

HERITAGE

Dale Smith

*A novel featuring the Seventh Doctor,
set shortly before the television movie.*

1.

5. August, 6048 CE

18:57

*' . . . transport you to the luxurious colony world of Heritage,
where you will spend the days doing the vital work of
Thydonium mining, and spend the nights enjoying all
the amenities of a state of the art colony Habitat . . .'*

Federation brochure for Heritage.

When it started, it was so small as to be almost invisible. None of the colonists who happened to look up at that precise moment saw it, but then not many of them looked up. There was usually nothing for them to see up there. So, when it first started, it was unseen, just another tiny speck of light against the backdrop of the stars. There was no-one looking to see that this speck was red, unlike the bright whiteness of the myriad of stars, and there was no-one to see that this speck was moving.

That would soon change.

As it grew closer, it grew larger. Soon it was the brightest star in all the heavens, twice as large as its nearest rivals and still growing. Then eyes started to turn its way: first just a single man, feet in the dust and eyes to the stars, stood silently watching, shielding his eyes from the glare of the second moon. Others soon joined him, stopping in the dirt streets and gazing upwards, each one working their way through a thousand theories as to what could be happening. None of them were right, but how could they be expected to guess the truth?

As it grew larger, confusion grew into disbelief. People blinked, as if hoping it was merely a mass hallucination, as if that would be easier to understand. Mouths hung open, eyes gaped, hearts skipped a beat. From behind a plastic window, a small red-haired girl stared agog, trying to make sense of this strange new vision, this interloper into her quiet world of dust. It was only to be expected: the last time most of these people had seen a shuttle craft, it had been arcing off into space, leaving them the bone-breaking task of building a new world from scratch.

Retros fired, and the shuttle swooped over their heads. It was making for the landing pad. It should have been obvious, but it had been a good twenty years since anything had landed on Heritage, so perhaps they could be forgiven. As they watched it burn its way across the night's sky, each and every person on the street started pacing, their necks still craning upwards. Without a word between them, the colonists headed for the landing pad, following those that could remember where it was.

With a great roar, flames bellowed out of the belly of the shuttle, and its speeding descent stopped, paused, leaving it hanging in the air, a pitted grey bird of prey waiting before it swooped on its dinner. The entire colony held its breath, even the second hand on the town hall clock seeming to pause longer than necessary before it clicked onwards. No-one seemed sure about what would happen next: perhaps the pilot, obviously some crazed drunk, would

suddenly sober and realise his mistake, punch the ship back into the dark skies and leave the colonists to discuss the intrusion, alone. Perhaps they would all snap out of it, realise it was just some trick of the light brought on by too much sun, too much dust, not enough to keep the mind from wandering. No-one expected what happened next.

With a gentle hiss, the retros cut and the shuttle landed softly on the dark tarmac of the landing pad. Unused to having anything heavier than a robust teenager resting on it, the tarmac pitted and cracked, tearing under the shuttle's belly, revealing the red dust in its veins.

The engines cut, and the silence prowled around the colonists. They stood, dumbstruck, waiting for something else extraordinary to happen. The shuttle merely waited, taunting them with its sheer presence.

'Out of my way,' came a voice from behind the crowd. 'Let me through, Goddammit!'

Eventually, the crowd parted, slightly, and allowed a small powerful man struggling to pull on a long dusty overcoat to push through. A few, a very few, turned to look at him as he moved through them like a hot knife through brick. Those that did recognised his bullish face, his shaved head, his beady eyes, and waited for the trouble to start. Most didn't even glance, barely even seeing him when he stood between them and the mystery, his dusty coat finally on, the twin moons' light reflecting off the tin star pinned to his chest. Sheriff, said the badge, or would have done had the E not been obscured by a large dent.

He stood there in silence, staring at the shuttle, his eyes barely visible beneath his frown. Nothing happened. Sheriff coughed quietly, more to break the silence than anything else. Still nothing.

'Aren't y' gonna do summut, Sheriff?' someone in the crowd asked. Probably Cole.

'Why don't you –' Sheriff started, but got no further.

Suddenly, there was a wild hiss filling the air, and a great breeze launched towards the colonists from the side of the ship. It dragged with it most of the red dust on the landing pad, spreading it airborne, breathing it into the faces of the gathered crowd. Sheriff all but vanished in the heart of the cloud, all that remained of him was a bellowing cough and some choice swearwords. Some of the crowd leapt back from the dust, as if fearing it now for some new alien weapon launched at them, not their ever-present bane. Most simply stood, dumbstruck.

As the cloud passed, they saw a large gaping black hole had appeared in the side of the shuttle. Stood in the darkness was an imp of a man, resting his weight on a strange looking umbrella. Despite the conservative nature of his tweed jacket, his wine waistcoat, his neatly trimmed Panama hat, there was a look in his grey eyes that suggested . . . well, to Sheriff it suggested trouble, plain and simple. A wild card, not to be appreciated, not to be trusted.

