

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

THE ANGEL OF THE NORTH
PART ONE



Duncan Johnson

Published by Jigsaw Publications/The Doctor Who Project
Vancouver, BC, Canada

First Published December 2010

The Angel of the North: Part One

© 2010 by Duncan Johnson

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

Doctor Who © 1963, 2010 by BBC Worldwide

The Doctor Who Project © & ™ 1999, 2010 by Jigsaw Publications

A TDWP/Jigsaw Publications E-Book

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced
by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

All characters in this publication is fictitious and any resemblance
to real persons, living or dead, is purely co-incidental.

Typeset in Palatino Linotype

Logo © 2005 The Doctor Who Project

Cover © 2010 Nick Giles

The Angel of the North
Part One

1999

Twenty minutes to midnight.

A sky full of colours. Hundred, no, thousands of revellers cheering the display, thinking it part of the celebrations. Tom Brooker knows otherwise. Knows what the lights portend. Not the dawning of a new millennium. Rather the funeral pyre for the old.

Death is no stranger to Tom. In the past year with the Doctor, he has seen more death than in the rest of his not-quite-thirty years of life. Deaths of friends, of enemies, of people he barely knew. He has faced down his own death, too, time and again. On long lonely nights when sleep refuses to come, he thinks about death, about how it might be.

Death by bullet.

Death by laser.

One thing is certain: as long as he is with the Doctor, he will not die in bed. But he is doing well (he hopes) so he is okay with that.

This is different. This is his home. Somewhere out there is his family. Tonight it is their lives at risk.

Fifteen minutes to midnight.

He stumbles down the steps to the Quay, the Millennium Bridge in his sights. He pulls the girl along behind him – his hand warm and sweaty, hers cool and dry – and forces his way through the crowds spilling from bars and restaurants. Lads in T-shirts, girls in skirts up to here. Trust a Geordie to rebel against the cold. Clinging to one thought, one thought only. *Save the girl.* A boyhood fantasy. It is all he has left.

Death by robot.

Death by vampire.

Almost all.

A motorboat on the Tyne. A figure in a dark coat bounding the last few feet to the quayside.

"Tom, over here!"

"Doctor!" Grinning. Everything is going to be all right. "Am I glad to see you."

"Likewise." Eyes on the girl. "Who's your friend?"

"Doctor, this is Sara. Sara, Doctor. She's... it'd take too long to explain. Basically, she's the lass everyone's after."

"Is that right?" The Doctor's arm around Tom's shoulders, drawing him away from the girl. "Tom, could I have a word."

Death by poison.

Death by asphyxiation.

"You've got a plan, right? What am I saying, you've always got a plan."

"Yes, I've got a plan, but I'm afraid it's not one that involves you."

A flash, light on steel. A knife in Tom's chest. The Doctor's hand on the hilt, driving it deeper. A world away, Sara is screaming.

"Doctor?" Tom says, or tries to. His lungs are filling with blood. His words turn to foam on his lips. There is no pain, just exhaustion.

So heavy.

So tired.

Death by Silence.

Death by Cyberman.

The colours in the sky are all grey now. Grey and getting darker.

Death by Doctor? Not in his wildest dreams.

2669

IMC Stadium, in orbit above Xerxes XVII. Currently playing host to the Galactic Wrestling Federation. Most spectators are crammed in at ground level, jostling each other for a better view. Those with money can escape the crush. VIP boxes of transparent aluminium float above it all, hovering in the best possible viewpoints.

One such box. One hover-platform travelling towards it. One nervous Mogarian, glad his all-encompassing environment suit makes his expression unreadable.

Mad. I must be mad to deal with people who make folk-heroes of professional hit men. The poisoner, the strangler, the wielder of the fastest electric stiletto...

Mad or in debt up to my ears to the Usurians.

In the ring, Wagner the Destroyer, a Macra and the crowd's favourite, has his pincers round the unranked Ogri. He hurls him into the barrier, which flares on impact. The crowd cheer. The bloodlust is palpable.

I'd feel safer down there.

The Mogarian enters the VIP box.

Two figures. One seated, one standing. Both covered in iridescent emerald scales.

Two pairs of rotating, stereoscopic eyes turn his way.

Worst. Idea. Ever. After my marriage.

"I've come about the shipment."

The seated figure cups a claw at the side of his head in imitation of a mammalian ear.

"Sorry." The Mogarian presses the triangular stud on his chest plate. "Always forgetting to turn my translator on. Nerves, I guess."

"That's quite all right, my boy, no harm done." Rich tones, at odds with his appearance. "I am G'Gugv'ntt, this is my nephew and we are in the market for some very particular merchandise. You, Imza, have come into possession of said merchandise. I view these circumstances as conducive to a mutually beneficially business transaction, wouldn't you agree?"

Bored, the nephew turns back to the action below. The Ogri is upright again, but too slow to catch the scuttling Wagner. Hooting and jeering. This is not what the crowd paid for. The nephew either.

"Don't play with him, you lousy crab! Gut him!"

G'Gugv'ntt sighs. "Junior, might I bring two points to your attention? First, it's extremely difficult to gut an Ogri given that they are essentially sentient menhirs. Second, your uncle is trying to work. Keep the noise down to a minimum or I'll send you back to your mother with a flea in your ear. Do we understand one another?"

Hunched shoulders. Shuffling of feet. "Sorry, Uncle."

"Teenagers," G'Gugv'ntt says. "Now, we were about to agree a price."

The Mogarian dives in. "Five hundred thousand credits."

"Imza, Imza, Imza. I thought you were a reasonable young man."

"Five hundred thousand is very reasonable." Voice level, but knees shaking. "The Argolin won't be happy when they learn it's missing and it won't take them long to figure out who took it."

"I think the Argolin are the least of your problems."

"Five hundred thousand. Take it or leave it."

"Really? I've looked into your background. I know all about your debts and I know that you have less than twenty-six hours to pay up or else... well, I'd really rather not say in front of Junior. Do you honestly believe you can find another buyer in time?"

Imza's shoulders slump. "What are you offering?"

"Three hundred thousand. Enough to settle with your creditors and set yourself up on a planet that doesn't have an extradition treaty with Argolis."

"Not a very nice planet."

"Beggars can't be choosers."

Wagner the Destroyer has the Ogri pressed hard against the barrier. Blue sparks cascade around them. Waves of energy surge through the Ogri's calcified body. He writhes, like a fish on a hook. Like the fish, he cannot wriggle free.

I know how he feels. Three hundred thousand. It's worth much more and he knows it. But given the alternative...

"Fine. You can have the tachyon reactor for three hundred thousand."

"Excellent." Claws clap with pleasure. "Junior, arrange for Mr Imza's cargo to be transferred to our ship."

An eruption from the crowd. Inarticulate disbelief. Wagner on his back, legs wagging helplessly in the air. The Ogri on top of him, pinning him to the mat. The Hestian referee looming over both, counting the Macra out.

One.

Two.

Three.

And it is all over. The nephew tears his betting slip into tiny pieces.

"Come on then." Sulky. "Let's get this over with."

"Oh, Junior," G'Gugv'ntt says as they reach the door. He holds up a small chit. "Don't forget to collect my winnings while you're down there."

* * * * *

The bridge of the *Hemlock*, richly decorated with trees, lianas and other foliage. All artificial, but for those who spend months off-world, it makes the ship feel more like the rainforests of home.

"Uncle," Junior says, "can I ask you a question?"

"Why not? Your mother sent you to me to learn"

"How did you know the Ogri would win?"

"Simple," G'Gugv'ntt replies. "I paid Wagner to throw the fight."

"You what?"

"Junior, if you're going to succeed in this business then you need to remember a few simple rules, the second of which being never gamble unless it's on a sure thing."

"And what's the first, Uncle?"

"Family. Always family. You can cheat anyone else, harm anyone else, *kill* anyone else, but family is sacred. The rest of the galaxy may be out to get you, Junior, but you can always count on family to hide you and to bankroll you because one day you'll do the same for them."

"Is that why you took me on as your apprentice? Because I'm family?"

"You didn't think it was for your dazzling intellect, did you? Now make yourself useful and get me a fresh bottle of this Thorosian nectar."

As Junior waddles off, Deputy Mk'Trk'chnk takes his place

"Er, Boss, we, ah..." Eyes rotating every which way bar one: the Boss.

Do we have to do this every time? I know the crew aren't use to the Boss of All Bosses supervising a deal personally, but get a grip already.

"Spit it out, Mk'Trk'chnk!"

"We're being hailed, Boss. It's a Federation Patrol."

G'Gugv'ntt leans on a control with his foot and a holographic image appears in front of him. A Drahvin. Tall, blonde, pneumatic.

"I am Captain Kaeta of the Galactic Federation ship *Venture*. Power down your engines and prepare for boarding."

"Boarding?" G'Gugv'ntt does his best shocked voice. "Whatever for?"

"We have reason to believe that your vessel is transporting stolen goods."

"Reason? What reason?"

Kaeta looks amused. "You're Foamasi."

G'Gugv'ntt concedes the point.

"Allow me to confer with my crew so as to make the necessary arrangements for your arrival." He cuts the connection before Kaeta can respond.

"You're not seriously going to let them on board, Uncle?" Junior is back, a bottle in his left claw.

"Don't be ridiculous. Mk'Trk'chnk, can we fight them?"

"With what? They're Galactic Federation. Their amour outclasses anything we can throw at them."

"Can we outrun them?"

"I seriously doubt it."

"Actually, Boss, I think we can." A fresh voice. Female.

"Who is this?" G'Gugv'ntt asks the deputy.

"No one of any importance." Mk'Trk'chnk hops from one foot to the other in embarrassment. "Fresh out of the academy. She doesn't know how things work around here."

"Ls'Ntwp'tt, junior science specialist." She is shorter than Mk'Trk'chnk, taller than Junior. The scales above her eyes are spotted with red. "I may have only just graduated, but I did my final dissertation on Argolin technology."

G'Gugv'ntt has yet to be impressed. "Is this going anywhere, Ls'Ntwp'tt, because I'm rather busy."

"We can use the tachyon reactor to execute a spatio-temporal hop away from the Federation patrol."

"Have you ever tried this before?"

"I've never had access to a tachyon reactor before, but I know all the theory and I guarantee it will work."

Mk'Trk'chnk makes a disbelieving noise at the back of his throat. G'Gugv'ntt glares at him.

"Do you have a better idea? I didn't think so. It would appear that today is your lucky day, Ls'Ntwp'tt. You get to put your theory into practice."

"Just give me five minutes to set it up, Boss."

"You've got one." G'Gugv'ntt reopens communications with the *Venture*. "Captain Kaeta, I hope I haven't kept you waiting long."

"I take it you're ready to receive us?" Arms folded, expression neutral.

"But of course. Please tell me you'll be part of the boarding party. I would so love to meet you in the flesh. We can discuss suitable compensation for the trouble we've put you to."

"You wouldn't be trying to bribe a Federation official, would you?"

"Bribe? No. I was simply thinking of a gift, though if you felt obligated to perform some service in return – overlooking certain items you might find in our hold, for example – well, that would be strictly between you and your conscience."

A smirk. "That's the prettiest description of a bribe I've come across in a long time."

"You can't blame a Foamasi for trying."

Kaeta consults her console. "We're picking up some strange readings from your ship." Her eyes narrow. "Tachyon emissions."

"Ah, that must mean it's time to leave. I'm sorry, Kaeta, but, alas, time and tide wait for no reptile. TTFN."

1969

A white room, sparsely furnished.

On the floor: reed mats; a mattress tied in place.

On the walls: three scrolls in red and black; a clay mask painted gold.

On the ceiling: a single light source, diffused through a screen.

And in the middle of the room: a prince.

Ryugin, eldest son of the Genroku clan. Legs crossed beneath him, a scroll in his hands.

Who are you, Urabe? Are you quiet or outspoken? Driven or docile? Hard or kind? Do you have a favourite flower? Colour? Food? What makes you laugh? What makes you cry? I don't even know what you look like.

The flexible OLED screen shows her image, but, like a good Draconian woman, wearing a veil. No man outside the Ogawa clan is permitted to see her face. Ryugin will not be part of her clan until their wedding night.

Are you as scared by this arranged marriage as I am?

Ryugin knows his duty, but still he has doubts. Two years past, his sister was sent to do her duty. Now she is dead.

Where are you, Sara, when I need you most?

"Your Highness." A voice filters through the paper screen. "May your humble servant be permitted to approach?"

"Of course, Yoshido." Ryugin replaces the scroll in its case. "You shouldn't even have to ask."

"But I do, your Highness." The screen slides open. Yoshido, bent almost double by age. "I am but a humble tutor in your father's service, whereas you are soon to be prince of not just one, but two mighty houses and, Amatsu willing, one day lord of both."

"I'm glad you're here, Yoshido," Ryugin says. "I just wish I was sure I'm doing the right thing."

"You're doing what your father asked of you, which is your first duty. Once you become Daimyo yourself, then you can weigh up matters of right and wrong. Until then, be glad you're spared such weighty judgements."

"Did you tell my sister the same thing?"

"Princess Sarafina never questioned. She knew her duty."

"And look where it got her." The words are bitter.

"I'm sorry," Yoshido says. "I realise the wounds are still fresh, but steel yourself. The captain requests your presence on the bridge."

The bridge. Two levels. The captain on one, his crew down below.

Ryugin dispenses with pleasantries.

"Captain Naga, you have news?"

"We've detected the presence of another ship," Naga says. "A *Draconian* ship. Now you know as much as I do."

The captain. A head shorter than the prince, but half again as broad. Rumour is that he was once a pirate, but was pardoned as a result of some unspecified service for the Emperor. A more loyal man it would be difficult to find. Or one less civil.

"Have you tried hailing them?" Ryugin asks.

"No answer."

"Could they be damaged?"

"As far as our scans can tell, their systems are fully operational, your Highness," Sentaro, the tactical officer, replies.

"What do you mean, 'as far as we can tell'?" Naga asks.

"They're running with their shields up so we can't get a full picture."

"Now why would they be doing that?"

"Maybe they don't feel safe," Ryugin suggests. "This isn't Draconian space after all."

"Exactly," Naga says, "and no one with any sense would venture this way."

"We're here." Ryugin says.

"Only because your Highness insisted on a stopover on route. Cutting through this system was the only way to make up lost time. Two weeks out from the main trade routes doesn't strike me as the best application of good sense."

"That 'stopover' as you call it, captain, was my sister's funeral!" Ryugin feels his temper rising.

"A funeral your father forbade you to attend as I recall."

An argument. Two proud men unwilling to bend in spite of their grief. Or because of it. Ryugin storming out before his father could stop him.

"He advised, Captain, he did not forbid."

"Strikes me there's not much difference where nobility's concerned."

"Captain, please!" Yoshido is between Naga and the prince. "I think we should focus on the matter at hand, don't you?"

Reluctantly, Naga nods. "Sentaro?"

"They're moving to intercept, sir."

"Are we close enough for a visual?"

"Putting it on screen, Captain."

"Shields up, Sentaro."

"Belay that order." Ryugin's eyes are fixed on the screen. "That's the *Kaiju*, my brother's ship."

