wanted to.

'Who is he?' he asked.

Dorothea stood, silent, perhaps thinking he'd asked Wolsey. But the Kitling was skulking in a corner somewhere, trying to rid himself of the Forge's gloop, and there was no-one else around. Chile moved closer, and repeated himself, softly.

‘Michael Smith,’ she said. ‘He worked here. I came here to speak to him.’

He looked down at the young boy’s face, pale and unmoving. He had blond hair, probably blue eyes. He looked young. Was young. He wondered what he’d done to warrant Dorothea’s attention, and actually had the nerve to ask, for once.

‘His father was adopted,’ she answered, pausing as if that was all. Then: ‘His grandparents had a boy when they were young, in their twenties. They were Russian - the grandfather an officer in the Soviet Army. When the mother was killed, the father swore to look after him. But then he got sent to England on a top secret mission and got himself killed too. So the grandfather was adopted into a English family: the grandfather had an English grandmother whose family arranged the whole thing. So he lost his original name, took on Smith after the man who brought the baby to them. Then he got married and had two children. One of them was Michael’s father.’

‘I don’t see a connection.’

‘I knew Michael’s grandfather, was there when he died. And I knew his great-great-great-grandfather, a count of St. Petersburg. I messed him about a bit. A lot. He reminded me of his great-great-grandson. I broke his heart.’

‘And you wanted to make it up to Michael.’

‘I wanted to tell him a bit about his family, the ones he didn’t know. But I’m too late.’

And silently, without show, Dorothea reached up and pulled a badge from her lapel, and bent down and pinned it to the corpse’s uniform. As she stood up, looking down at the hammer and sickle glinting back up in the

sunlight, Chile reached out and held her reassuringly in his arms. They were still stood like that when the Doctor pulled up behind them on an old Triumph Fury, letting it fall to the floor as he leapt off.

'Is it here?' he asked urgently.

'What?' Dorothea asked.

'The Cyberman,' the Doctor asked darkly.

All eyes went up to the Manor behind them.

'Stay here,' the Doctor said, heading for the front door.

Dorothea ran up behind him, put a firm hand on his shoulder.

'I'm coming with you,' she said.

'Too dangerous. Stay with Chile.'

'I'm a big girl now, Doctor. I do this for a living.'

The Doctor looked into her eyes, softened. He reached up with a cold hand and gently flicked the end of her nose, smiling. Dorothea smiled too.

'Don't worry. I'll be back,' he said. 'I've been dead once. I didn't enjoy it.'

'Do you know how long its been since you did that?' she asked.

'Too long,' the Doctor admitted, 'for both of us. Chile, make sure she stays away from the Manor.'

Chile nodded, stepping forward protectively. He needn't have bothered: Dorothea stood back, grinning like a fifteen year old, as the Doctor disappeared into the depths of the dark house. She smiled as she lead her away from the Manor, even smiling still as he went back and dragged Michael's body to safety. She was still smiling five minutes later when every

brick in the Manor decided they didn't like where they had sat for the last three hundred years and all tried to make for the heart of the building, dragging the Manor down to the ground in front of them.

The Cyberman stood at the heart of the building, in total darkness. Even though it couldn't see, it could hear every wall, every piece of furniture in the room. It could hear where the spiders webs in the corners were, could hear the floorboards above it complaining at their age-old burden. So when the Doctor arrived in the room, it knew instantly, had its gun arm covering the Time Lord before he'd even before he'd registered where the Cyberman was in the gloom.

'I'm assuming that doesn't work,' the Doctor said, edging forwards. 'But if I'm wrong, please, use it.'

Nothing, only silence.

'Well, that's good.'

**YOU WILL BE DESTROYED.**

'Really? Then why don't you destroy me?' the Doctor paused again. 'What's the problem? Change of heart? Or perhaps that explosion damaged you more than you'd like me to know. Slowly wearing you down, is it. Until you're dead, gone.'

**YOU WILL BE DESTROYED.**

'I don't doubt it,' the Doctor said, coldly, eyes elsewhere. 'I was, in fact. But now I'm back. Nothing to do with you, I take it?'

Silence. Only silence.

'No. I didn't think so,' the Doctor said, almost regretfully. 'I suppose before I might have come in here with some sort of plan, some way of grinding you into defeat, wiping out your family, your race. But I don't need to now, do I. You've destroyed yourself. Perhaps I never needed to.'