A grin cracked the stranger's face, and he said:

'Someone told you I was coming, didn't they? You didn't all have to come and meet me. Most unexpected.'

Yup, thought Sheriff, definitely trouble.

At first, Sheriff had thought they were going to follow him all the way to the hotel, but a few glares soon fixed that. The stranger didn't notice, or didn't seem to notice, any how. He had simply stood beaming that smile – that smile that Sheriff just knew was going to get irritating any moment now – before quickly hopping from the shuttle's airlock, swinging that stupid looking umbrella around, somehow avoiding all the heads and limbs and eyes at a convenient height for him to hit. He took a quick look around, and without stopping, casually called out:

'I wouldn't stand there, if I were you. Unless you'd like to be frazzled.'

The stranger had taken too much joy out of that one word, rolling his Rs with relish. Sheriff didn't have time to say anything about it, though, because the shuttle airlock snapped shut, sending the thin dust flying again. He could barely splutter that the colonists should get the hell away before the engines fired up. Flames shot out into the ground, the tarmac cracked and melted itself whole again, and with a whine, the shuttle lifted up away from Heritage. More dust flew everywhere. It was around about then that Sheriff first thought he'd lost control of the situation.

By the time he'd caught up with the stranger, he'd managed to think of a line that might just get him the upper hand back. Unfortunately, the stranger was resolutely ignoring him, his head swinging this way and that, instead, looking around the small town that was Heritage. The dust filled street, Cole's bar, the Professor's place, his own station: he could just imagine the stranger's stomach dropping as he wondered just where in the hell he'd ended up. Like most of the Heritageans did every morning of their lives.

'You shouldn't've sent your shuttle away, mister,' Sheriff drawled, finally catching the little imp up. 'You'll be wanting to get out of here, soon as you realise this ain't where you meant to be.'

'Ah,' said the stranger, grinning again, and tapping the side of his nose. 'But this is *exactly* where I want to be.'

'Heritage?' Sheriff questioned, expecting at any second to see that lined face fall.

'Heritage,' confirmed the stranger, his eyes twinkling.

And Sheriff found he had nothing to say to that.

'You're sure you wanted to come to Heritage?' he tried, thinking maybe the stranger had misheard.

'You seem surprised –' Sheriff saw the man's eyes drop to his star, '– sheriff . . . ?'

'Just Sheriff,' Sheriff responded automatically, even though everyone knew he was just Sheriff, even though no-one had asked him for nigh on twenty-five years.

'Ah,' said the stranger, nodding. His hand shot out and grasped Sheriff's, pumping it like he thought it was a water pump. 'How do you do? I'm the Doctor, and this is my friend . . .'

The stranger's voice trailed off abruptly, and his eyes darkened. It was only for a second, but it was there. Now that Sheriff had seen that smile die, he suddenly wanted it back again, annoying as it was. Anything was better than the coldness in those eyes.

The stranger physically shook himself, plastering that smile back on his face again. But it was a rush job, and the cracks were showing. With enforced joviality, he said:

'Well, I don't have a friend at the moment, but if I did, this is where she'd be.'

With that, he spun around again, leaving Sheriff watching his back head off towards the end of the road.

'I take it you don't get many visitors around here,' the stranger said, casually. 'Or do you always bring the welcoming committee to every shuttle that lands here?'

'We have so far,' Sheriff said, thinking he was only speaking to himself. 'Yours is the first shuttle we've had.'

Somehow, the stranger heard him, even though he was sure it had been more a thought than a whisper. He stood there, those cold eyes locked on his, and raised an eyebrow. Then he snatched at his umbrella and marched off again, all energy and motion.

'Perhaps you can help me, Sheriff,' he called back. 'I'm looking for some friends of mine. The Hayworths. Do you know where I can find them?'

Sheriff froze. Every hair on his body stood on edge, and the growl in his stomach, that electric bitterness that he'd fought these last few years to keep in check, reawakened. He tried to keep himself in pace with the stranger, but found that he couldn't. He couldn't even keep moving. Somewhere inside him, a small voice was screaming at him, screaming that this was it, it was finally over, screaming hysterically. Sheriff heard a voice quietly in his ears. It took him a good few seconds to realise it was his own.

'Then you've had a wasted trip. They don't live here any more.'

The stranger stopped abruptly, turning with the handle of his umbrella to his lips. His face was a statue carved out of ice, cold blue light reflecting in his grey eyes. His brow was wrinkled, the darkness eating his eyes.

'They don't live here any more?' he echoed.

'That's right,' said Sheriff, the lie coming easily to his lips. 'They moved out. Couldn't stand the dust.'