"With respect, your Highness," Naga says, "that ship is in an area it has no good reason to be, has its shields up and is refusing to respond to our hails. We have to treat it as a threat."

"That's my brother you're talking about, Captain. A member of the imperial family. When my father hears about your disrespect..."

"He'll thank me for getting you to your wedding in one piece."

"Captain." Yoshido is quiet, but firm. "Remember to whom you are speaking. Your duty is to obey his commands."

"Even if those commands are insane?"

The saddest of smiles. "Especially then."

"They're charging weapons," Sentaro says.

"My brother will not fire on us. Hail them again. Hail them until they answer."

"There is no greater honour for a Draconian than to do his duty," Yoshido says to Naga. "The dutiful will find their eternal reward in the Heavenly Palace of Jade, the dishonoured are destined to sail forever on the River of Frozen Darkness."

"Only if you believe," Naga says. He turns to the helmsman. "Evasive manoeuvres."

"But, Captain, the prince said..."

"I don't care," Naga roars. "This is my ship and I'm not about to throw her away because some princeling can't see the space dust when it's right in front of him. Evasive manoeuvres, that's an order!"

"Too late!" Sentaro shouts. "They're firing!"

The deck quakes. Those seated are thrown against their consoles. Those standing are hurled across the bridge. Sparks spray like the palace fountains from damaged equipment.

"Damage report," Naga yells. "Anybody?"

"The torpedoes took out our engines." Sentaro's voice is choked by smoke. "And the reactor core."

"Can we use the ion-drive to get out of here?"

"Negative, Captain. We've barely got enough power for life support."

"I can't believe my brother would shoot at us."

"Use your eyes, your Highness," Naga says. "He's made his intentions perfectly clear."

"It must be a mistake."

"Well, you can ask him about that yourself. He's hailing us."

The viewscreen crackles into life. A blurred picture, the colour distorted, but a familiar face. A familiar smile.

Genroku Katashi.

"Katashi. It's me, Ryugin. You've made a mistake."

"No mistake, dearest brother." A sneer. "I want you dead."

Ryugin's jaw works, but he has no words.

Yoshido is at his side, lending him support.

"What treason is this, Katashi?" he demands.

"That's *Lord* Katashi, old man."

"Lord? I think not."

"Really. I think you'll find that I'm the head of the Genroku clan following our father's untimely demise."

"Father?" Ryugin's strength fails, but Naga is there to catch him.

"Easy, boy," the captain whispers. "Don't give him the satisfaction."

Ryugin cannot hear him.

When last I spoke to father, it was in anger. He went to his death with words of hate in his ears.

"What have you done, Katashi?" Yoshido asks.

"I?" Katashi smiles. "Alas, our father died of a sudden, unexpected, but fatal disease."

"You poisoned him."

"Such a suspicious mind, Yoshido."

"It doesn't matter," Yoshido says. "If Sunkiro is dead, the eldest son inherits. That's Ryugin, not you."

"Only if Ryugin makes it back home alive. How fortunate for me that you came all the way out here where there'll be no witnesses to your tragic accident. The Heavenly Palace of Jade awaits you."

"They're charging weapons," Sentaro says.

Yoshido looks to Naga. "Do something!"

"We're dead in the water," the captain replies. "There's nothing I can do."

"What's that?" Ryugin points at the screen. A crack is opening up in space. A crack containing a thousand colours.

"Sentaro?"

"Sensor readings are off the scale."

A crash. The tearing of metal on metal. An impact that sends everyone sprawling across the deck.

"The *Kaiju*?" Naga is on his feet before the ship stops shaking.

"No, captain," Sentaro says, "they missed. Something knocked us out of the way."

"Something?"

"Another ship, but like nothing I've seen before. It just appeared from nowhere."

"Ships don't just appear."

"I don't know how else to explain it, Captain." Sentaro checks his console. "The *Kaiju*'s trying to get a lock on us again."

"Whatever that thing was, it brought us a few moments. Let's not waste them," Naga says. "Yoshido, get the prince to an escape pod. Sentaro, divert all power from life support to weapon systems."

"But, captain..."

"We're going to die anyway, Sentaro. We might as well go out with a bang."

"Yoshido..." Ryugin begins as his tutor forces him into the escape pod.

"Naga's going to create a distraction," Yoshido says. "With luck, Katashi won't notice this pod."

"What about you?"

"Only room for one in each of these things. I'll follow in another."

"You're a terrible liar, Yoshido."

"Then you'll believe me when I say that I'm proud of you, Ryugin." Yoshido salutes as the pod's hatch starts to close. "My life at your command."

"Yoshido..." Ryugin reaches out for his tutor.

The pod is already falling away.

Out of Time

The TARDIS. A corridor off the console room.

Valentina Sara Rossi. Glossy, auburn hair bound up in a pony-tail, olive skin and a prominent Italianate nose. Designer labels, but a practical combination of low-heeled boots, flared trousers and a colourful blouse.

Purposeful.

Tom Brooker. Curly brown hair and a round, open face. Tall, but hides it with a slouch. Slacker uniform of indie-band T-shirt and frayed jeans.

Lurking.

An arched eyebrow. "What are you doing out here, Brooksy?"

"Um, hi, Val." Tom looks up. Shifty. "I'm doing nowt. Just, you know, hanging around.

Waiting for you."

Twenty-nine going on six.

"Waiting for me?"

"Yeah. I thought we could go in together, like."

"Together."

Squirming. "Or you could go in first. If you like."

"Or you could."

"Do I have to?"

"Tom, what is your problem?"

"It's the Doctor," Tom whispers.

"The Doctor?"

"Shh, he'll hear you," Tom says. "And he scares me."

Big baby. Except...

Except he scares me too. Just a little.

Earth, 2031. Home. An alien princess, a velociraptor with a gun and a man with all the answers. The Doctor. Gentle, brave and kind and with the oldest eyes in the universe.

He took her by the hand, promised wonder and adventure.

Sparana Prime. Paris in the eighteenth century. Terra Zentrum.

Explorer. Teacher. Friend.

Back to twenty-first century London. The Meti and Yog-Sothoth, the so-called Great Intelligence. A parting of the ways.

The death of the Doctor. *Her* Doctor. The ultimate sacrifice.

Only not quite.

Total cellular regeneration, *he* called it. The new Doctor. Younger, harsher. Quick to judge and tough to like. The same old, old eyes, but now oh so cold.

So why am I still with him?

Morgan: "He's more like the old Doctor than he wants you to know."

Difficult to imaging two people more different, and yet...

He saved Camelot. He saved the Earth. Not because anyone asked him to, but because it was the right thing to do.

"Someone has to take responsibility for cleaning up the universe's mistakes."

Morgan again: "He needs you, Valentina."

And I need him. Need him to give me the one thing the old Doctor couldn't.

My brother.

"Stick with him, maybe one day he'll even thank you for it."

Tom wakes her from her daydream.

"Hello, Earth to Val. You still in there, pet."

"Just wondering if you were always this much of a wuss."

"Certified coward, me. Now pop your head round the door and see if he looks angry."

"Angry's his default expression these days."

"I know, that's what scares me."

"Give me a break." Val reaches for the door. Her fingertips brush the handle.

A sonorous boom reverberates throughout the ship. The tolling of a funeral bell.

Tom throws open the door and strides into the console room.

"What's going on?"

"Ah, Brooker. Good of you to join me." The Doctor's fingers fly across the console. "If you could take up your positions, we might yet get through this in one piece."

"Er, positions?"

"Yes, that's what I said. If you could handle navigation, Miss Rossi can monitor the environmental systems."

The Doctor sighs off their blank looks.

"Have you picked up nothing travelling with me? Never mind, I'll handle everything myself. As usual. By the way, you might want to hold on to something."

The room spins and tips. The floor shifts from under Val's feet and she cannons into Tom. They go down in a tangle of limbs.

"Watch where you're putting those hands, buster."

"Never even occurred to me, pet."

Val struggles back to her feet. "I don't know whether to be relieved or insulted."

"Try being quiet," the Doctor snaps. "This would be much easier if the peanut gallery kept the distractions to a minimum."

"It might help if you told us what's going on," Val says.

"We caught up in a rip in local space-time."

"Which means?"

Sotto voce. "This means I need better educated assistants."

"What was that?"

"Imagine a hurricane in the middle of the ocean and the TARDIS as a rowboat caught up in it."

"That's bad, right?" Tom asks.

"No, the cloister bell is ringing to let me know I've won the lottery. Can we stop with the questions so I can get on with saving my ship?"

"And us too, right?"

"Can't be helped."

The room twists, the floor drops away.

Tom clings to a roundel, hanging in the air as up becomes sideways becomes down. Val dives for a chair, riding it like a sled as it follows the tilts and jumps of the deck. The Doctor is braced against the console, his eyes on fire.

"Now the fun really begins."

He plays the console like an organ, stroking keys, pushing on pedals, pulling on stops.

"Not enough hands." He tries to reach the controls on the other side of the console, but his arms are not long enough. "Brooker!"

"Can you hang on a moment, Doctor?" Tom dangles precariously. "I know I will."

"No time."

Another shockwave. A springboard. The Doctor uses it to vault the TARDIS console, scrambling down the other side, flicking switches and twisting dials all the while.

"Here goes nothing!"

He pulls hard on a red-handled lever. The TARDIS screams in pain. Then –
Silence.

Darkness and silence.

Breathing. Val's breathing. Pounding. Her blood in her ears.

A point of light. The heart of the time rotor.

One after another, the lights around the console room flicker and blossom.

Tom tentatively tests the floor, wary that it will disappear again.

"What just happened?"

"We landed" the Doctor says. "Obviously."

Val rubs her bruised shin. "So we're free of the rip in time?"

"Not exactly." Circling the console, checking readouts. "We didn't have enough power to break away so I've pulled us out of the vortex. We'll be safer if we're not in flight. Think of it as battening down the hatches and waiting for a storm to pass over."

"And will it? Pass over, I mean?"

"That rather depends on the cause."

Tom is inspecting the console for himself. "What I want to know is how you managed to fly us into that thing in the first place."

The Doctor rounds on him, a finger in Tom's face. "I didn't fly into anything, Brooker. The rip formed around us. I can't be expected to avoid something that wasn't there."

Tom backs off. "It was just a joke. Sorry."

"What do we do now?" Val tries to change the subject.

"I try to find out what caused the rip and how I can close it again."

"Fair enough. And what is Tom and I supposed to do while you're doing that?"

"I suppose you'll have to come with me, Miss Rossi," the Doctor replies. "After all, I can hardly leave the two of you alone in my ship, can I?"

"Be nice if we knew where we were." Tom turns on the scanner. Nothing but static.

"The circuit must have been damaged," the Doctor says, "but I can tell you that we're on Earth, more specifically the north-east of England, sometime in the mid-1980s. And it's cold out so I'd advise you to wrap up warm, Miss Rossi."

"I'll get a coat," Val starts for the interior door. "Can I get you anything, Tom?"

"Don't bother. Knowing the Doctor, we're just as likely to have ended up on lava-world."

"Is that right?" A baleful glance sends Tom looking to the floor.

1984

Kittiwakes waft over murky river waters, as disinterested as the press and guests on the north bank.

Richard Ferris. Chain-smoking Rothmans. Hands like spades. Boss of –

Ian Townsend. Face of a weasel, body of a reed. Sweating in December. Formerly assistant to –

Council Leader George Patterson. Balding. Sharp-suited. Smiling for the cameras. Has been since 1965.

In front of them, journalists impatient for the pub. Behind them, the derelict Barrett Brothers' factory, soon to be sight of the Hadrian Development. Affordable housing for the masses or another money-spinner for Ferris Housing? Depends on which newspaper you read.

Ferris and Patterson smile for the cameras. Ian tries to keep out of the way.

An argument over a sledgehammer. The press want the council leader to swing it, but Patterson is not a young man anymore. How will it look if he fails to knock down the wall?

A compromise. Patterson poses for photographs, hammer in both hands, but then gives it to Ferris. Ian holds Ferris's jacket for him and the big man attacks the wall with relish. It is no secret that Tricky Dicky Ferris likes to get his hands dirty.

Token section of crumbling brickwork demolished, Ferris waves for the builders. The bulldozers roll in. Progress underway, the press pack up and leave.

"Not a bad day's work, eh, Ian?" Ferris punches Ian on the shoulder. A friendly gesture. It sends the younger man rocking back on his heels.

"Assuming the development is completed on time, Mr Ferris."

"What's it going to take to get you to call us Richard? We're family, remember."

"I'm not sure it would be appropriate, that's all. Not when we're working."

Ferris shrugs. "You shouldn't worry so. You don't see us sweating the details, do you?"

"That's because you have me to do it for you, Mr Ferris."

"True, true, but not today, aye? Just enjoy the moment."

"I will," Ian lies.

"And how's our granddaughter?"

"Katherine's fine."

"Bet she's growing up fast. I know what Hazel was like at that age. The missus is really looking forward to seeing the three of you for Christmas dinner. You haven't forgotten, have you?"

"Of course not."

"Good lad."

"Richard, might I have a word?" George Patterson has sidled up beside them.

"Of course, George. Ian, I'll see you at the office in the morning."

"Wouldn't miss it."

Ian turns the collar of his coat up against the wind, sets off towards his parked Saab while trying to avoid the worst of the mud. Key in the ignition, but there's a tapping on the window. Jim Kramer, now of the *Chronicle*, formerly of Gosforth Grammar School. Ian's alma mater.

Ian winds down the window. "Jim."

"Ian, long time no see."

"Midland Hotel, last election night, right?"

"You were there supporting Patterson."

"No, Ferris was supporting Patterson. I was there because of Ferris. I got out of politics, remember."

"So you say."

"So I say."

"Listen." Kramer glances over his shoulder. "You got time for a drink, like?"

"I shouldn't."

"It's important. There's something you need to know. About Patterson."

"I told you, I've nothing to do with Patterson anymore."

"I'm glad," Kramer says. "For your sake."

* * * * *

The south bank of the Tyne. A cloaked spaceship.

G'Gugv'ntt peels of his skin-suit.

"That's much better," he says. "Hollow bones are all well and good, but I still get hellish cramp forced into one of those things."

"I don't see why we have to bother with disguises at all, Uncle," Junior says. "We should have taken over a long time ago."

"Is that right, Junior?" G'Gugv'ntt scratches at an itch. "When we arrived there where fourteen in the crew – down to just eight now – and there are six billion humans on this planet. The odds are not in our favour."

"We have superior technology. Weapons."

"Which we would get to use once, maybe twice before we were overwhelmed. We operate from the shadows because it is the only way to survive."

"So you say."

"Yes, so I say, and I am still Boss." G'Gugv'ntt turns to address the whole bridge. "Speaking of the crew, have we heard anything from our absent friends?"

"Got a transmission from Mk'Trk'chnk this morning," a technician says.

"Mk'Trk'chnk. He relocated to Leeds, didn't he? Dating a girl called..."

"Deirdre, Boss."

"Deirdre, that's right. How are they both?"