Unnoticed, Wolsey padded reluctantly into the room, still matted with gunk and dust and God alone knew what else. But he resisted the urge to clean himself, at his Sister's instruction, and sat in silence, watching.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, *MAQU IS*? the Cyberlieutenant asked firmly, its voice shaking the dust from the rafters.

'Is that what you call me?' he said, surprised. 'Telosian? I'll have to translate it, at some point.'

THERE WILL BE NO BARGAINS.

'You've killed a good many of my friends, today, over the years. I know you of old,' the Doctor spat. 'What makes you think I'd bargain with you?'

WHAT DO YOU WANT? the Cyberman repeated.

'I . . .' said the Doctor, and stopped.

DESIGNS RECEIVED, the Cyberlieutenant's CPU told it silently.

DESTROY *VEN MAQU IS*. DESTROY ALL REMAINING COPIES OF  
DESIGNS.

And the Cyberman merely remained despite knowing exactly what that last message meant.

'I should go,' the Doctor said, turning.



*MAQU IS?* the Cyberman started.

The Doctor paused in the doorway, turning back to the creature. His Sister's unease flooding through his system, Wolsey stood, tensed, ready for action.

'Yes?' said the Doctor.

A pause. The Cyberman's eyes glowed red.

*VEN MAQU IS. THE DOCTOR. THE HOME EATER.*

Another pause. The Doctor tried to think what was worrying him, tried to realise his mistake.

'Thank you,' he said, doffing his hat.

*DIE*, the Cyberman intoned, eyes a brilliant flame red.

And then he realised. The Cyberman wasn't being helpful - it was trying to detain him. The brilliant red glow in its eyes, growing in intensity with each passing second, was a result of its final command: it was slowly stripping away the shielding from its central reactor. In approximately three seconds, the core would go critical, and the Cyberman would commit suicide with such passion and intensity that it would take most of the Manor with it. And the Doctor.

Chiding himself for his mistake, the Doctor tried to jump. Then he remembered he was cured of the Cheetah Virus, and all its little bonuses. So he prepared himself to die, instead.

*Home*, said the voice in Wolsey's head, full of urgency.

And the Kitling pounced, grabbing hold of its prey in its field, opening that small part of its mind and jumping, taking its prey home with it.

ADDITION TO CENTRAL CPU, the Cyberman transmitted calmly.

POSSIBILITY OF DOCTOR TARGET POSSESSING TELEPORTATION

ABILITY: 99.9%

And then it imploded, taking most of the Manor down with it.

Brigadier Bambera was standing, hurting nobody, in the central lobby of UNIT HQ, London - which, she reminded herself, was meant to have a Top Secret location and security system - and scratching her head. Life, it seemed, was conspiring to make things difficult for her. On top of jet-lag, now she had *this* sitting on her doorstep. She was just wondering how she was going to deal with it, when things got ten times worse.

With a flash of brilliant white light, the Doctor appeared in a heap in front of her, and Wolsey trotted off towards McShane's quarters, leaving a trailing of muddy footprints all the way across her nice clean floor. She arched an eyebrow and tried not to sound surprised.

'Are you alright?' she asked the heap at her feet.

The mass of clothes and flesh quickly unfolded itself until the Doctor was standing right in front of her, that damned grin on his face, his hand outstretched for the shaking. She let it stay there, untouched, but that didn't seem to faze him. He just took a deep breath, composed himself, and slipped into that neutral gear in which he seemed to spend most of his life: annoying everybody.

'Brigadier Bambera!' he hollered, everybody in the foyer looking round

at her. 'Fine, I'm fine.'

'Shame,' she said, and turned to inspect her floor.

'Please accept my apologies about the floor,' he said, leaning in confidentially. 'Wolsey's just saved my life. So, this is where he thinks of as home now, is it?'

'Unfortunately, so it would seem, Doctor.'

'It used to be the TARDIS, you know. But that was some time ago now.'

Bambera looked him squarely in the eyes, that look that suggested he was playing games with her again firmly planted on her face. He smiled disarmingly, but she didn't flinch.

'How's Ancelyn?' he tried.

'About the TARDIS, Doctor,' she said. 'Misplaced it, have you?'

'As it happens, I have,' he said, realisation creeping across his face. 'I hadn't thought about it. It's been a hectic couple of days.'

'I can imagine, so have mine. Because of you,' Bambera snapped. 'But next time, if you could not use UNIT HQ like some kind of lost and found depot, I'd be able to sleep a lot more soundly.'