The stranger looked round, taking his eyes from Sheriff for what seemed like an eternity. He was looking at the main street, how its surface was a just a sea of the dry red dust, looking at the houses, crude plasticrete prefabs with the dust lubricating every joint, spilling out of every crack. He was looking at the dry sheen on the plastic windows, the clothes people wore. He was looking at his own clothes, seeing how they'd already been invaded in just these few

moments, how the dust had worked its way into the seams, desperate to cling to his skin. At least, that was what Sheriff hoped he was thinking.

'Must have taken the last shuttle out,' the stranger said, quietly.

Damn, thought Sheriff, but the stranger was already moving again, towards Cole's bar. This was going to take careful consideration. And, of course, the Professor would need to be informed. Damn.

Glowering and spitting, Sheriff rolled down the street towards the Professor's lab, occasionally letting out a loud expletive. It stopped him from thinking about the fear gnawing in his stomach. Almost.

* * *

And from her vantage point behind the plastic window, crouched on top of an old plastic desk, beside a tall, flickering candle, the red-haired girl watched the funny dark man hurry away from the loud police officer. There was something about the dark little man that appealed to her – whether it was simply because he was something new for her to find out about, or whether it was something else, she didn't know. All she knew was that she liked him, wanted to see if he would play with her. She hoped he would.

'What are you looking at, my Sweetness?' said Daddy behind her, putting down his plastic toys and joining her, staring out of the window.

But by the time he got there, all he could see was the loud police officer stumbling towards them, a strange look creasing his face.

SYNOPSIS

The Doctor goes to the bar and meets Cole, a large one-armed Geordie trying to fix his basic robot arm. The Doctor enquires why he doesn't use a cybernised one, and is told that Cole's grandmother died fighting in the last Cyber-war. The problem is, the dust gets everywhere, into everything, grinding it down, making it seize up and stop. Cole gives the Doctor a brief history of the colony, explaining how they came here to mine Thydonium and how a couple of years later, a scientist elsewhere found a way of synthesising it. The colonists had no reason to stay, but nowhere else to go. He says people got used to it, even with the dust, and things going missing all the time.

Whilst in the bar, the Doctor sees the dust-busters – small robots designed to clean the dust away like a vacuum cleaner – and is then accosted by Bernard and some of his cronies. Bernard is a dolphin in a cradle – like R'tk'tk in STORM HARVEST – only he likes to think of himself as human. He moved to Heritage because there was no sea to remind him of his non-humaness and changed his name to a more humanised one. He and his two friends try and intimidate the Doctor, and scare him into leaving. Needless to say, it doesn't work. The Doctor rents a room from Cole and tells him he'll only be needing it the one night.

Whilst the Doctor is upstairs settling in, Sheriff arrives and Bernard, Sheriff, Cole and some others discuss the Doctor in fearful terms. They all want to know who he is, and how they're going to get rid of him. They each have different theories about why he's there – he's an investigator, he's a private hit-man, he's just a nobody – but they all agree he can't get out to see the Adobe Flats. Sheriff is sent up to try and suss out the Doctor.

The Doctor is sitting petting one of the dust-busters – they seem to like him. The Doctor is concerned about the reception he's been getting, and tries to find out from Sheriff about the Hayworths and their house. Sheriff refuses to tell him anything, and the Doctor muses aloud about how strange it is that everyone is so tight-lipped about them. He asks Sheriff if there is

a car or anything he can hire to take him out to the Adobe Flats, and gets a very definite no. He decides to have a look around the town, instead. Sheriff goes down to the bar for a drink.

Whilst the Doctor is out walking, he meets Professor Wakeling who is the model of charming congeniality. He apologises for the townsfolk's general mistrust of him, but they are so unused to strangers. Wakeling invites the Doctor around for tea, and the Doctor accepts.

When they enter the Professor's house, the Doctor is attacked by a large raven. Wakeling saves him, and explains that he is the colony's geneticist and the raven is a hobby: it is a clone of a real raven from the Earth archives. The Doctor is quite impressed, knowing about the experiments in cloning mentioned in THE INVISIBLE ENEMY being such a failure. Wakeling assures him he has not achieved complete success yet himself, but he is pushing back the boundaries. The Doctor agrees, looking into the bird's eyes and saying there is a noticeable defect there.

When the Doctor asks about the Hayworths, he gets the same story: they left some time ago. However, he is introduced to Sweetness, the little red-haired girl. Wakeling explains that it is a very sad story, the Hayworths up and leaving her when she was only a little girl. They abandoned her, and Wakeling stepped in to bring her up as his own daughter. The Doctor goes tight-lipped at this, but does not explain why. All that is clear is that he suddenly doesn't trust Wakeling, and decides to take his leave of him.

Wakeling has conversation with Bernard and the others, about whether they have found anything out about him. They say they've contacted their associates on the nearest worlds and none of them have heard of a Doctor. The further worlds will take longer to get back in touch, but Wakeling doesn't care. He has decided that the Doctor is a nobody, somebody just nosing around who could quite easily "disappear" without anyone kicking up too much of a fuss. Bernard understands.