"Mk'Trk'chnk wants your permission to come out to her. Apparently the relationship is getting serious and he doesn't want to lie to her anymore. He figures she deserves to know that she's going out with a Foamasi deputy and not a solicitor named Michael Tennant."

Junior rolls his eyes. "You cannot be serious."

"Why not?" G'Gugv'ntt is more understanding. "He wants to make a life with this Deirdre and who am I to stand in the way of their happiness. Let him know that he can tell her with my blessing. But keep an eye on them. If she doesn't take the news as well as Mk'Trk'chnk hopes then we shall have to eliminate them both. Our secrecy is paramount."

"Is this what we've come to?" Junior asks. "Skulking around and aping squalid human lives? What happened to trying to get home?"

"Our journey back in time wrecked the tachyon reactor. The material we need to get it going again can't be found on this planet. We're going nowhere."

"There must be extraterrestrial visitors. We could ambush them."

"Look around you, Junior. This is Earth in the late twentieth century. What self-respecting alien race is going to come here by choice?"

"We should never have used the reactor in the first place."

Junior's eyes roam the bridge until they find Ls'Ntwp'tt. She is removing damaged leaves from one of the artificial plants.

"I know, I know." She cannot meet Junior's eye. "How many times do I have to say I'm sorry?"

"As many times as you like. It'll never be enough."

"Junior, what's done is done," G'Gugv'ntt says. "Recriminations are pointless."

"Yeah, well maybe they make me feel better. And you wouldn't want to stand in the way of my happiness, would you, Uncle?"

"I was just trying to help." Meek. Fragile.

"Next time you feel like helping, Ls'Ntwp'tt, do us all a favour and drop dead."

Tearfully, Ls'Ntwp'tt flees the bridge.

"That was uncalled for, Junior," G'Gugv'ntt snaps. "You will apologise this instant."

"Will I?" Junior looks his uncle in the eye. "Make me."

* * * * *

"Do you have to go straight back out again?" Mary asks. Blonde hair in a Princess Di cut, sea-blue eyes glistening.

Westoe, a mile out from South Shields. A narrow hallway in a narrow Georgian terrace. A husband and wife keeping their voices down so as not to disturb their son in the adjoining living room.

Robbie. Still in his school uniform, sitting cross-legged on the floor and watching *Danger Mouse* on the telly. Jack, the boy's grandfather, sits in the armchair behind him, gently snoring.

Alan, the husband, takes his battered donkey jacket from the row of pegs at the bottom of the stairs.

"You know I do, Mary, love," he says. "I want to get out to the tip before all the good stuff's gone. I'm hoping to make enough so as we can get Robbie one of those *Transformer* things he wants for Christmas."

"I'm more worried about the essentials. You know, clothes, food. The mortgage."

"I told you, I spoke to the bank and they've agreed to give us an extension. There's no need to fret, like." Alan buttons up his jacket. "And food wouldn't be an issue if you'd just accept the food parcels from the lasses at the Union."

"You know how I feel about charity."

"Maybe if you helped out up there from time to time it wouldn't feel so much like charity."

"I work." Part defensive, part wounded pride. "One of us has to support this family."

"I would if I could. I didn't call this bloody strike. Or do you want us to go back to work and be branded a bloody scab like Bob Miller at number 18?"

"Of course not. It's just I never expected it to go on this long."

"We none of us did. Listen, I just want to do something for the bairn, like. He's had it tough this year."

"We all have." Hollow. Tired. "Will you be back for tea?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

Alan gives his wife a peck on the cheek, turns up the collar on his jacket and steps out into the cold evening. Mary stares at the front door long after it had closed.

When does it get any easier?

* * * * *

The engine room. Smooth curves and flowing structures connected up to the sharp, crystalline pyramid that is the tachyon reactor. Around the room, tubes and nodules pulse with a slow, red heartbeat, but the pyramid stays dark. Dead.

"Did your uncle send you to apologise?" Ls'Ntwp'tt asks. Her eyes are clear. No trace of tears.

"Hardly," Junior replies. "That oxygen-thief couldn't force anyone to do anything. He doesn't have the stomach to be a real Boss."

"But you do?"

"I wouldn't just give up. I wouldn't let myself be contaminated by this stupid planet. I'd find a way to get us home."

"And that's what I love about you."

Junior ran a claw over the pyramid. "Can you fix this thing?"

"Already fixed. It just needs fuel."

"Fuel?"

"Shikirenum. Your uncle's right, you won't find any on Earth."

"So where can we find it?"

"Argolis. Paragon. One of the moons of Draconia."

"But nowhere we can actually get to."

Ls'Ntwp'tt shakes her head.

"There's another problem," she says.

"Bigger than the fact we can't go anywhere?"

"Even if you could, no one's going to follow you while G'Gugv'ntt's still around."

Junior only hesitates a moment. "In that case, he'll have to be dethroned."

"You'd turn on a member of your own family?" Not a judgement, just an observation.

"I'm doing this to *save* the family."

Ls'Ntwp'tt purrs. "I was hoping you'd say that."

* * * * *

"It's starving out here, man." Tom shivers and rubs his bare arms.

"I did warn you."

"Give us the key so I can grab a jacket."

The Doctor ignores him.

"Can't you reason with him, Val?"

"Hey, I'm with the Doctor. You had your chance. Anyway, what's a bit of cold to a hard Geordie lad like you?"

"I hate you all." Tom sulks, but only for a moment. "I can see the sea! Who's up for plodges?"

"Plodges? Is that another of your holy northern expressions?"

"Plodges. You know, paddling and like."

"Paddling? In this weather? You said it was freezing."

"Well, yeah," Tom admits, "but it's the sea-side. You've got to make an exception for the sea-side. Me folks used to take us to the sand all the time when I was wee." His best wheedling face. "Please, can I go paddling, miss? Can I?"

"Oh, go on then. But don't wander off."

The Doctor looks up from the device he is working on. "We don't have time to indulge his juvenile antics."

"Have you found what you're looking for yet?" Val asks.

"Well, no..."

"Then what's the harm? Besides, after what he's been through, Tom's entitled to blow off some steam."

"I died. Do I get to blow off steam too?"

* * * * *

"You are allowed to look at me, Sosuke," Princess Genroku Urabe, formerly Ogawa, says.

"It would not be appropriate, my Princess," Sosuke, her pilot and bodyguard replies.

This place is cold and grey. All harsh lines and sharp corners. Where are the natural forms, the curve of wood, the footprints in the sand that her heart craves? The very alienness of this world unsettles Urabe, but it excites her too. Space travel, exploration, these are things that would have forever been denied her where the situation not so desperate. The chance to see a new world is almost worth the sacrifice. Almost.

Neither fear nor excitement is visible on her face, however. She is a Draconian princess and above such displays.

"Appropriate?" she says.

"Your clothes... Your veil..."

"But I'm not wearing a veil."

"And it would be wrong for me to look upon your face."

Urabe laughs in disbelief. "But we're alone. Who would know?"

"I would know." Sosuke's voice is filled with gravel. "A woman should not dress as a man unless..."

"Unless?"

"Unless she is disgraced."

"And is that how you see me, Sosuke?" Urabe is stung, but Sosuke does not answer. "It didn't seem to bother you when we were fleeing from the palace."

"Then the disguise was necessary."

"And I consider it necessary still." She does not want this, but words cannot be unspoken. "These garments are far more practical than my own."

"As you say, Princess."

Urabe sighs. "Enough of this. I order you to look at me, Sosuke."

Sosuke shakes his head, just the once, but with great deliberation.

"I will not."

"You would refuse a royal command? Where is your honour?"

"I betrayed my lord and master, Princess," the bodyguard says. "I have no honour."

Urabe closes her eyes, building a wall around her emotions. Whether Sosuke can see it or not, she is still a princess of Draconia and she will always be wearing a veil.

Another time, a different place. Urabe, in her wedding gown, being told that her husband-to-be is dead. She does not cry. How should she react to the death of a man she never knew? Time passes. Spring becomes Summer becomes Autumn. The Sayuka tree outside her bedroom window blossoms, ripens and fades. Negotiations continue between the Genroku and Ogawa households and it comes as no surprise to Urabe to find that, as the first fingers of Winter take hold, she is betrothed to Ryugin's brother, the new head of House Genroku. At first, she feels pity for him. He has lost his father and his brother in quick succession. She knows how that would make her feel.

Then she meets him.

"Let's just focus on what we're here for," she says at last. "Finding Ryugin."

"I'm detecting evidence of advanced technology, Princess,' Sosuke says, "technology not native to this planet."

"Draconian?"

"I cannot say."

"It must be," Urabe says. "Where is he, Sosuke? Where is the signal coming from?"

"Here, Princess. It's coming from right here."

"Here? But there's *nothing* here."

"I beg to differ, Princess."

A figure steps from a gap in the air, a conjuror appearing from behind an invisible curtain. Or a veil.

"Who are you?" Urabe asks. "*What* are you?"

Green skin. Scales. But not Draconian.

"I can be anything you want me to be, Princess," G'Gugv'ntt says, "for the right price."

* * * * *

Never thought I'd be glad it gets dark early in winter, but I reckon it's safer. Less chance of being spotted by the guards. Or the pollis.

There had been police up at the pit earlier when they had been picketing. A barrier between the pickets and the scabs. The scabs had their hoods pulled down to hide their faces as they hurried through the colliery gates, but everyone knew who they were. It would have taken more than a hood to disguise Bob Miller's lankiness.

I only wanted to talk to him. What makes a bloke turn his back on his mates? Go scab?

The police never let him get close. He protested, they threw back abuse. Then the other pickets were there, trying to pull the police off him. Shoving became kicking. Harsh words replaced by harder fists. Someone threw a bottle and then the police had their batons out.

Hope the press weren't there. Wouldn't want to be on the news. Mary'd only worry.

Alan hefts the makeshift sieve he cobbled together in his backyard – just a couple of planks with some wire mesh in between – and continues sifting through the waste on the spoil heap.

Wonder what Mary's doing right now? Bet she's sitting at the window, watching for us to come back. It's not fair to her, any of this.

He looks down at his haul. Not as much as he wanted, just the one gardening sack in the car and another half-full in the wheelbarrow. There is always tomorrow. Better that than cause Mary any more grief.

A torch-beam strikes him across the eyes.

"What do you think you're doing?" the shadow behind it asks. Security.

"It's just waste, like." Alan tightens his grip on the barrow. "Nowt's going to miss it."

"It's theft is what it is."

"I just want to earn a bit of cash to give our bairn a decent Christmas."

"You want to earn some cash, try going back to work."

"It's not that simple."

"Course it isn't. You miners think you're above all that. Bleeding entitled. Entitled to make off with other people's property."

"They just throw this stuff away."

"Tell it to the pollis."

"They charge us, I'll lose my job."

"Maybe then they'll give it to owt actually wants to work."

The shadow reaches for Alan. Alan is faster. He shoves the barrow forward and it catches the shadow in the shins. It yelps and drops the torch.

Alan runs.

* * * * *

Friday night in the Owl. *Do They Know It's Christmas* on the radio competing with the bleeps and whistles of the fruit machine.

Kramer returns from the bar with two glasses, a Newcastle Brown for him, a pint of bitter for Ian. There is a packet of cheese and onion flavour *Golden Wonder* in his pocket.

"So, how's Hazel?" he asks, offering Ian a crisp.

Ian declines. "Fine."

"And your wee lass? Kate, is it?"

"Katherine. She's fine, too."

"Good. That's good."

"Jim, you didn't bring me here to talk about my family."

"No. Then again, I guess it does concern them, like."

"Jim..."

"Sorry. Just shouldn't be telling you any of this." Kramer takes a generous swig from his glass.

"You said it was about Patterson."

"Aye, right. Word is he's being investigated."

"Investigated."

"Yeah, as in by the pollis, like. Financial irregularities."

"Bribes, you mean."

"Bribes, aye."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"You used to work for Patterson."

"A long time ago."

"Sure, a long time ago. When he was chairman of the Housing Committee. When they say he first took a bung. Another round?"

Ian nods, head spinning. Fifteen years ago. A fat brown envelope in a spade-like hand. A Christmas present.

A drunken cheer. The metallic waterfall of change falling from the fruit machine. The radio playing *The Little Drummer Boy*. *Pa rum pum pum pum*.

Kramer sits back down.

"Still think this doesn't concern you?"

"Why should it?"

"I don't know, Ian. A councilman who takes bribes to award housing contracts. One of the North-East's leading development companies and the top beneficiary of those contracts. And you, starting out working for the one, now employed by the other."

"Are you accusing me of something, Jim?" Ian can smell his own sweat.

"I'm just saying, as a friend, you might want to lie low for a while."

"I've got nothing to hide."

"First rule of journalism, Ian: everybody's hiding something."

Ian does not reply, just looks for answers in his pint-glass.

* * * * *

Tom jogs over to them, shoes and socks in his hand.

"That was quick," Val says.

"Yeah, well the water's right cold, isn't it?"

"Do tell." Val rolls her eyes. "What do you reckon that is over there, Doctor?"

The Doctor's reply is muffled by the screwdriver in his mouth. "It may have escaped your attention, Miss Rossi, but I'm trying to concentrate."

"Pardon me for breathing."

"It's a spoil heap," Tom says. "That's what they do with the waste from the colliery, like."

"Hark at you all knowledgeable of a sudden."

"You may mock..."

"Don't worry, I will."

"You may mock, but you can't grow up in the North-East without picking up a bit about mining. You can't take coals to Newcastle and all that."

"All right then, smarty-pants, if that's a rubbish tip, what are those people doing up there?"

"Ah, well..."

"They're coal tipping." The Doctor does not look up. "The waste may be poor quality, but that doesn't mean it's worthless. Any more questions?"

"Just one," Val says. "Why's that guy waving at you?"

He kicks up sand and coal dust as he runs. Tall, wavy hair, black donkey jacket.

"Doctor?" he says. "It really is you, isn't it?"

With deliberate slowness, the Doctor takes the sonic screwdriver from his mouth and pockets it.

"Do I know you?"

"Hadaway, man. You can't have forgotten. It's Alan. Alan Brooker."

Val's breath catches in her throat. She glances back at Tom, sees the blood drain from oh-so-similar features.

"Brooker," the Doctor murmurs. "Now there's a coincidence."

"Hey, get back here!" The security guard jogs towards them, favouring his right leg.

"Friend of yours?" the Doctor asks.

"Hardly," Alan replies. "You know, me car's just down there and I'm sure Mary'll be pleased to see you."

"And I her, if I had the faintest idea who she was."

"Mary's his wife," Tom whispers. "My grandmother."

"You okay with this, Tom?" Val asks.

"Would you be?"

The security guard is closing on them. "I'll have you for assault!"

"I reckon as I'm not welcome here anymore," Alan says. "You coming, Doctor?"

* * * * *

Junior lurks at the back of the room. He has as much right to be here as anyone else, yet stepping out would mean a confrontation with his uncle and he doesn't want that.

Not yet.

He can feel Ls'Ntwp'tt's hand stroking the delicate spines on his back.

Not yet, but soon.

His uncle has brought two strangers onto the ship. A mistake. Junior searches the faces of the rest of the crew for signs of dissent. There are none. They are still blind to G'Gugv'ntt's faults.