'I'm sorry, Brigadier?' the Doctor said, confused.

Bambera turned, pointing into a corner of the foyer, saying:

'Your hawk-faced friend delivered it five minutes ago, to the annoyance of security.'

And the Doctor followed her finger, and saw resting in the corner a familiar blue box, wrapped in an unfamiliar pink ribbon, and with a small note attached. He walked up to the TARDIS and plucked the note from its perch.

*Congratulations, it said, on your recent resurrection.*

Somewhere, just out of earshot, a raven cawed loudly, its laughter echoing all round London, for those who could hear it.

## EPILOGUE

*'Keep your eye on where you're going,*

*Lest you lose your goal.*

*Keep you're eye on where you've been,*

*Lest you lose your soul.'*

Thal Travelling Song

**Little Sarfield: 3. December, 2003**

**19:29**

Sergeant Wagner looked up at the dark sky above, tried counting the stars, wondered if the snow would hold off until he made it home. Then, with a slow motion of his arm that send twinges running up and down his back, he reached out and locked the police station for the last time. It was very final, forever. He wished he'd brought a bottle of wine, give it a bit more sense of

occasion.

'Here,' said a voice at his elbow, and handed him a glass of chilled Chardonnay.

He spun round quickly, and saw the Doctor stood there beside him, looking solemn. In his hand, he had another glass of wine. There wasn't a bottle to be seen. His waistcoat was as red as ever, his hat jammed firmly on his head. His umbrella was open and slung over one shoulder, anticipating the snow to come. Just like him - always one eye on the future.

'You,' Murphy said, not touching his wine. 'You took your time in coming back.'

He nodded, saying:

'I wanted to wait until I'd caught you up a bit.'

'Come back to finish her off?'

'I'm sorry?'

'It's all gone. Once the soldiers were through with it, the Cybermen, well, most people were too afraid to stay here any more. Just like last time you came to town. She won't survive this time.'

'Who?' the Doctor asked.

'Who? The village, Little Sarfield. Look around you, Doctor, it's as silent as the grave. You've killed her.'

The Doctor said nothing, merely looking up at the stars. Then:

'There used to be another village, you know. Before Little Sarfield. Just Sarfield, up there, closer to where the Manor used to be,' he gestured up, and Murphy couldn't help but let his eyes follow the motion. All he could see was

the House, staring back down at them. 'It wasn't large, bigger than this village, smaller than the city, but it was thriving. And then one day they all died, every last villager. And for fifty years there wasn't a village on this site, until Little Sarfield sprung up. Ask them in Bexston, they'll remember.'

'And that was your fault too, was it?' snapped the Sergeant.

'Yes,' said the Doctor simply, still looking up at the stars.

Surprised by the answer, the Sergeant - the soon to be retired Sergeant, he couldn't help reminding himself - looked again at the Doctor. Something in the way he held himself made Murphy realise that he had seen far more than he ever would, ever could. And the chill in his bones on a night like this must be a thousand times as cold.

'Is Dorothea alright?' he asked, softly.

'Fine, fine,' said the Doctor, mood brightening. 'Her and Wolsey are fine. And Chile's doing alright too.'

'I saw them at Sophie's funeral,' he said, remembering.

'I thought I should stay away,' the Doctor said, picking up on the implication. 'A lot of her family think the same as you.'

'I don't think it's your fault, Doctor,' the little man raised an eyebrow. 'Not really. It's just - this was the second time you came here, and it's the second time people have died. This time she won't bounce back - it was hard enough last time. It . . . it's just it's going to hurt to move away from her, after so long.'

'You don't have to,' the Doctor said. The Sergeant fixed him with a stare. 'Chile's moving on, down to London. The House needs a new



caretaker. I thought you might like the job.'

'Stay here and watch her rot, you mean?'

'She'll survive,' he said resolutely. 'Believe me. She'll lay dormant for a few years, and then she'll come back, a phoenix from the flames. But you don't have to take my word for it: you can watch it happen, if you'd like.'

And looking into the Doctor's eyes, somehow Murphy believed him. He took a step towards the little man, smiling, and said:

'Let's go and find somewhere warm where we can talk about it, and finish off this wine.'

And so the Doctor's question-mark umbrella swallowed them up as the walked away from the station, up towards the warmth of the House, eyes on the sky.

Softly, it began to snow.