The Doctor arrives back at the bar and tries to go to his room. Cole says there aren't any, that it's been taken. Bernard intercedes and the Doctor gets his room back. As Bernard settles down for a whisky and a cigar, Cole tries to get Sheriff to do something about Wakeling and his gang, trying to make him feel guilty for not doing anything "last time". He needn't bother – Sheriff already feels guilty: so guilty he is proceeding to crawl into the bottom of a bottle of vodka.

Whilst the Doctor is presumably asleep upstairs, Bernard is preparing a surprise. While his cronies wait downstairs, he heads to the Doctor's room. Using a gun built into his cradle, he fires twice at the Doctor's bed (downstairs, everyone hears the shots, and assumes that it's over) whereupon the gun jams. Some more of the dust has worked its way into the workings. The Doctor comments on how annoying that must be, and Bernard sees that he wasn't in the bed: he was sat on the floor, playing with one of the dust-busters.

The Doctor talks to Bernard for some time, trying to find out his real name, talking about the ocean, about denying the things that make us us. It seems that he has some very personal evidence of the dangers of this, regarding a friend of his, but he won't be specific. Finally, he says that all he wants to do is visit some old friends, but it seems wherever he goes, somebody has to try and kill him. He wants to know what's going on, but Bernard refuses to tell him.

The Doctor walks down the stairs, much to everyone's amazement, and announces that unless anybody else would like to try and shoot him, he is going for a walk. Cole says there's nowhere to go, except the town, but the Doctor just walks out. The two henchmen look surprised, try to work out where he's going, and Sheriff tells them that it's obvious: he's going to the flats. Bernard arrives and instructs Sheriff to arrest the Doctor – on any charge he can think of. Sheriff bristles and says that he is the law around here, not the dolphin. Bernard wants to know how long that will last, if the Doctor reaches the Adobe Flats . . .

Wakeling is in his laboratory again, watching Sweetness looking out of the window. He takes a blood sample from her to test, and notices the Doctor simply walking out of the town.

The Doctor's journey out of town takes quite some time. By the time he has reached the Adobe Flats – or he assumes he has – he is quite tired, wishing that somebody would have lent him a horse, or a car, or something. Or even better, just told him what was going on. He finally finds what he has been looking for, though. There is a wooden cross planted in the ground, indicating a grave, right by a burnt out shell of a house. His thoughts are his own as he looks at it.

In the distance, there is the sound of jeeps approaching.

The Doctor remembers getting a message, passed on to him from when it had been found, floating in a bottle, in space. The message was a recording: Mel Bush and her husband, Ben Hayworth, in their farm on the Adobe Flats. Mel is heavily pregnant, radiant, happy. She explains about making a go of it, despite the mining not panning out, says she'd like to name junior after the Doctor, but what kind of a name for a boy is that? Instead, she invites the Doctor to visit – perhaps if he arrives in time he can be a God-parent, or just Uncle Doctor.

The Doctor's thoughts are broken by the sound of jeeps approaching. They are bearing down on him, trying to run him down. He can't see who's driving them, because he's too busy trying to get out of their way. He runs, across the sand, not too sure of escape. As he dives aside to escape one of the jeeps, he lands hard on the soft sand. It starts to swallow him, and soon he has completely vanished beneath the sand. The two henchmen driving the jeeps stop, and watch him vanish, convinced he has fallen into an abandoned mine.

Sweetness watches Wakeling receive the news of the Doctor's disappearance. He takes it very well, before sending her to bed. She has a busy day coming up.

The Doctor finds himself in one of the underground mines, surrounded by the dust-busters. They have sucked him through the fine sand, into the chamber. He takes a quick look around, seeing a variety of objects stolen from the townsfolk that have been wrought into a city for the tiny computers. He also sees that they are guiding him to a rudimentary bed that has been made for him. With quiet thanks, he falls into it and sleeps. For at least three hours.

When he wakes, the Doctor notices that most of the dust-busters have gone – presumably heading for the town to do their work. There are a few around, though: most noticeably, a couple seem to be warily guarding a smaller, less well crafted computer. They trust the Doctor enough to let him examine it, and he notices there is no serial number on it: he asks the dust-busters whether it is all their own work, but they cannot answer him. He has a look around, and finds a schematic for the dust-busters, quite old, and dotted with annotations in Mel's handwriting. The Doctor asks if she told them about him, but again can get no answer. This disappoints the Doctor, as he correctly guesses that the dust-busters could tell him what happened to Mel.

It is at this point that the Doctor notices a newer structure that the creatures have created. The focal point is the Doctor's sonic screwdriver. As he takes it back, chiding the machines, he notices something else. There is a heavy piece of scientific equipment in the structure – and it has dried blood on it. The Doctor looks at it intently.