But I will show them.

Not yet, but soon.

The strangers are Draconian, a woman and a giant, both dressed as men.

"Draconia," Ls'Ntwp'tt whispers in his ear. "They have shikirenum there."

The sound of her voice lifts him up, sends him flying across the room to throw down his uncle and take up his place.

Not yet, but soon.

The Draconians want something. Another Draconian. G'Gugv'ntt will help them. For a price.

But not shikirenum.

They could go home, but he is ignoring the opportunity. Another mistake. The crew must see. Yet they do nothing.

So I will act for them.

Not yet, but –

"It's time," Ls'Ntwp'tt says.

* * * * *

The engine of the Vauxhall Chevette coughs as Alan pulls up to the kerb. Mary is already at the front door.

So she really was watching for us. Hopefully she won't chew my ear off in front of guests.

"Hope you don't mind, love," he says as he gets out of the car, "but I ran into an old mate and invited him and his friends round. You mind the Doctor, don't you, Mary?"

Mary blinks.

"You know, the night bus?" Alan continues.

Realisation dawns. "That was fifteen years ago, Alan. You can't seriously expect us to remember that now."

"It was the night we first met," Alan says. "I'd hoped it had made an impression."

"Well we can't keep your friends standing around in the cold," Mary says. "Let's get them inside."

Alan starts to the door, but Mary halts him with a raised finger.

"Not you," she says. "You're filthy. Go round back and wash up."

"But, Mary, love..."

"I'm not having coal dust in my house. *You* don't have to clean it." She inspects the others. "You'll do. Leave your shoes in the hall."

"Does she mellow with age?" Val whispers to Tom.

"I've no idea what Alan expects us to do with you all," Mary continues. "It's hard enough just feeding the four of us, but we'll just have to make do, I suppose. You're not vegetarians or anything continental, are you?"

"Don't worry about it, Mrs Brooker," Val says. "We picked up supplies on the way."

The Doctor pushes through the crowded hallway. "Kitchen through here, is it?"

Mary follows him into the front-room. "So you're just going to take over the cooking, are you, Doctor?"

"That was the general idea, yes."

Jack tears himself away from *Coronation Street* to glare daggers at the Doctor.

"What's he doing here?" he demands.

"We've met, I take it?" the Doctor says.

"That's one way of putting it. I lost my job because of you."

"Everyone seems to have the advantage of me today. Your problems will just have to join the queue." He casts around, spies the boy sitting in the corner. "Robert, isn't it?"

"Robbie."

("Daddy?" Val asks quietly.

"Daddy," the Doctor confirms.)

"Robbie, be a good lad and set the table, would you, while I see about something to eat."

"I'm not in the habit of accepting charity," Mary says.

"Not a problem since this isn't charity. This is in return for the hospitality offered by you and your husband." He turns to Tom. "Brook..." Stops himself. "Tom, see what you can make of this."

He throws Tom the device he was working on earlier. Tom catches it clumsily.

"As for you, Miss Rossi, I'd appreciate your help in the kitchen."

* * * * *

"So Tom gets to play with advanced alien tech, but all I'm good for is boiling a few carrots, is that it?"

Hands on hips. Righteous anger.

Wasted on the Doctor.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"I'm saying you trust Tom with the important tasks, but not me."

"Hardly. Brooker hasn't a hope with the detector."

"Then why..."

"It'll give him a distraction. Relax him. Being surrounded by his relatives has got to be more than a little unsettling."

"I don't know," Val says. "I'd quite like the chance to get to know my ancestors better."

"You and I, Miss Rossi, obviously have very different family experiences," the Doctor replies. "And I didn't ask you in here to boil carrots, not least because I don't think we've got any."

"Then why am I here? Come to think of it, why are we cooking dinner for a load of people we've only just met?"

"Because they seem to think I've met them before."

"And how does that work? Time travel?"

"Perhaps. Or it's a trap." He starts unpacking the contents of his shopping bags onto the worktop. "Believe it or not, there are people out there who really don't like me."

"You don't say." Val picks up a box of *Findus Crispy Pancakes*. "What's this?"

"No idea, but I think there are instructions on the back. Now where does she keep her pans?" A clutter of cupboard doors. "What do you make of them?"

"The pans?"

"Funny girl. I was referring to our hosts, the alleged Brookers."

"'Alleged'? Tom seems to think they're genuine."

"Appearances can be deceptive. Now, first impressions?"

"You're asking me? I thought you knew everything."

"No one knows everything – though some of us know quite a bit more than others – and I'd like a second opinion. You read people, Miss Rossi, and, though I hate to admit, you've been known to see things I don't. Tell me what you see."

Val takes a deep breath.

"Do you have to stare at me like that? It's putting me off."

"Relax." The Doctor's voice. Soothing. Borderline hypnotic. "Don't think. Just say what you feel."

"Well, I guess they are who they say they are. More or less." Val starts to pace. "Mary's a bit of a dragon, but that's because she's proud. Proud of her house, proud of her family. Everything has to be just so. Alan... Alan's frightened of something. He talks just a little bit too much. Overeager to please. It's a mask for nerves and the sense that the world is on the verge of collapsing around him."

"Very good."

"Jack's bark is worse than his bite. He says he doesn't like, but he's a big guy, a physical guy, and if he really hated you then words are not the way he'd let you know."

"Please, I'm still nursing the bruises from our last stop." The Doctor rubs the back of his head. "What about Robbie?"

"Robbie?" Val pauses. "I don't know really. He's very quiet. Do you reckon he's hiding something?"

"Did you have secrets when you were his age?"

Nostalgia raises a smile. "Only the biggest secrets in the world. I guess what I'm saying is that, for all their hang-ups, they're just an ordinary family."

"Yes, I was afraid of that."

"How so?"

"Because," the Doctor says, "it means that Alan *has* met me before, which puts him one step ahead of me. I hate that."

The hob spits as the pan boils over. The Doctor rushes to rescue it.

"You do know how to cook, right?" Val asks.

The Doctor looks at her askance. "There's a reason the TARDIS has a food machine."

* * * * *

Tom sits on a chair up at the table. Robbie sits opposite him, hunched over a piece of paper, colouring pencils fanned out around him. Jack has not strayed from his armchair. Alan and Mary are sitting on the sofa set at right-angles to it. There is a television in the corner, its screen smaller than anything Tom is used to, the box far, far bigger. No one is watching it. The Brookers are staring at Tom. Tom is trying to look anywhere else.

"So, what brings you to Westoe?" Mary asks.

"Well, that's tricky to explain, like," Tom hedges.

Mary continues to stare.

Where's Nana Brooker who'd buy me ice-cream and liquorice? I'd even rather she pinched my cheek like she used to and I hated that.

"We're looking for something."

"Something?"

Tom opens his mouth.

What am I supposed to say? The truth? Be easier if I knew what we were looking for.

"Radiation," he says, hoping that's broad enough.

Alan leans forward. "You mean like nuclear?"

"Something like that, aye."

"I knew it. I bloody knew it."

"Language, Alan." Mary tuts. "Not in front of Robbie."

"Sorry, pet. But you know what they're doing, don't you?"

"What *are* they doing?" Tom asks.

"Trying to sack all the bleeding miners, that's what."

"I don't follow."

"Country needs the miners, don't it," Jack says. "Britain needs coal whatever Thatcher might say."

"Jack, you know I don't like hearing that name in my house."

"Give over, lass."

"If they replace the coal power stations with nuclear," Alan says, "then they *won't* need coal. They can close the pits and they won't have to give the pickets what they want. Didn't know they were doing any of that round here, though."

"Alan's been on strike since March," Mary says.

"And we can still win," Alan says. "The country won't put up with this much longer. We just have to be stay strong."

"I know, love," Mary says, "and we will. You'll see."

The kitchen door opens. Wisps of smoke drift into the front-room.

"Dinner is served," the Doctor announces.

* * * * *

Council Leader George Patterson puts his signature to yet another document. G'Gugv'ntt remembers when he struggled even to hold the pen, struggled to manipulate a five-digit prosthesis with his own three-digit claw. Now he wonders how he ever coped with two less fingers.

Is Junior right? Am I going native?

Rap-rap. Knuckles against the door.

"Come."

His assistant, Connie Willoughby. Human both outside and within.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr Patterson," she says, "but I was wondering if you needed me anymore tonight?"

G'Gugv'ntt offers her a smile, not entirely genuine – he is Foamasi, after all – but less affected than the one he shares with the press.

"No, you get off, Connie. I can take care of this. Enjoy the holiday."

"I don't mind staying, sir, if you need my help with anything. You know, filing and stuff."

She cannot quite meet his eyes.

Last Friday. The Christmas party. A furtive kiss under the mistletoe.

And if I am going native, would that be so bad?

"Do you have any plans for the big day?"

"No, no plans." She brushes a stray lock of hair back behind her ear. "It'll just be me and the telly. There's a *Just Good Friends* special on. Be better if I had a good friend of my own to share it with, though."

"Hmm."

"And what'll you be doing for Christmas, sir?"

"Oh, I'll be spending Christmas with the family."

I am still Foamasi and family comes first.

"Well, family is important..."

Family always comes first.

"...but if you should change your mind, you could always stop by. You know, just to toast the season."

I am still Foamasi, but I am also George Patterson.

"I might just do that, Connie. I just might."

"I'll look forward to seeing you." Connie smiles. "Goodnight, sir."

"Night, Connie."

The door closes. G'Gugv'ntt stands and goes to the window. He cannot see the river from here, but still he looks in the direction of the ship. His ship. His family.

I'm letting them down. I should be taking them home, but after fifteen years, I don't know where home is anymore.

Rap-rap. Another knock. Connie again, now in a coat. Flustered.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I was just leaving when I met these gentlemen coming the other way."

"Detective Chief Inspector Brady," the older of the two men says. "This is Detective Inspector Hutchins. Northumbria police. You're Patterson?"

I am G'Gugv'ntt.

"Yes. What's this about?"

I am George Patterson.

DCI Brady is wearing an ill-fitting suit from C&A. The sleeves are shiny where they have been rubbing against the edge of a desk.

"We've received information suggesting that you have been engaging in inappropriate business dealings with a Mr Richard Ferris."

"Tricky Dicky Ferris," DI Hutchins adds.

"Among others."

I am Foamasi.

"Inappropriate business dealings?"

"Fraudulent, you might say."

"Corrupt, even," Hutchins adds.

"We'd like you to answer some questions, Mr Patterson."

"By all means. Have a seat."

DCI Brady shakes his head. "I think it would be better if we did this down the station. You will come quietly, won't you, sir?"

I am Foamasi and I could snap his neck like a reed in a hurricane.

But I am also the mask I wear.

"Will I be needing a solicitor?" he asks.

* * * * *

"Well, that was..." Alan hesitates.

"Yes, it was, wasn't it," Val says. She is clearing the table. "Tom, can you do the washing up?"

"Must I?"

"I cooked, you wash up. That's the deal."

"It's like being back home."

Mary comes down the stairs, having just put Robbie to bed.

"You want to put the telly on, Alan?" she asks.

The Nine O'Clock News. John Humphrys.

"You think they'll be something about the strike?" Alan asks.

Mary shrugs. "Can't hurt to take a look."

The Doctor retrieves the detector from the table where Tom has left it.

"Tom fettle that up for you, like?" Alan asks.

"Hardly," the Doctor says.

"I thought the TARDIS was supposed to translate alien languages?" Val whispers.

"Be fair," the Doctor replies. "She's having a bad day."

The Doctor zaps the detector with his sonic screwdriver and it bursts into life.

"Oi! Shut that thing off, will you?" Jack says. "It's interfering with the telly."

The Doctor turns a dial and the noise fades to a faint buzz.

"Right, I'll be off then. Will Tom and Val be okay to stay here until I get back?"

"Doctor!" Tom calls from the kitchen.

"Excuse me." The Doctor joins Tom at the sink.

"You can't leave me here with them. Please. I'll go mad."

The Doctor sighs. "Okay, but you do exactly as you're told."

"What are you boys conspiring about?" Val is standing in the doorway.

"I'm taking Tom with me," the Doctor says.

"And leaving me behind? No way."

"This isn't a school trip."

"No, it isn't and do you really think that Tom will be more help to you than I can?"

"Hey!"

"No offence, Tom."

"Frankly, I think you're both as much of a hindrance as each other," the Doctor says.

"And *I* think the three of you will need a lift?" Alan is standing behind Val.

"You're not coming," the Doctor says, "and that's final."

"If there's nuclear radiation involved then I want to know about it," Alan says. "Besides, it's my car."

"I knew I should have taken that job herding cats," the Doctor says. "Fine, come on then if you're coming."

* * * * *

The smell of gently crisping bacon and fresh black coffee. Ian tightens the belt of his dressing-gown and sits down at the kitchen table.

"Daddy, Daddy, look what I've got!"

His daughter barrels up to him, all smiles and uncoordinated limbs. She hands him his newspaper.

"Thank you, sweetheart." Ian ruffles her hair. She squirms and giggles.

"Breakfast's ready," his wife calls. Bacon, egg, fried bread and grilled tomatoes. Hazel puts the plate down in front of Ian before turning back to the hob to serve Katherine and herself. Her little girl tugs on her apron.

"Can I do it now, Mummy? Can I? Please, can I?"

"All right, but only if Daddy's not too busy."

Ian puts down the newspaper. "What is it, sweetheart?"

"Just this, Daddy."

Katherine raises her hands to her forehead, her nails digging deep into her skin. Ian leans forward, startled, expecting blood. Instead, the flesh comes away in long ragged strips and underneath –

"What do you think, Daddy?" asks the green-scaled child.

"Isn't she gorgeous, darling?" At the hob, another lizard, wearing his wife's clothes. Speaking with his wife's voice. "We can finally show you how we really are."

Ian sits bolt upright in bed, chilled to the bone despite the sticky sheen of sweat. His wife is still asleep, her back to him. On the bedside cabinet, the clock-radio taunts him. The luminous green of its digits an unwelcome reminder.

03:04.

The morning after the night before.

Coming home late, stinking of booze. Hazel waiting up for him, only *Newsnight* for company. Recriminations.

"And what about Kate? She wanted to know where you were, why you wouldn't read her a bedtime story."

"Couldn't you do it?"

"She wanted her daddy!"

Undressing in silence, collapsing on the bed and then –

Ian climbs out of bed and heads for the bathroom. He moves slowly and quietly so as not to wake Hazel. Standing at the sink, he splashes water in his face then opens the window, hoping the fresh air will drive the nightmare from his head.

It does not help.

* * * * *

Walls the same grey as the Tyne. No windows. A bare bulb swinging by a cord from the ceiling.

George Patterson looks down at the file on the table. The memos. The bank statements. The receipts. Information that should have been buried too deep for the plodding constabulary to find.

G'Gugv'ntt looks to the door, the only way out. It is open, letting in warm light from the corridor beyond. He can hear his solicitor arguing with the DCI Brady.

DI Hutchins stands in the doorway. Hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched. Surely below the minimum height requirement.

He closes the door.

He turns to George Patterson. To G'Gugv'ntt.

He wears a feral grin.