As day breaks, Sheriff is in his office with another bottle. He has clearly not slept. He is clearly not happy when the Doctor walks in, looking ominous. Sheriff tells him that he should be heading for his shuttle, should get away while he still can, that he shouldn't get involved. The Doctor wants to know what happened here, what it was that was so bad that it seems to be eating away at each and every colonist. Sheriff won't answer, just repeats that the Doctor should leave. Quietly, the Doctor agrees.

He gives Sheriff a long speech: the Doctor used to get involved, used to think that every problem was his to dive into, his to solve. But he's come to think that maybe some things

aren't, maybe some things are best left to people to sort out for themselves. Perhaps they always were. We can't alter the past, he tells Sheriff, no matter how much we might want to, no matter how hard we try. But we can make amends in the present, can try to make now better.

The Doctor places the bloodied scientific instrument on Sheriff's desk.

Sheriff stares at it for a few seconds, his face unreadable. The Doctor tells him that he will leave the matter in his hands, but leaves him a few hints: if he DNA traces the blood, he'll find it belongs to Melanie Hayworth, nee Bush; if he checks up on the instrument, he'll find out it's fairly standard issue for any serious geneticist. As the Doctor leaves, Sheriff watches him go. Sweetness, the red-haired girl – decides that its time she had an adventure, rather than getting treated like a pin-cushion. She escapes from Wakeling's house, and heads into Heritage.

The Doctor arrives back at Cole's bar. The barman seems edgy around him, but the Doctor tries to reassure him. He explains what he is doing on Heritage – trying to forget. He explains about his past, how he used to try to save the universe on his own terms, how people got hurt. He came to Heritage to try and recover, but instead it's just shown him that he doesn't need to fight: there are plenty of people out there who can fight the good fight as well as he can. He's even thinking about going home, at last.

Then Sweetness arrives in the bar, looking at the Doctor with wide expressive eyes. He immediately starts putting on a show for her with his spoons and his magic. He even manages to get Cole to rustle up some ice-cream for her.

At his lab, Wakeling has noticed Sweetness' absence and is yelling at Bernard and his two companions to go and find her. She is absolutely vital, to everything. The three people hurry away, terrified.

The Doctor is telling Sweetness about his home, how there are no children on Gallifrey, when he suddenly asks her about her parents. She says nothing, looking away. As the light catches her eyes, the Doctor notices something. Then Bernard and his two henchmen walk into the bar. The Doctor isn't worried by them, but Cole makes sure he is somewhere else as they walk over. One henchman takes Sweetness, while Bernard and the other talk about the Doctor as if he isn't there, saying people who run around on main roads in the middle of the night ought to be careful: they could end up dead. When one of Bernard's henchmen decides the Doctor is in his seat, the Doctor politely moves. Then Bernard decides that the Doctor's new seat is *his* favourite.

The Doctor is about to give them a speech about how they should enjoy their moment of power while they still have it, when he notices outside: Sheriff is crawling into a jeep and driving off. One of the jeeps that nearly ran the Doctor down the previous night. His hearts fall. Bernard suggests that the Doctor come with them, so Wakeling can *thank* him personally for looking after Sweetness, but the Doctor hardly hears. He just allows himself to be herded out by the three of them, while Cole watches, doing nothing.

Wakeling is making several preparations to some kind of large scale experiment. It involves lots of technical equipment, and a video link. When the Doctor arrives, he is quite chatty, discussing the future with the Time Lord without a care in the world. He seems quite jolly, even. The Doctor wants to discuss the past. Wakeling merely nods, saying the he expected as much: he suggests that the Doctor is an agent, sent to investigate something big on Heritage. The Doctor is non-committal, choosing instead to needle Wakeling for answers. He manages to get out of the scientist that he believes that under certain circumstances, certain people can only be held accountable to history, people resting on the hub of immortality. The Doctor informs Wakeling that he is something of an expert when it comes to history, and that sometimes all that matters is that there is a grave on the Adobe flats, next to a burnt out farm. Sometimes, history only remembers where the bodies are buried.

Wakeling loses his patience with the Doctor, telling him lies about the town's children burning the farm down once the Hayworths left, that they had to shoot their horse when they left. Most of all, he tells the Doctor that it's time he left them, went back to whatever hole he crawled out of. The Doctor takes it to mean that he will be killed, but Wakeling insists that he would never do that: not in his own house. He thanks the Doctor for returning Sweetness, and insists that Bernard escorts him to his hotel room, and then to his shuttle. The Doctor takes that to mean he wants the town to see him leave, so nobody goes looking for him, but Bernard is already lugging him away. Wakeling goes back to his work, clearly agitated. Sweetness looks quite worried.