"How does it feel to have all your mistakes catch up with you?"

G'Gugv'ntt meets the detective's eyes. "I don't know what you mean."

Hutchins slams a palm down on the desk. The file jumps. A sheet of paper floats to the floor.

"Tell me how it feels!" Shouting. "I want to know how it feels to know I bested you!"

"You?"

Hutchins takes a step back.

"You really don't recognise me, do you?"

He raises his hands to his face. He digs his fingernails into his skin. He peels away his face.

"How about now, Uncle?"

"Junior?"

"My name is Kv'Mt'chll. Use it!"

"I'm sorry."

"You should be sorry."

"I should have been a better uncle to you, Kv'Mt'chll."

"I didn't need an uncle. We needed a leader. A strong leader."

"I was just trying to do what was best for the family."

"You should have been getting us home. *That's* what's best for the family. Not... not *this*."

"Some of us are happy here. Maybe you could be too if you gave it a chance."

"Can you even hear what you're saying? We're Foamasi. We don't belong here."

"You've betrayed the family, Kv'Mt'chll. I tried to warn you..."

"No, *you* betrayed us! I'm taking the family back. I'm taking us home and there's nothing you can do to stop me."

G'Gugv'ntt looks away.

"Who's helping you, Kv'Mt'chll? You're not smart enough to do all this on your own."

"You'd like to think that, wouldn't you?"

"Someone's pulling your strings. Sooner or later they'll stab you in the back just like you have me. It's what happens when family loyalty means nothing."

"Shut up! Just shut up! Don't you understand? I've. Beaten. You."

G'Gugv'ntt shakes his head. "I can walk out of here whenever I like."

"But you won't. You'll stay here and you'll pretend to be Patterson and you'll pay for his crimes. Because you're a coward."

"You still don't understand. I'll stay here because to expose myself would be to betray the family. That I will not do. Family is all. I love my family, Junior. Even you."

Junior backhands him across the face.

"Stop calling me that!"

The chair rocks backwards.

G'Gugv'ntt falls.

* * * * *

"Go left!"

"Left here?"

"Yes, left here... No, too late, you've passed it. We'll have to loop round and go back. Next time, pay attention."

"Do you want to drive?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I want," the Doctor says.

"Ah," Alan says, "well, you can't. It's my car."

"So you keep saying."

"We've been driving around for hours," Tom complains. "Are you sure that gizmo of yours is working."

"It's working just fine, thank you," the Doctor snaps, "but the source of the signal keeps shifting."

"Shifting?" Val asks. "It can do that?"

"It's moving through eleven-dimensional space. It only interacts with the universe as you perceive it part of the time and so keeps jumping both geographically and temporally."

"Temporally? It's moving in time?"

"That's what I said, yes. Am I going to have to explain everything twice?"

"Once *clearly* would be enough."

"I never had this problem with K-9," the Doctor says. "Stop the car!"

Alan slams on the brakes, throwing everyone forward in their seats.

"Thank you." The Doctor opens the passenger-side door.

"You're getting out?"

"Unless you can drive up there?" He points up the narrow chare on the right.

"Guess not," Alan concedes.

"Then we walk from here," the Doctor says.

He sprints up the steep incline, the others struggling in his wake.

"Couldn't we have parked at the top?" Tom pants.

He turns the corner.

His jaw drops.

In the middle of the alley is a mass of light, writhing like an otherworldly octopus. At first, all he can see is white, but, as his eyes adjust to the brightness, he can make out other colours. Green and pink and blue. All colours and more.

"Whey ye buggor mar!"

"What is that?" Alan asks.

"It's a rip in space and time."

"Right."

"You follow me?" the Doctor asks.

"Not in the least."

"Must run in the family."

"What?"

"Don't worry about it." The Doctor turns back to the light. "The question is: what's on the other side?"

"You think it leads somewhere?" Val asks.

"I'm sure of it, I just don't know where. Only one way to find out."

Without a backwards glance, the Doctor charges straight into the heart of the rip and disappears.

"Was the old Doctor this reckless?" Tom asks.

Val nods. "He hasn't change in *that* at least."

"Just checking. See you on the other side."

"Tom, wait..."

Val's warning comes too late.

"Howway the lads!" Tom yells before diving into the light.

"Idiots, the pair of them," Val mutters. She turns to Alan. "Thanks for all your help, Mr Brooker, but I guess this is goodbye."

"You're not thinking of going after them, like?"

Val shrugs. "It's what we do."

She takes a step forward.

The rip flares and then shrinks to nothing leaving Alan and Val standing alone in the dark alleyway.

Tom and the Doctor are nowhere to be seen.

* * * * *

03:58:29 by his digital watch.

The Barrett Brothers' factory, pretty much as he last saw it. The bulldozers this afternoon were just for the benefit of the press. Demolition proper will not start until tomorrow. Today even.

Ian sits in his Saab, condensation fogging the windows.

How did I get here?

He remembers getting yesterday's clothes from the laundry basket, dressing in the kitchen. Not the bedroom. If he wakes Hazel there will be questions he does not want to answer.

He remembers starting the car, driving away with no particular destination in mind. Just a need to be in motion.

How much did Richard pay to get planning permission on this place?

It is an idle question. If Ian really wants to know, he only has to consult the ledger. Not the one kept at the offices of Ferris Housing. He needs the one kept at home, in the drawer in his desk to which Hazel is not allowed a key. The book only he and his father-in-law are ever allowed to consult. The one that implicates him in everything.

There is a torch in the glove box, together with an AA road atlas and half a packet of *Opal Fruits*. Ian leaves the car, follows the yellow torch-beam up the slope to the derelict building. Sections of roof have fallen in as has part of the wall furthest from the river. Ian has to watch his footing as he clammers over the loose rubble coated with bird and rodent droppings.

What am I even looking for?

A rat runs over his foot. Startled, Ian steps back, but the ground is not where he expects it to be. He falls backwards, grasping at the wall with his hands, but succeeding only in scraping the skin from his palms.

He hits the floor.

And keeps going.

Rotten boards splinter and crack on impact, giving way beneath him and dropping him into the basement below.

He lands with a wet thud.

He is below the level of the river here. The basement is damp and the ground is coated by a layer of sludge. Ian lies on his back for a long time, fighting through waves of pain.

He has dropped the torch.

Fortunately, miraculously, it is still on. Ian lifts his head and sees the pool of light just out of reach. Grunting with effort, he rolls over and half crawls, half drags his way across the floor.

His eyes are starting to distinguish between the different shades of black. There is something by the torch. He leans in for a closer look.

Ian screams.

It's a body! I'm trapped down here with a dead body!

A movement. Almost imperceptible. So tiny Ian thinks it must be his imagination, but there it is again. A chest rises and falls. Breathing. Life.

Ian's racing heartbeat starts to slow.

Just a homeless bloke. Must have snuck in here to keep out of the cold.

Ian picks up the torch. Starts to back away.

The torchlight flashes off metal and Ian's heart leaps back into his mouth.

Oh my god! He's got a sword! He's carrying a bloody sword!

And there's something else. The torch shakes in Ian's hand. The light plays across the figure's face. High, sloping forehead. Green skin. Scales.

Inhuman.

Reptilian.

Please, God. Please let me wake up now.

1999

Lisa Murray is waiting for Sara Ferris at the school gate, her hat, scarf and gloves at odds with the length of her skirt. It is snowing. Lisa's knees are already red with cold.

"Hey, Sara, got something for you."

She is holding an oblong parcel, beautifully wrapped in gold paper.

"Yeah, me too."

Sara roots around in her rucksack and produces an envelope.

"A card?"

"A voucher," Sara says. "I couldn't think what else to get you. Sorry."

"No, this is great. I can use it in the sales."

They exchange presents, but Sara has barely taken possession of her parcel when it is snatched away.

"What have we here then?" Scott Draper. Bully. Makes up for in size what he lacks in maturity. "Is this for me? You shouldn't have, freak."

"Give it back." Sara makes a grab for the parcel, but Scott holds it over his head, out of reach. "It isn't yours."

"Finders keepers, losers weepers."

"Open it, open it." Wayne Taylor. Scott's sidekick and one man cheering section.

Scott picks at the wrapping. "What do you reckon, shall we find out what's in here?"

"Don't be a hole, Scott," Lisa says.

Scott leers. "Tell you what, I'll give Spock her present back if you agree to go out with me."

"In your dreams."

"Every night."

Lisa looks like she has swallowed a fly.

"Just give it back, Scott," Sara says, "or I'll..."

"You'll what..."

"I... I'll..."

Don't say call a teacher. Don't want that label.

Instead, Sara lowers her head and barrels into Scott. She staggers back. Scott is not even winded.

"Is that the best you've got?" he asks. "Freak."

Sara's woollen hat has fallen off and is lying in the snow at her feet. She snatches it up and pulls it down over her ears, not caring about how wet it now is.

"Why's it so important to you anyway?" Wayne asks. "Did Daddy buy it for you? Wait a minute, you don't have a Daddy, do you?"

He giggles maliciously.

Will not cry. Won't let them see me cry.

Sara is so busy fighting back the tears that she almost misses Scott grabbing Wayne by the collar of his coat and pinning him against the fence.

"Is the something wrong with not having a dad?" Scott growls.

"No, not at all," Wayne whimpers. "Absolutely not."

"Didn't think so." Scott lets him drop.

"I didn't know," Sara says. "About your dad, I mean."

"Kosovo," Scott says. "He was army."

"At least your dad died a hero."

I don't even know who mine was.

"Here." Scott throws her the parcel. "Freak."

Sara scrambles to catch it.

"Loser," she calls after him.

"Come on, I'll walk you home," Lisa says. "You still on for next week?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

"What did you tell your mum?"

Sara pulls a face. "I'll think of something."

* * * * *

Another brown envelope, another white label. Another set of initials written in black biro.

Robert Brooker yawns.

"We keeping you up, Robbie?" asks a man in a crisp, blue shirt.

"Not used to these early starts, Dan, like."

"Well, if you will ride all the way in from Byker. You should be like me, just live across the way."

Robert shrugs.

"Won't be an issue after today."

He finishes writing his explanation on the label and drops the envelope in the tray with the others.

"That's the last of the undeliverables, boss."

"Then that's you done for the day. Go home and get some sleep."

"I wish. Still got shopping to do."

Robert starts walking towards the exit. Dan falls into step beside him.

"Leaving it a bit late, aren't you?"

"Don't remind me."

Robert signs out and the pair of them step through the double-doors into the snow. The bulk of the central station looms behind and above them. A train rumbles over the bridge ahead.

"Thanks for all your hard work this week, Robbie," Dan says. "You know, if you feel like coming back in the new year on a more permanent basis I could put in a good word for you."

"Thanks, but I'm not sure I'm cut out to be a postie." Robert drops to a crouch to unchain his bicycle. "I'm only here to earn enough for a ring."

"A ring? Who's the lucky lass?"

"Her name's Kate. I've known her for years, but I've been waiting for the right time to pop the question."

"And that's now, is it?"

"Millennium night, the stroke of midnight. I've booked the restaurant, got the evening all planned out, now I just need to buy the ring."

"Congratulations."

Robert looks down at his feet.

"Yeah, well, she hasn't said 'yes' yet."

"Course she will. You worry too much."

"Maybe."

"Definitely. And I expect an invite to the wedding."

Robert mounts his bicycle and adjusts the strap on his helmet. "You'll probably be delivering them."

* * * * *

Lisa and Sara part ways at the top of her street, Sara turning left towards home, Lisa continuing down the main road to the Metro stop. No one is watching so she does not bother to buy a ticket. The chances of encountering an inspector are remote and she is sure she can blag it if she does.

The train is crammed with last-minute Christmas shoppers. Lisa squeezes her way in between a student reading a textbook and an expectant mother for whom no one will sacrifice their seat. Lisa closes her eyes, tries to blot out the rest of the world. The body odour and fast food smells. The press of bodies against hers as the train rocks back and forth.

Lisa gets off at the next stop, weaves her way out through the shopping centre. Christmas lights sweeping overhead. Snatches of music in shop doorways, Cliff Richard competing with Westlife. A *Big Issue* seller in a Santa hat.

Her destination sits like a giant maggot on the Gateshead bank of the Tyne, dismissed as yet another trendy art gallery built to usher in the new millennium. A sign on the door reads "Opening Soon". Lisa taps an eight-digit code into a keypad, opens the door and steps inside.

The *Hemlock* has seen better decades. Abandoned by most of her crew. Surfaces covered with dust and mould. Systems functioning intermittently or – like the cloak – not at all. The artificial jungles more broken plastic than verdant foliage.

Kv'Mt'chll sits at the centre of it all, squatting in the captain's chair like Fuseli's *Nightmare*.

"Is that you, Ls'Ntwp'tt?"

"Who else would it be?" Lisa – Ls'Ntwp'tt – replies. "We're the only ones left, remember."

"The others might come back."

"Doubt it. Did you see we got a postcard from Mk'Trk'chnk? He's planning to adopt."

"Disgusting." Kv'Mt'chll spits.

"What about your uncle? Have you heard anything from him?"

"Why would I?"

"Well, it is Christmas."

"Don't tell me you've been infected by this planet's poor excuse for a culture as well, Ls'Ntwp'tt?"

Lisa pouts. "Does that mean you won't be getting me a present?"

"Do you have to wear that revolting skin-suit?"

"I rather like it." Lisa gives him a twirl.

Kv'Mt'chll looks away.

"Don't be like that." Lisa climbs up beside him and starts stroking the spines on his head. Kv'Mt'chll shudders with pleasure. "There, that's much better, isn't it? If you're good, I can always slip into something more comfortable later."

Kv'Mt'chll waves a claw in the direction of the river. "How are things out there?"

"I'm failing history," Lisa replies, "and we've got killer science homework to do over the holidays."

"I meant with the girl."

"Oh, she's definitely who you think she is."

"I should hope so given that her uncle's on her way to see her."

Lisa stops running her fingers over Kv'Mt'chll's scalp. "You spoke to him?"

"Finally got the transmitter working. He seemed very interested in what I had to say."

"And he's bringing the shikirenium?"

"He won't get the girl without it. Very soon now, Ls'Ntwp'tt, you and I are going home."

"Kv'Mt'chll, that's brilliant news!" She kisses him.

"Now, what was that about slipping into something more comfortable?"

* * * * *

"Sara, I'm home!"

No answer, but pop music is rolling down the stairs.

"Reckon that's a yes." Hazel turns to Mary. "Sorry about this."

"Don't worry about it." Mary closes the front door behind her. "I'm a mum too. I've been there."

Hazel carries her groceries through to the kitchen. "Make yourself at home. I'll put the kettle on."

Mary goes to the conservatory and looks out across the garden.

"What are you planning for Christmas?"

"Nothing special. I expect Sara and I'll have a lazy day in front of the telly."

"You could come round to ours, like. Robert's stopping by, but there'll still be more than enough for everyone."

Hazel enters the conservatory carrying two mugs of tea. She and Mary sit down on wicker chairs.

"Thanks for the offer," Hazel says, "but I'd rather stay here. Just in case, you know, Kate changes her mind and wants to join us."

"She's still not speaking to you?"