The Doctor is trying to turn Bernard, explaining that if he works for someone so ruthless, sooner or later he will become the next victim: Wakeling can't afford any witnesses. Bernard won't listen, though, and simply escorts the Doctor to his room. The Doctor enters, but as Bernard enters behind him, the dolphin is struck a cruel blow across the jaw, knocking him unconscious. As the Doctor spins around, he sees Cole standing behind him, grinning.

Sheriff is sitting on the Adobe Flats, Mel's murder weapon in his hands, looking out at the burnt out farm house, remembering. In his other hand, is a bottle of vodka. There is a pistol by his side, just within reach.

The Doctor takes some components from Bernard's cradle, leaving the dolphin immobilised and only able to speak in his natural clicks and whistles. Cole and the Doctor hurry away, Cole explaining that there just comes a point in a man's life where he has to do something, stop running away. The Doctor is silent. He suggests trying to call in the authorities, but when they try to get an off-planet call placed at the Heritage exchange, they are told it's impossible: all the resources are going into an off-planet conference call. The Doctor asks what the chances of having a call placed to the Adjudicators once the conference was over. The operator says simply no, then hangs up.

The Doctor just looks at the telephone, and Cole looks unsurprised. Finally, the Doctor says that perhaps it's time he found out what was going on. He tells Cole to tell him everything he knows, and Cole looks worried.

Sheriff and Cole remember the story between them, from the point where Wakeling and Ben Hayworth arrived in Sheriff's office, Ben accusing the silent Wakeling of killing his wife. When Sheriff asks whether it was true, Wakeling merely nodded, looking like his world had crumbled. Sheriff and a deputy went to look over the scene of the crime. After a brief look, Sheriff decided that Mel had tripped and fallen down the stairs: an accidental death. Ben cannot believe what he is hearing, and Sheriff tries very calmly to explain that the work Wakeling is doing is the only thing that can stop Heritage from crumbling into the dust. It will bring jobs and money to the colony, to everyone. None of them can afford for Wakeling to be taken away, for that work to stop. Sheriff instructs Ben to go home and think about it, to go home and look after his child. Ben is furious, but the deputy and Sheriff form a formidable team. He walks home in the desert, barely comprehending what has happened.

The Doctor is appalled, but Cole tells him the story gets worse. Hayworth did raise his child, and keep his farm going, burying his wife right by his farm house. But he also built up a damning case of evidence against Sheriff and Wakeling. It was only when he came to present that case, that he needed help. He asked Cole – the only man on Heritage he trusted – to help him. To his eternal shame, Cole went and told Sheriff what Ben was planning, and Sheriff told Wakeling. The response was immediate – he held a rally to talk to the whole town, to tell them what would happen. If they sided with him, prosperity and rebirth; if they sided with Hayworth, the same dusty poverty they had known since they landed here.

Heritage's decision was almost immediate: they followed Wakeling and his gang out to the Adobe Flats as one, and burnt the Hayworth Farm down to the ground. When Hayworth escaped the flames, he was beaten to death by the townsfolk, and left to rot in the desert. Heritage had been damned since that day.

The Doctor stares at Cole in silence.

Sheriff throws his bottle at the burnt out farm house, tears streaming down his face.

Wakeling watches the Doctor's shuttle come flying back in, and landing on the landing pad.

Cole tries to convince the Doctor that there is only one course of action open to him – he can't take on the entire town, after all. He suggests that the Doctor get out as fast as he can on that shuttle, inform the proper authorities and let them deal with it. If the Doctor hangs around, Cole says, then Bernard and his friends will kill him, just as soon as it gets dark. If he so much as steps off the main street, he'll be worm-food. The Doctor agrees that maybe the most prudent course of action would be to retreat, and spread the truth.

As they reach the shuttle, the Doctor and Cole find that the pilot is dead at the controls. The Doctor tries to power the ship up himself, but it is dead. One of Wakeling's henchmen appears behind him and says it looks like the main power cells have been damaged. He gives the controls a hit with a crowbar just to make sure, and the whole ship goes into meltdown. As the Doctor, Cole and the henchman dive out of the ship, the thing explodes without fuss. The henchman picks himself up, and dusts himself down and says that yeah, it looked like it was the power cells. He says he'll see the Doctor later, and wanders away, grinning to himself.

Cole wants to know what the Doctor will do now. He is quite philosophical, saying he's owes Wakeling something. He had come to Heritage to tidy up a few loose ends before he crawled away home to bury himself in obscurity. Some things had happened recently to make him question the life he led, his right to interfere. People got hurt, and he wasn't sure whether he could function in that kind of situation again. Wakeling has just proved to him that he not only can, but that he has to. And suddenly, the only thing that Cole is afraid of, is the little man standing in front of him, his eyes ablaze.