"Just to let me know she's doing okay. She cares about me that much, at least."

"Don't defend her. After everything you've done for that girl, she could care about you a whole lot more."

"It's not her fault, Mary. She had to grow up without her father. She blames me for that."

"That wasn't your fault."

A mournful smile. "Wasn't it?"

Mary looks at her hands.

"How's your Robert doing?" Hazel asks.

"Oh, you know, the usual. This and that. He's got a Christmas job down at the post office, but he still hasn't figured out what he wants to do with his life."

"I know the feeling."

"This latest job not working out?"

Hazel gets up and leaves the room, returning a moment later carrying a glossy hardback. She throws it down on the table.

"*Building on Sand: Richard Ferris and the Scandal That Rocked a City Council* by James Kramer," Mary read. "Who's he?"

"Allegedly, one of Ian's old friends. Used to write for the *Chronicle*."

"And he thinks now's a good time to start raking up the past? Why've you even got a copy in the house?"

"He sent it to me. As a gift."

"Unbelievable, some people."

Hazel shakes her head. "I thought I'd put it all behind me, but overnight I've gone from being known as just another office temp to the daughter of Richard Ferris the famous crook."

"Well they can't fire you for *that*."

"No, but they can make it so I'd wish they would. More tea?"

"Why not. Alan's going for Christmas drinks with his mates so there's nothing to rush back for." Mary follows Hazel into the kitchen and sits on a stool at the breakfast bar. "If it's upsetting you, why not move away, somewhere nobody's heard of Richard Ferris?"

"I couldn't take Sara out of school," Hazel says. "She loves it there. Anyway, where would I go?"

"Where'd your Dad end up?"

"Brazil?"

"Can't see the attraction myself. Sun, sea, sand... you can get all that in Newcastle. Once or twice a year."

Mary laughs. Despite herself, Hazel does too.

"I needed that," she says. "You know, despite everything that happened fifteen years ago, I'm glad we met."

"You know what they say," Mary replies. "Every cloud has a silver lining."

"Two in this case."

"Oh?"

Hazel looks up towards Sara's bedroom where the floor is trembling as her daughter practices the latest Steps dance routine.

"My little angel."

* * * * *

Night has fallen. A disembodied voice recites the poetry of the northern cities.

Durham.

Darlington.

York.

A voice distorted by the public address system, twisted all out of shape by the three arches of the roof. Warped until it becomes so much less than was intended, but so much more than mere words.

The GNER from Kings Cross to Edinburgh Waverley draws up alongside platform four. Doors open. Passengers disembark.

All are drawn to Newcastle for one reason. It could be parents or children. Aunts or cousins or siblings. The details may differ, but it is always family.

At Christmas, there is nowhere else to be.

George Patterson turns up the collar of his overcoat. He starts climbing the bridge that leads to the ticket barriers and the exit. He has not been in Newcastle in almost seven years, not since he was released from Moorland Open Prison.

So much is familiar. So much is different.

At the foot of the steps, a child breaks free of her father's grip to run to her grandmother and give her a hug.

I wonder if my family will be pleased to see me?

* * * * *

Saturday. Christmas Day.

A plastic Christmas tree in Alan and Mary Brooker's front room decorated with last year's lights and some fresh tinsel.

Their old terraced house has been demolished following the closure of the Westoe pit to make way for a new development and Alan and Mary have been relocated to this flat high in Spital Tongues.

"Robert," Mary calls from the kitchen, "can you give Dad a hand with the soup. We don't want wallpaper paste like last year."

"Yes, Mam," Robert says, tearing himself away from the closing moments of *Morecambe and Wise*.

Robert rescues the soup from his dad and ladles it into bowls.

"Did you ask them about staying on at the post office next year, like?" Mary asks as they sit down at the table.

"I don't want to be a postie for the rest of my life, Mam."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I haven't figured that out yet."

"Well, don't you think it's about time you did?"

"Leave the boy alone, Mary," Alan says. "He's free to do whatever it is he wants."

"But he doesn't know what he wants, do you, Robert?"

Robert has no answer to that, but his father does.

"I can think of one thing the lad wants." There is a twinkle in his eye. "Where is that Kate anyway?"

Robert squirms uncomfortable, which only makes his father's grin widen.

"She said she had other plans."

"Well, I hope she's gone to see her mother. It's about time she apologised for everything she's put Hazel through."

"Mary..."

"No, Alan, it needs to be said. She's selfish and spiteful and I don't see what you see in her, Robert, I really don't."

"Mam, I really like her," Robert says. "I wish you could try to like her, too."

Mary purses her lips.

"The soup's good this year, don't you think, Alan?"

* * * * *

In Jesmond, Hazel's dining-table stands empty. She and Sara are eating their Christmas dinner off of trays in the front-room so that Sara can watch *Top of the Pops*. Jayne Middlemiss and Jamie Theakston introducing S Club 7.

"So, do you think Cliff's going to be Christmas number one?" Hazel asks.

"God, I hope not."

"Same here. I can't stand that song."

Hazel cracks a smile, but her attempt at bonding with her daughter falls on barren soil.

At least she's not hiding in her room like she usually does. And she'll probably stay put for Robbie the Reindeer, too. I suppose I can't ask for too much, not when her sister won't even show her face.

Hazel looks across her daughter and out of the window. There is a car parked across the street and sitting in the driver's seat...

Suddenly it is fifteen years ago.

Christmas Eve, 1984.

St James's Park.

"Mum? Mum, what is it?"

Hazel blinks. She looks down at her daughter.

"Sorry, Sara, I thought I saw something, that's all." She looks back out of the window, but the car is empty now. "Just a ghost."

* * * * *

Across the street, Kv'Mt'chll ducks down in the seat of the car and hopes that he has not been spotted. He wants to take the girl now, but Ls'Ntwp'tt has said no. It will be several days before the buyer arrives. Better to leave her free until the last minute. They know her movements. She will not stray.

Kv'Mt'chll is not so sure so he is here, outside of her house, watching and waiting.

He let opportunity slip through his fingers once before.

It will not happen again.

* * * * *

In the city centre, Kate Townsend and Wendy Lin are strolling back from the restaurant. There is a slight weave to the way they walk, an effect of a generous, though not excessive (by their standards), consumption of red wine.

"Thanks for inviting me, Wendy," Kate says. "I don't know what I'd be doing today otherwise."

"Least I can do for my best designer."

Wendy and Kate were at college together and, when Wendy decided to open up a fashion boutique just off Grainger Street, she asked Kate to come and work for her.

"You and your mum still not talking?" Wendy asks.

Kate glares.

"Okay. What about your dad? Couldn't you go to him for Christmas?"

"Dad's got himself a new girlfriend," Kate says, "and she doesn't know about me. He wants to keep it that way."

"At least you've got me." Wendy gives Kate a friendly nudge on the arm. "And I hear Robert's taking you to Sabatini's New Year's Eve. You and he getting serious?"

"I don't know. I like him and he's a good laugh, but..."

"But what?"

"Well, Robert and serious don't seem to go together. He... drifts. I wish he could be a bit more dynamic, sometimes."

"Dynamic? Who wants a man who can think for himself?"

"Wendy..."

"I'm just saying if you don't want him, I'll take him off your hands. Good guys don't just fall from the sky you know."

A crack of thunder. A ball of light appears in the air in front of them.

"Is that lightning?" Wendy asks.

"I don't know. I don't think so."

Kate steps forward. She raises her hand.

"Don't touch it!"

"I wasn't going to. I just..."

Kate never gets the chance to finish her sentence. She is interrupted by a figure falling out of the light.

Tall. Slim. Tousled brown hair.

He lands on his feet, but stumbles, falling against Kate.

"Who are you," she asks, "and where the hell did you come from?"

"My name's Tom. Tom Brooker." He slurs his words. "And I..."

His eyes roll back into his head and he falls into Kate's arms. Unconscious.

Kate looks to Wendy.

"Okay," Wendy says, "so I was wrong."

1969

Newcastle city centre on a Tuesday morning. Watery, wintery sunshine. A bitter wind howling through twisting medieval alleyways. And the centre itself. Buildings by Grainger, clothes by Biba.

Ian Townsend worms his way through commuters and early morning shoppers. He is thin, with a pinched, but otherwise nondescript face. Until now, he has not thought himself invisible, but to judge from the feet on his heels, elbows in the ribs and bags in the stomach, everyone else is oblivious the new graduate. That or they simply do not care.

The new civic centre is directly ahead. Distinctive white blocks. Twelve floors of offices topped by a green crown. A bronze god rears up from one wall, water gushing from his outstretched hand. He meets Ian's eye. Finds him wanting.

Ian straightens his tie. Pats down his fine, sand-coloured hair. Wipes his damp palms on his trouser-legs.

He climbs the stone steps leading to the main entrance and goes looking for reception.

Fifteen minutes later, Ian enters the office of a round, red-faced man who gets up from behind a desk to greet him. Billy Bunter all grown up.

"You must be Ian Townsend. Pleasure to meet you."

Ian wipes his palm again before taking the offered hand.

"Help yourself to a seat," George Patterson continues, "and welcome to the Housing Department."

Ian sits down opposite Patterson. There is a window behind the councillor through which Ian can see St Thomas's Church.

"So, Ian. A BA in PPE from Oxford. What makes you want to work for the City Council?"

Ian reels off his prepared answer.

"Well, sir, I studied politics because I thought I could make a difference and I grew up in Newcastle so where better to give it a go."

"And your father knows someone who knows someone who could get you a job in my office. Now, now, don't protest." Patterson holds up a hand. "Nepotism is a good a way as any to get a foot in the door. I'm more concerned with whether you'll work hard now that you're here."

"I will, sir. I promise."

Patterson chuckles.

"Ian, if you're going to make it in politics, you need to be more careful about making promises. Now, I've got a meeting with a developer in ten minutes. I'd like you to sit in on it and afterwards we'll talk about what I'm going to do with you."

* * * * *

Smoke fills the bridge of the *Hemlock*.

"Damage report!" G'Gugv'ntt yells.

"Engines are shot, Boss. We're running on emergency power only."

"Can we take-off?"

"Not even if the Council of Lodges were after us."

"Then can someone at least do something about this damn smoke!"

Slowly, the haze clears.

"Any injuries?"

"Bumps and scrapes, Boss, nothing major."

This is no surprise. Foamasi have hollow bones and are able to contort themselves into skin-suits in a way that belies their bulk. This flexibility also means they are better placed to survive being thrown a crashing spacecraft.

"This is your fault, Uncle," Junior says.

G'Gugv'ntt frowns.

"And how do you reach that conclusion?"

"You shouldn't have listened to what that girl said about the tachyon reactor."

"It was a calculated risk."

"What happened to never gambling unless it's on a sure thing?"

"The alternative was unacceptable."

"And this is better?"

G'Gugv'ntt ignores him.

"Mk'Trk'chnk, how long until the engines are up and running again."

The deputy scratches the back of his head.

"Given the likelihood of finding useful components in the surrounding area, I'd say we're looking at being grounded for several weeks at least. Probably longer."

"Weeks?" Junior is incredulous. "You're kidding, right."

"You're not on Foamas now, boy," Mk'Trk'chnk snaps. "Get used to roughing it with the rest of us."

"Speaking of which," G'Gugv'ntt interrupts smoothly, "if we're going to be stranded here for a protracted period then we should probably familiarise ourselves with the area. I'm sure we can turn this misfortune to our advantage if we put our minds to it. I for one still intend to return to Foamas with a profit."

* * * * *

"But think of the profit," Richard Ferris is saying.

"Mr Ferris," George Patterson replies, "your bid for the work may be the cheapest, but you've achieved that by cutting corners and compromising standards, both in terms of build quality and safety."

"That's harsh, Mr Patterson," Ferris replies. "Have you considered that perhaps our competitors are being overcautious?"

Ferris and Patterson are sitting on opposite sides of the desk, with Ian perched on a chair at one end. Richard Ferris is built like a rockslide and Patterson seems almost comically small in comparison.

"This office has its integrity to think of."

"Your office has its budget to think of, too," Ferris says, "and, in my experience, money talks louder than morals."

"Then perhaps you need a wider vein of experiences, Mr Ferris."

"George, be reasonable." Ferris opens up his huge hands, palms uppermost. "Think of the opportunity, not just for the council, but for you personally. Put some business my way and I'll make it worth your while, if you know what I mean."

Patterson's face darkens.

"Bribes won't work either, Mr Ferris. I've studied your proposal and found it wanting. The only way you'll win this contract is over my dead body!"

* * * * *

Patterson drives home at lunchtime, tense and angry after his argument with Ferris. An hour with Julie will relax him. It always has in the past.

He opens his front door.

"Daddy's home!" he calls. "Where's my darling girl?"

Julie runs down the hall towards him. Jumps up. Licks him across the face.

"Down, girl." Patterson strokes the spaniel's golden fur. "Just let me find your lead and then we'll go for walkies."

In Armstrong Park, Patterson unclips the lead and lets Julie run free. She dances around his feet. It is cold, but bright and the park is full. Mainly students. Long hair and beads. Floral mini dresses and afghan coats. Sunglasses and Consulate menthol cigarettes.

Hard to imagine Ian Townsend ever being one of them.

Patterson takes a ball from the pocket of his jacket.

"You ready, girl? Fetch!"

He throws the ball. Julie scampers in pursuit.

I think he'll work out. Bit wet behind the ears, but reminds me a bit of me at that age.

Julie returns with the ball clamped between her teeth. Patterson tickles her behind her ears.

"Who's a clever girl? Want to go again?"

Another throw. The ball bounces once and disappears into the bushes. Julie burrows after it.

Need to keep him away from the likes of Richard Ferris, though. He'd eat him alive.

Julie has not returned. Patterson cannot hear her bark.

"Here, girl!"

Concern.

"Julie! Julie, where are you?"

He steps through the bushes. Finds the ball.

Does not find the spaniel.

"Julie!"

Fear. Then –

"Julie, there you are."

A ball of golden fur curled up among the tree roots.

Relief. Then –

"Julie? Julie, what's wrong, girl?"

A ball of golden fur that is not moving. That is the wrong shape. That is smeared with blood.

Fear again. Fear and –

"I'm sorry about your pet, but she just wouldn't shut up."

A shape in the shadows. Red eyes set too far apart.

"Who are you?"

"Oh, that really doesn't matter, George."

"How do you know my name?"

Patterson steps back. The figure advances. A chameleon on its hind legs, standing as tall as a man.

"It's my name now, George."

* * * * *

This time, Ian is not allowed to sit in on the meeting. Whatever Ferris and Patterson have to discuss, they do so in private. Ian waits in the corridor. Pacing. An unlit cigarette dangling from his fingers.

The door opens.

Ferris blocks out the light.

"I'll have the contracts sent round for you to sign on Friday," Patterson is saying.

"Why not tomorrow? It's only Christmas."

They laugh.

It is too much.

"What happened to integrity?" Ian yells at Patterson. "What happened to compromising standards? To only giving him this contract over your dead body?"

"Who is this boy, George?" Ferris asks.

"My assistant," Patterson says. "He's new and unlikely to last long."