Wakeling is in his laboratory, the video link just coming on, as the Doctor and Cole burst in. Cole is just sitting back, seeing what the Doctor will do. Wakeling is furious. Sweetness hides behind some instruments, but looks on with curiosity. The people on the video conference are simply astounded, demanding to know what exactly is going on. The Doctor strides around, explaining what most of the machinery will do, introducing himself to the people on the video screens, accusing Wakeling of being a murderer.

As the hullabaloo starts, Wakeling is quick to regain control, explaining about some wild, unproven accusations a few years ago, some local madman. Cole protests, but Bernard and his friends arrive to subdue him and the Doctor. Just as Wakeling looks about to regain the upper hand, Sheriff bursts in, pistol in his hand, and arrests Wakeling for murder. Bernard over-reacts to the ensuing scuffle, and one of the henchmen and Sheriff are shot dead. When Wakeling turns back to his video conference, every one of the delegates has logged off. He lets out a howl of disgust.

Wakeling demands to know if the Doctor, if Cole, truly understand what they've done. The Doctor does, explaining that being the site of the galaxy's first stable cloning experiments would make quite a profit for Heritage, and that Sweetness really is a most impressive piece of work – despite the flaw in her eyes – but that the achievement was still built on the bones of others. Wakeling protests that it was an accident: Mel and Ben had come to him because they couldn't have children, they wanted a clone of both their genes combined to raise as their child, but to take his experiments to the next level Wakeling needed to copy just a single person. There could be no doubt that his clone was a fraud. When the Hayworths found out, they didn't understand, there had been an argument, a scuffle, and before he knew it, Mel was lying dead on the floor.

It had been Wakeling's idea to go to Sheriff, to confess everything, but luckily Sheriff had seen the big picture, knew what was best for Heritage. Used to know what was best for Heritage. The Doctor asks about Ben, but Wakeling insist that Hayworth was just a fool who didn't know when it was best to keep his mouth shut. Like the Doctor and Cole. Well,

Wakeling says archly, in a few moments, neither the Doctor nor Cole will be saying anything, and Wakeling will be free to reveal his discovery to the galaxy.

It is at this point that a small gang of dust-busters blow a cloud of Heritage's red dust into their eyes, and give the Doctor and Cole and smokescreen for their escape. They take the opportunity, escaping towards the Adobe Flats in Sheriff's jeep. Wakeling and Bernard and the remaining henchman follow in their jeep, with Sweetness following them almost without them knowing it. But only after she has picked up the instrument Wakeling used to kill Mel.

Sheriff's jeep starts to die when they reach the burnt out farm – the dust has got to it. The Doctor decides it will be best to split up. They go separate ways, the Doctor heading towards an old abandoned mine, Cole heading the other way. When Wakeling and Bernard arrive, they too split up: Wakeling goes after the Doctor, Bernard and his henchman go after Cole. Sweetness follows Wakeling.

As Bernard chases Cole, his henchman suddenly disappears into the ground: Cole shouts out that the whole area is riddled with potholes and wells due to the nearby mine. Bernard doesn't care, he will still kill Cole.

Wakeling finds the Doctor, who has stopped by Mel's grave. Wakeling says he will kill him, talking a good fight. The Doctor merely points over his shoulder, and there is Sweetness, holding the murder weapon. She accuses Wakeling of killing her mother, of killing her. Wakeling is stung by this, scared by the look in her eye, backs away from her. Sweetness keeps advancing. Wakeling backs right into one of the potholes, is left hanging on to the edge for dear life. The Doctor approaches to try and help him, but as Wakeling reaches out for his rescuer's hand, Sweetness drops the murder weapon. Reflex makes Wakeling catch it, and he plummets to his death.

It's over, says Sweetness, and then bursts into tears, leaving the Doctor to comfort her.

When Cole arrives, saying he's left Bernard somewhere swimming in the sand, he sees the Doctor and Sweetness and knows that it's over. He wants to know what will happen now, and the Doctor tells him that Heritage should make its peace with its dead.

EPILOGUE

1.

14. August, 6048 CE

13:01

'It don't rain much on Heritage,' Cole had said, 'but when it comes, it comes.'

And he was right.

It had come in the night, while none of them had been expecting it, turning the dry dust to mud, making pools in the streets, turning the sides of the buildings slick and shining. It landed with such force that the drumming raindrops could be heard even in the foundations, the tiny dust-busters cowering together in huddles, or going about their construction, fearless. They all knew – fearless and frightened alike – that they wouldn't be needed for a good few days. The rain might stop, but the mud would stay until at least the end of the week, maybe longer.

It rained so much, it threatened to flood the two fresh graves in the flats, until Cole made the journey out to cover them. He pinned them over with tarpaulin, one strong sheet for the two graves, side by side, kept the rain out until the morning. He sat there all night, in the rain, just to make sure the cover didn't blow away in the wind. Nobody sat with him. He didn't mind, was more relieved.

They'd needed a priest, somebody to say a few words of comfort, to bless their souls, the dead and the living both. Somebody had asked the Doctor, but he had simply said:

'There are reasons I don't call myself Preacher,' and would say nothing else on the subject.

And so it was that Cole found himself stood at the gravesides' heads, feeling the rain hammering against his back, dripping down his neck. He looked across the flats in front of him and saw everybody left from Heritage, all dressed in black, all with the same look in their eyes. He saw the Doctor stood at the back of the crowd, his umbrella open above his head, his eyes dark. Everybody else let the rain pour over them, as if they hoped it would wash away the darkness in their souls. Either the Doctor's soul was spotless white, or he knew the futility of their thinking. Some things never wash away, no matter how much water flows under the bridge.

Sat peaceful and quiet at the Doctor's feet was a small dust-buster. It looked strange to Cole, as if it had been knocked about in the trouble, or had been hastily thrown together for the occasion. It didn't look like one of the many Mel had constructed herself, from the fifty packs brought across on Foundation Day.

The thought of Mel brought him back to the moment, the bloodshot eyes all looking to him to make it better. He wished he could say something soothing, lulling, bland enough to ease their minds: they were good people, and they shall be missed. But he knew deep inside that he wouldn't, couldn't let himself. He steeled himself, and looked out at them.

'Maybe Mel and Ben weren't the most loved people on Heritage,' he said, catching each and every eye as if to challenge them to deny it. Each eye except the Doctor's. 'They tried their best, an' there ain't no-one here can say they did more for this place then them. Aye, they loved this black earth more 'un anyone, gave it their sweat, their hours, their blood.'

He paused then, listening to the rain perhaps, perhaps seeing something other than those eyes, those faces then.

'We – all of us here, we did something terrible, something evil. Come the day, ain't one of us here can say their hands is clean of it. It ain't my place t'say what'll happen up theres when our times come, ain't my place to say whether He'll forgive us or not. Only He can say that. I

don't even know if we can forgive ourselves for it. I hope so, but . . . but . . . Ain't one of us here'll ever forget, neither. Ain't one of us here who won't think about these two till the day they die. And if one of us does forget, then the rest of us'll remind them, send them out here to sit with them, to . . . I don't know what we'll do. I don't know.'

And Cole stopped there, knew he couldn't go on, knew it was all empty, all for nothing. They'd finish up here, go home and pack. Hell, he'd probably be leading the march to the first shuttle out of here. Sometimes, sometimes memories were just too much, you had to run from them, before they bare their sharpest tooth and eat you alive. They'd killed more than this couple, that night so long ago, and it'd take more rain than the heavens could provide to wash the stain free.

And then it happened.

As the clouds darkened up above, as the rain hammered down around them, as the wind whipped at their very souls, she saved them. The little red haired girl, the girl from the test tube, little Sweetness, opened her mouth and began to sing softly. She didn't have the most clear of voices, and it was obvious she didn't know the tune that well, but everybody in the crowd heard her, heard her begin to sing *Amazing Grace* as best she could. Everybody heard, and – one by one – everybody began to join in.

Soon all of Heritage was stood there, singing hard against the rain, as if their voices could wipe the blood from the earth, let the waters run clean. And who knew, thought Cole, tears running down his face, singing for all his worth, who knew, perhaps they could.

And then, as sudden as it had begun, the hymn was over, and the colonists were left standing there, bats blinking into the light. Each of them wondering what to do now, whether they had done enough. Whether they could ever do enough. That was when the Doctor strode forward, the dust-buster at his feet, and joined Cole by the head of the graves.

All eyes looked at him, as he stood there and silently held out his hand. The small dust-buster crawled up his body and sat on his wrist. With a slight cough, it deposited a heap of dust in his palm. It quickly grew damp from the rain.

'Ashes to ashes,' he said softly, 'and dust to dust.'

And everyone saw the pattern of infinity etched on the wind as each grain tumbled its own way onto the coffins below.

'The sky's clearing,' the Doctor said, motioning upwards with his free hand. Cole looked, through the tears, 'the suns're coming out.'

The Doctor fixed Cole with a curious stare, eyes cold and grey, soft as ice.

'Somewhere, there'll be rainbows,' he said. 'Soon.'

And with that, the strange little man turned round, and walked out of Heritage as easily as he'd come.

When the second shuttle landed, the pilot stood in the airlock and saw the little man with the umbrella waiting for him. He looked over on the horizon, and saw the crowd, heard the faint sound of something floating towards him on the breeze: it could be singing, it could be sobbing, he couldn't tell.

'What happened here?' he asked the dark-eyed man.

'Murder,' he answered grimly.

The pilot merely nodded, saying:

'I thought it was something: first time the Starliner's stopped here in twenty-five years.'

The dark little man's face was set, his voice unreadable as he said:

'The third time.'