"Come now, George, he's just a bit naive, that's all. He needs someone to educate him in the ways of the world."

Ferris puts his arm around Ian's shoulders. Ian flinches.

"What's your name, lad?"

"Ian," Ian replied. "Ian Townsend."

"Well, Ian, I'm holding a Christmas party tonight, for my staff and select business associates. I'd like you to be there. We can talk some more about the ways of the world."

"I don't think..."

"But I insist." Ferris folds a handful of banknotes. Stuffs them into Ian's breast pocket. "Buy yourself some nice gear to wear tonight. The Cavendish Club. Seven sharp. Don't be late."

* * * * *

Patterson closes the door behind him. He takes a cylinder from his pocket. Three inches long and half an inch in diameter. Matt black. He speaks into one end.

"This is G'Gugv'ntt."

"Mk'Trk'chnk, Boss." The voice is distorted by static. "What's the situation?"

"There's been a complication. One I need you to eliminate for me."

"Understood. Does this complication have a name?"

"His name is Ian Townsend."

* * * * *

Tom hits the ground face first. Cold, wet. Long grass hardened by frost.

He hauls himself up on to his hands and knees. His stomach rebels. He vomits ham and cheese crispy pancakes and butterscotch *Angel Delight* into the dirt.

"I don't want to hear you complain about TARDIS travel ever again."

A voice from far above.

The Doctor.

He drops a packet of tissues, still in their plastic wrap. Tom tears them open and wipes his face clean.

"Where are we?"

"You tell me," the Doctor says. "It's your part of the world."

Tom stands. Slowly.

"The Town Moor," he says. "City centre's back over that way."

"Just as I thought." The Doctor is focussed on the detector. "The damage is confined locally. Lucky for us."

"Lucky how?"

"It means any damage will be small scale. Theoretically, there's nothing to stop the effects of this kind of anomaly from stretching across centuries of time and thousands of light years of space, which could destabilise causality and unmake the universe."

"I can see how that would be bad."

"As it is, the worse that might happen is that Newcastle gets wiped from the timeline."

"And that's lucky, is it?"

"It's all relative."

Tom looks up at the stars.

"Still night so at least we haven't been gone long."

"Brooker, even your home city has experienced its fair share of nights in its history. I promise you that Miss Rossi is not looking at the same sky."

"All right, I'll buy that, so when are we?"

"1968. Maybe '69. The sensitivity on this thing isn't all I'd like."

Tom looks around for a litterbin where he can dump his soiled tissues.

"So what now?"

"Now we..."

A deafening roar. The ground trembles and a streak of flame shoots overhead, travelling from west to east. It disappears below the distant tree line, but they can still here the explosion as it lands. The dark horizon turns crimson.

Then silence. Stillness.

Just for a moment.

The peace is shattered by the wail of a thousand sirens.

"Let's go!"

Tom Brooker starts to jog away. The Doctor puts a hand on his shoulder.

"No."

"No? But..."

"Whatever that is, it's not the source of the signal." The Doctor holds up the detector. "What we're looking for is back that way."

"But you saw that thing. People could be hurt."

"I know, I..."

He looks at the detector, looks to the city skyline. He turns back to the crash-site.

"Split up?" Tom suggests.

The Doctor throws him the detector.

"Just follow the green light," he says, "but you're to observe only. Don't interfere."

"Aye aye, skipper."

"I mean it, Brooker. Find the source, then wait for me to return."

"I get it. Trust me," Tom says. "Now go already."

The Doctor shakes his head.

"I'm going to regret this, aren't I?"

* * * * *

The flames are dying down.

Katashi stalks through the crash site. Ash stains his red and gold robes.

"Have you found him, yet?"

Three soldiers turn and bow in his direction. They are wearing steel helmets and lamellar armour.

"We have failed you, your Highness," they say as one.

"Perhaps," one of the guards risks, "he was never aboard?"

A blur of movement. Katashi closes the gap between himself and the soldier and kicks him in the stomach. The soldier doubles over. Katashi draws his sword and rests the edge of the blade on the back of the soldier's neck. Tiny beads of green blood well up from beneath the skin.

"You are a fool," Katashi says. "There was only one escape pod. Yoshido would have made sure that my brother was on it. The only reason his body is not here is that he is still alive and trying to escape."

The soldier drops to his hands and knees. He abases himself at his master's feet.

"Please forgive me, your Highness. I am not worthy."

"Get up." Katashi sheathes his sword. "Fetch the Okuri. We're going hunting."

* * * * *

Grey.

Grey and bleak.

Grey and bleak and desolate.

Tom stands on the Quayside. His trainers sink up to their laces in the sludge.

I used to come down here of a Saturday night. What happened to this place?

It is empty. Abandoned buildings keep silent watch. No window is intact. Either they gape open or they have been patched up with chipboard. There are no birds, no fish. Just a rat snuffling its way through the rubbish piled high beneath the bridge.

Tom consults the detector again.

No mistake. The signal's definitely coming from round here.

But where? The past might be alien, but it isn't *alien* alien. Unless the rat is an extraterrestrial in disguise.

"You're not here to take over the world, are you?" Tom asks. "Take me to your leader."

The rat bares its teeth and hisses in disgust.

"Keep your shirt on."

Tom looks away. There is a figure on the quay. A figure that was not there a moment ago.

Tom shrinks back into the shadow of the bridge.

"Now that," Tom whispers to the rat, "is an alien."

Green scales and red eyes. Bulky, with short, stumpy limbs and a waddling gait. Like a cross between a lizard and a giant baby.

Tom's eyes widen. A second alien emerged from an invisible door.

"You know something, Ratty," Tom says, "I'll bet that's a cloaked spaceship. I've seen them on *Star Trek*. Well, not *seen*, obviously, but you know what I mean."

The rat ignores him, goes back to chewing on the rubbish.

The aliens plod across the quay. They reach a tan-coloured Ford Anglia and one of them smashes a window, reaches inside and opens the door.

Tom glances at the detector.

To stay or to follow, that is the question.

Well, the Doctor did tell me to observe and it's tricky to observe an invisible spaceship.

He scurries out from behind the bridge, keeping low as he climbs the bank.

The aliens have started the car.

Tom looks around for a taxi, but no one comes around here. Not at this time of night. Not ever.

His eyes alight on a moped propped up in a doorway. He darts across the street. For an instant, he is clearly visible in the glare of a streetlight and he is convinced that the aliens have spotted him, but they are still turning lazy circles around the quay, trying to figure out how to steer.

Satisfied, they drive up and onto the main road. One of the aliens is hunched over the steering wheel. The other is struggling with a fold-up map.

Tom jumps onto the moped and revs the engine. Above, a window opens and a young, female face peers out.

"Oi! Come back with me scooter!"

"I'm just borrowing it," Tom calls back.

He hares off in pursuit of the Anglia, the girl yelling at his back.

* * * * *

Jack Brooker and his teenage son Alan step out of the Green Dragon pub for a breath of air. They are still wearing their overalls from their day down the pit, but that is okay because so are most of the men in the pub. The overalls are navy blue, but so smeared with dirt and coal dust that little of the original colour is still visible.

"I ache all over," Alan complains.

"Stop being such a baby," Jack says. "You'll get used to it after a few months."

"You said that a few months ago."

Jack looked up at the sliver of moon.

"If you don't like working down pit," Jack says, "I could always ask if there's work for you in the yard."

"No, no way. The pit was good enough for Granddad and it's good enough for you. I'll find a way to hack it, you'll see."

Jack claps him on the back.

"That's me boy. Come on, let's get home before your mam sends out a search party."

Jack adjusts his cap, but before they can set off, they see a figure staggering towards them.

"Look at him stotting about," Jack says. "Reckon he's already had a skin-full."

"What's with the weird-looking gear?" Alan asks. "Think he's off to a fancy dress party."

"Student, most like." Jack spits a goblet of phlegm on the floor. He has no patience for students.

"Hey, man," Alan calls, "do you need a hand or something."

"Help me," the stranger wheezes. "Help..."

He topples forwards. Jack lunges, catching him before he can hit the tarmac.

"Alan, help us get him in-bye."

But Alan is examining the stranger's face. The high forehead. The scales.

"Dad, I don't think this is a mask."

They are interrupted by a growl. Deep and menacing.

Yellow fangs. Amber eyes.

"Stay very still, Alan," Jack says. "It'll only attack if it thinks we're a threat. It's probably more scared of us than we are of it."

"I very much doubt that, Dad." Alan forces the words out between knocking teeth.

The fangs advanced, trailing behind them the body of a black hound. A black hound the size of a horse.

It tenses. Muscles ripple beneath midnight fur.

The hound leaps.

* * * * *

"Faster, faster!" Junior yells.

"That's easy for you to say," Deputy Mk'Trk'chnk replies.

He has most of this vehicle figured out now, but there is nothing he can do about the rest of the traffic. Northumberland Road is at a standstill. Cars gridlocked bumper-to-bumper, a trolley-bus at an angle across the street and pedestrians weaving in and out of the chaos.

Mk'Trk'chnk sounds his horn, one of the first controls he identified. It is lost amid the general cacophony.

"What I wouldn't give for a maser rifle," Junior complains.

"I know the feeling." Mk'Trk'chnk checks the rear-view mirror. "Junior, I thought you were supposed to be keeping an eye out."

"I was."

"Then how did you miss that monkey on the two-wheeled contraption? He's been following us since the river."

"I was trying to read the map," Junior replies sulkily. "You're the one with all the mirrors."

"As if I didn't have enough to think about."

Mk'Trk'chnk spins the steering wheel and the Anglia mounts the kerb. Pedestrians scatter. Abandoned shopping is crushed under the Anglia's tyres. They turn down a narrow alleyway. Junior sucks himself in as the tight walls snap off their mirrors and tear gouges in the side panels.

Another turn. Another road. Burning headlights dead ahead.

"It's a one-way street!" Junior screams.

Mk'Trk'chnk accelerates. The closing Cortina sounds its horn. Two short bursts followed by one long blast. Junior covers his eyes with his claws.

The Cortina swerves, crashing through a stack of cardboard boxes and into the wall. The Anglia sails through the space it has just vacated and turns smoothly on to the main road.

Mk'Trk'chnk chuckles.

"I didn't scare you, did I?"

He glances across at his companion.

"As if," Junior mutters.

He snaps bolt upright. Points ahead.

"Look out!"

* * * * *

The hound leaps... and howls when it impales its head on a sharp blade.

The stranger has hauled himself to one knee. He is holding his sword in both hands.

He twists the blade and the hound slides off. Close up, Alan can see that there are thick metal cables emerging from the back of the hound's skull and disappearing from sight again between its shoulder blades.

"Run," the stranger says. "The Okuri doesn't want you, only me."

"But it's dead, like?' Alan says.

"It takes more than that to kill an Okuri."

Alan's mouth falls open in horror. The wound on the hound's head is closing. Its eyes snap open.

The stranger forces himself to stand.

"I am ordering you to run," he says.

"Ordering us?" Jack says. "Who do you think you are?"

"I am Prince Ryugin of the royal house of Genroku," the stranger says, "and no one else will die because of me."

He readies his blade.

The hound springs.

A figure in a dark coat barrels into the prince, knocking them both to the ground and out of the hound's path.

"What are you playing at?" he says. "Do you really think you can stop an Okuri with samurai sword?"

"Kill or be killed. Either way, I stop the Okuri."

"I don't understand," Alan says. "What's he on about?"

"The Okuri is a cyborg hunter, programmed to track specific biodata," the man in the coat replies. "Once it has eliminated its prey, it has no further value and self-destructs."

"So even if it kills me," Prince Ryugin says, "I can still save others."

"That's the trouble with lizard-men. Lizard brains. What is it with you Draconians and your death complex?"

"We do not fear death, not if we die with honour."

"Honour's over-rated. I'm the Doctor, by the way, and I'm here to save your life. Shall we run?"

* * * * *

Tom smiles when he sees the aliens veer off the road. He grew up in this city. He knows its shortcuts.

He turns into Blackett Street, planning to cut through the Eldon Square Shopping Centre.

It is not there.

Stupid, Tom. Stupid, stupid, stupid. This isn't your time, remember.

So much the same, so very different.

He weaves through unfamiliar streets. Bounces over cobbles. Curses himself for every second this detour is costing him.

Then he sees it. A narrow gap between two buildings. He guns the engine, races through the space, bursts out onto the main road.

A surge of triumph. He can see the aliens.

They are right on top of him.

The Anglia's bumper meets the moped, flipping it up. Tom rolls across the car's bonnet. He strikes the windscreen. A cobweb of cracks blossom from point of impact. Tom cannot appreciate it. Tom is rolling up onto the roof and then over the side. His left shoulder hits the road first, but he feels no more pain.

He feels nothing.

* * * * *

A Marcus Price suit, Ben Sherman shirt and a floral tie that looks as though it might have been cut from a pair of curtains (and probably was). Ian's outfit for the evening. He has no idea if he looks "fab" or "groovy". Fashion passed him by when he was studying at Oxford. He just hopes he does not look a total square. Even if he is.

The man at the door directs him to the private room up a flight of carpeted stairs. A brown and orange room. Men in suits, women in dark dresses, standing and chatting in small groups. The men were drinking from bottles of brown ale, the ladies from glasses of Baby Cham. A trestle-table along one wall laden with bowls of crisps and brazil nuts, angels on horseback, cheese and pineapple on sticks, porkpies and a gammon joint.

A turntable in the corner plays the Beatles' *Abbey Road* LP. George Harrison's vocals.

Sitting on a chair by the record-player, apart from everything else, is a girl. Hair cut in a bob, so black it is blue. Heavily made-up eyes. A black and white Mary Quant dress. A matching handbag in her lap.

Something in the way she moves.

Ian tries smiling at her. She smiles back – so brief that Ian thinks he might have imagined it – then looks away.

Something in her smile she knows.

"Mr Townsend?" A gorilla in a monkey suit.

"Yes, I'm Ian Townsend."

"Mr Ferris is waiting for you. In his office."

Ian follows the henchman to a small room – a cupboard, really – at the far end. Richard Ferris is showing someone out.

"Ian, good to see you."

Ferris clasps Ian's hand in his huge mitt. His grip is tight. Ian does his best not to wince.

"Come in, have a seat. What are you drinking? Newcastle Brown?"

"I, uh, never really got the taste for it," Ian admits.

"More of a bitter man, are you?" Ferris signals the gorilla. "Lloyd, go downstairs and fetch us two pints of Double Diamond, would you?"

Ferris shuffles papers about his desk.

Ian clears his throat.

"Mr Ferris, I hope you won't think I'm being rude, but why am I here?"

"To have a good time, I'd have thought. It is a party. Though there was a small matter I wanted to discuss with you."

"Oh?"

"Something of a business proposition. You seem like a bright young lad. I clapped eyes on you and I thought to myself 'now there's a lad that's going places'."

"That's kind of you to say so."

"It's not kind," Ferris replies. "I simply call it as I see it. And I think you could be my eyes and ears in the housing department. Keep me informed of any items you think might interest me, like."

Ian's mouth is dry.

"That doesn't sound entirely ethical."

"Ah, ethics. They're all very well for debates in academe, but out in the real world, Ian, you have to take a more pragmatic approach, you follow me."

"I think so, sir."

"You need to think about your future. Your prospects. And I make it a point of pride to look out for those who look out for me."

"That's very generous, sir."

"Simply fair remuneration," Ferris says. "Speaking of which, how much are they paying you at the council? Never mind, you do this for me and I'll double it."

"Double it?"

"Double it. How does that grab you?"

"It's... You wouldn't ask me to do anything illegal."

"Heaven's no. We'd just have a bit of a friendly chat every now and then, like. What could be wrong with that?"

"I don't know..."

"Even Patterson came round to my way of thinking in the end," Ferris adds, "and you know what a stickler he is for integrity."

Ian nods slowly. It is a lot to take in, but...

"All right, I'll do it."

"That's my boy."

They shake hands again. Ian does not flinch this time.

Lloyd the gorilla returns with their pints and Ferris walks Ian to the office door.

"I saw you checking out that young lady on your way in."

"She's very... attractive," Ian says.

"That she is. She's also my daughter."

"I'm sorry," Ian splutters. "I didn't mean."

"Don't apologise. Why would I be offended? Go, try your luck. Hazel could do with a friend her own age rather than spending her time with my stuffy business associates."

"You really don't mind?"

"You have me blessing," Ferris tells him. "Just remember, if you hurt her, I'll break your legs."

Ian swallows most of his pint in one gulp.

Hazel Ferris is drumming her fingers in time to the music.

"Um, hello," Ian attempts.

She looks up. Her eyes are dreamy and distant.

"Hi."

"I'm Ian. I, uh, work for your father."

"I know, Daddy told me. He likes you."

She turns away, but keeps watching him out of the corner of one eye.

"He told you that."

She shrugs. "He wouldn't have hired you if he didn't like you."

Her voice is posh, like crystal. Not like most Newcastle girls. Too good for Ian.

"Can I get you a drink?"

"Babycham makes me heave."

"Then how about we go somewhere else. Someplace a bit more – " Ian risks a bit of slang. " – happening?"

Hazel looks him in the eye.

"All right," she says. She is so relaxed. So cool. "It has to beat staying here."

* * * * *

The headlights form a circle of not-quite-white in the road. A man in a duffel-coat steps into the spotlight and waves his arms. The driver slams on the brakes and the yellow bus stops three – no, *two* – inches from the Doctor's toes.

He jumps aboard. Shoulders the conductor out of the way.

"Everybody off. We're commandeering this vehicle."

The night bus is mostly empty, just half a dozen passengers. Only one stands up.

"You what?" Defiance from a leather jacket and flat cap combo.

"Was 'commandeering' too many syllables for you?" The Doctor invades his heckler's personal space. "Would it help if I used small words? Something very large and very vicious is on its way here to murder my colleague and anyone that gets in its way. That will include you if you don't get off this bus right now. So move!"

"Of all the cheek!" a woman wearing wrinkles and fox-fur complains, but at least she is in motion.

"Out, out, OUT!"

The Doctor works his way up the aisle, throws himself into the driver's seat.

"Everyone sitting comfortably."

Jack helps Prince Ryugin to a seat at the front. Alan stays at the back, on the conductor's platform. He cannot see the hound, but the invisible spider crawling up his spine tells him that it is out there.

A girl with straight, honey-coloured hair and a floral jumpsuit, hops up onto the platform as the bus pulls away.

"You can't get on here," Alan protests. She is already past him.

"I forgot me radio."

She retrieves the small, white Regency box and stows it in her bag.

"You can let us off at the next stop."

"There aren't any stops on this service, love," Jack says.

"No stops! But me mam'll go ape if I'm late back."

"We have worse things to worry about than your mother, young lady," the Doctor says.

The girl frowns. "You haven't met her."

She starts for the rear exit. Steadies herself against the metal pole. Prepares to jump off the moving vehicle.

The Okuri is directly below her.

Its jaws snap at her boots.

The girl stumbles backwards into Alan's arms. He tries to pull her away.

"A little help here!"

Jack grabs Ryugin's sword and races down the aisle to help his son.

The Okuri has its front paws on the conductor's plate.

Jack attacks the hound with the sword, but he swings it like a club, not a blade. He infuriates the hound. He does not discourage it.

The Okuri springs.

Jack tries to back away, but, with three people crowded at the back of the bus, there is nowhere to go.

The Okuri clamps its fangs into Jack's calf.

Jack screams.

* * * * *

Ian intends to offer Hazel his jacket when they get outside, but she has left a black PVC coat behind the bar so his gallantry is not needed. Good thing too. It is freezing tonight.

Hazel walks with her hands in her coat pockets. Her head rocks from side to side to a rhythm only she can hear.

Ian cannot stand the silence.

"Be honest," he says, "why did you agree to come out with me?"

"You asked me, remember?" Her smile is hiding something.

"Did your dad tell you to do it?"

"Does it matter?"

"It does to me."

"So Daddy wants us to have some fun. What's wrong with that?" Hazel spreads her arms, looks up at the sky and twirls an almost circle. "Don't you want to have fun, Ian?"

"I guess."

Hazel takes a cigarette from her pocket. It is not a Consulate menthol.

"Have you got a light?"

Ian has half a box of Swan Vestas. He strikes one, lights Hazel's cigarette, then lights one of his own for himself.

Hazel inhales deeply, breathing smoke out through her nose.

"You want to know the truth? You did me a favour. You think it's easy being Daddy's little girl? His princess. He wants to keep tabs on me twenty-four-seven. I used to go up Morden Tower – " She points vaguely in the direction of the city's western wall. " – to listen to Basil Bunting and Allen Ginsberg and the rest, but one of Daddy's thugs spotted one night." She slashes a finger across her throat. "After that, Daddy keeps me on a very short leash. I trail around after him like a dutiful puppy, bored out of my skin, enduring the company of *his* friends who don't like me anymore than I like them."

"I like you," Ian says.

"That's sweet, Ian."

She beams, igniting fireworks in Ian's brain.

Is now the time to try and put my arm around her, or is that too forward?

"Of course," Hazel continues, "you're only saying that because you don't know me. I'm a wicked, wicked child."

"I don't believe it."

"No, I am." Hazel looks down at her feet, shakes her head. "It must be true because Mummy says so. Perfect Mummy with her perfect home and perfect friends and perfect garden and perfect dinners. And her imperfect daughter. That's me."

Maybe I could just hold her hand?

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"Because, thanks to you, Ian, for one night the caged bird gets to fly free. Then, in the morning, I'll get put back at the very top of my tower waiting for another handsome prince to come and rescue me." She tugs at her hair. Pulls a face. "There's not really enough of this for him to climb, though, is there?"

She laughs. Ian laughs too.

"Since it's your one night of freedom," he says, "what would the princess like to do?"

Hazel looks up at the stars.

"I want to dance. Please, Ian, take me somewhere I can dance."

* * * * *

A boot strikes the Okuri between the eyes.

Alan lashes out.

Again –

And again –

And again.

He loses count of the number of kicks, but finally the Okuri lets go of Jack's leg, falls out of the bus, disappears into the darkness.

Jack is still screaming in pain.

"We need bandages or something," the girl says. "Something to stop the bleeding."

"Use this."

Ryugin stumbles down the aisle, tearing strips from the hem of his robe as he does so. The silk darkens with blood as the girl ties it in place.

"Why won't he stop screaming?" Alan asks Ryugin. He feels tears at the back of his eyes, but his dad would never forgive him if he cried. Not even now.

"The bite of an Okuri is poisoned," Ryugin says.

"Does that mean... Is Dad going to die?"

"An Okuri is primed for a specific target," the Doctor says. "Its saliva would be fatal to Ryugin, but, while it's obviously causing him great pain, your father should survive."

"You promise?"

The Doctor does not reply.

The girl puts a small hand on Alan's shoulder.

"Let's get your dad onto one of the seats. Make him more comfortable, like."

Alan nods and the two of them lift Jack as gently as they can.

"Thanks," Alan says. "You've been great and I don't even know your name."

"Mary Moran."

"Alan Brooker. I'm sorry you got caught up in this, Mary."

Mary flashes a small smile, but the mask is slipping.

"That thing is still out there, isn't it?" she says.

"An Okuri never gives up," Ryugin says.

"We can't outrun it forever." Unconsciously, Mary takes hold of Alan's hand. Alan feels a thrill of something building in his chest. "What are we going to do?"

"Doctor?" Alan asks.

"I'm open to suggestions."

Alan's expression hardens.

"In that case," he says, "I think I have an idea."

* * * * *

The wail of a saxophone. The beat of a drum. The howl of the electric guitar. The grit in the vocals.

My baby found a new place to go.

The "Blues". Small movements of the hips and the arms. A swing in the shoulders. A tremble of the leg. Less a dance, more a collective vibration.

Hangs around town at the Club A'Gogo.

Ian pays for them both at the door in Percy Street. Two flights of stairs and over the bus workers' canteen. Into a room that is dark and full of magic.

Hazel drags Ian onto the dance floor.

The house band is on the stage. The Animals graduated from the A'Gogo several years earlier, but the Junco Partners are a credible alternative.

Ian feels like a bit of a prat as he rocks from side to side, but Hazel throws herself into the music with abandon. Eyes half-closed. Head tipped back.

"Hazel..."

"Ssshhh." She raises a solitary finger. "Can't you feel it, Ian? We're just feathers. Feathers tossed on the ocean."

And Ian does feel it. Sort of. Light-headed and out of control.

I'm dancing with the bonniest girl in the Club A'Gogo. Does it get any better than this?

Three songs in and nerves have shrunk his bladder to the size of a peanut.

"Be right back," he tells Hazel. She nods dreamily.

Ian shuffles off of the dance floor, asks a man at the door the way to the toilets.

"The nettie? Why, it's just down there, like."

Thanks are drowned out by a drum solo.

It is quieter out here. Cooler, too. The toilet is empty. Ian locks the door behind him. Relieves himself. Loosens his tie. Fills the sink and splashes cold water on his face.

Looks at the face staring back out of the mirror.

The same dark circles under his eyes. The same beak of a nose. The same fluff on his upper lip that will never earn the title of moustache. Not a handsome face and a far cry from a dashing knight on a white charger come to rescue the beautiful princess.

Tomorrow, Hazel will wake up and regret this evening and all I'll have left will be the memories. That's how this goes.

The toilet door caves inwards and a giant lizard grabs Ian by his shirtfront and drags him out into the hallway.

* * * * *

"What have you brought us here for, son?" Jack asks. He is sitting up, but his face is grey.

The Tyne looks beautiful in the moonlight. A wide expanse of molten silver.

Darkness hides a multitude of sins.

With the bus's engine turned off, they can hear water lapping against the wooden coal staithes.

"Do you remember Donald Gannon, Dad?"

Jack nods slowly. "Oh aye, now I see what you're getting at."

"Would someone mind letting me in on this secret of yours?" the Doctor asks.

"Don Gannon worked on bank, up here with the coal chutes rather than down the pit. One morning he's had a bit too much to drink the night before and he's not paying enough attention and he gets his hand caught in the machinery."

"Crushed to mince, it was," Jack adds. "Horrible. Had to amputate his arm all the way down from the elbow."

"This dog of your may be tough, Doctor, but I reckon it wouldn't stand a chance if we could trap it in the machine."

The Doctor chews on his thumbnail.

"It might work. It's risky, but it might actually work."

Mary is less convinced. "But the – Okuri, is it? – the Okuri is hardly just going to throw itself into the machine, is it?"

"It will if we give it the right incentive," Alan tells her.

"Me," Ryugin says. "You need me to act as bait."

"It's you it's after," the Doctor says. "It's only chasing us because we're with you."

"You mean we could just walk away," Mary says, "and this would all be over?"

"Yes, and I suggest that's what you do." The Doctor's gaze takes in Mary and both Brookers. "Prince Ryugin and I can handle this on our own."

Alan shakes his head. "Reckon you'll need all the help you can get. I'm staying, like."

"And I can't get anywhere under my own power," Jack says, "not with this leg so I guess I'm staying too."

"Mary?" the Doctor asks.

"Go home, love," Alan says softly. "Your mam'll be waiting for you."

"I'll stay," Mary says.

"You don't have to," Alan says.

Mary looks up at him.

"I want to."

* * * * *

Tom's head is chiming like Big Ben. He swims back out of darkness, opens his eyes.

The moped lies in the gutter, folded almost in two

"Now how am I going to give it back?" he moans.

He tries to stand. Stagger into a passer-by.

"Easy there, lad. That was quite the tumble you took."

"Tell me about it. Did you see what hit me?"

The passer-by points up the street and Tom sees the parked Ford Anglia. He runs towards it, trying to ignore the pain in his skull.

"Oi," the man on the door says. "You can't go up without paying. It's one and six."

"What's that in proper money?" Tom asks.

A mighty crash echoes down the stairs.

"I'll have to owe you!"

Tom reaches the top of the stairs just in time to see the two aliens hurl a blond man across the dance floor. He lands on the stage. The band stop playing. They would not be heard over the screams in any case.

The smaller of the two aliens advances over the downed man. It raises a three-pronged claw.

Observe, don't interfere, the Doctor said.

Sod him.

"Can I borrow this?" Tom asks a band-member.

He hefts his guitar and smashes it down over the head of the alien.

Strings snap. The body shatters. The alien staggers back, nursing its head.

"Is he all right?" a dark-haired girl asked.

At first Tom thinks she is referring to the alien, then realises she means the man on the floor.

"I'm fine, Hazel," he says, sitting up. "Nothing broken, I think."

"You shouldn't scare me like that, Ian," the girl scolds him. "It's not nice."

Hazel? Ian?

"You wouldn't be Ian Townsend, like?" Tom asks.

"Do I know you?"

I know you.

"There's so much I've got to say to you."

"Such as?"

Such as why you walked out on mum and nan? Why nobody ever talks about you? Why you've never been part of my life?

"That sodding hurt!" the short alien bellows. "You're gonna pay for that!"

"It'll keep," Tom says to Ian. "For now, let's just run."

* * * * *

"We'll never be able to move that," Mary says.

"Sure we will," Alan replies. "It's on a slope. We just take the brake off and it'll roll down under its own power. Mind your feet."

Alan releases the brake and the cart trundles down the track, picking up speed as it goes. It overshoots, starts rolling back up the hill, but then loses momentum and returns to the lowest point.

"Perfect," Alan declares. "What'd I tell you?"

Engines purr. Wheels turn. Cables carry empty buckets to the staites and back.

"Looks like the Doctor's managed to get the thing up and running," Alan says.

"Who is he anyway?" Mary asks.

"Haven't a clue, but he seems to know what he's talking about which makes him all right in my book."

The heart of the machine. The air thrumming with potential.

Ryugin sits cross-legged on the ground. His sword rests across his lap.

"You want to tell me why the Okuri's after you?" the Doctor asked.

Ryugin opens one eye.

"Not that it really matters," the Doctor continues, "but it would be nice to know if I'm protecting a mass-murderer or just someone who raided the pick 'n' mix at Woolworths."

"Isn't it a bit late to ask that now?"

Ryugin takes his time getting to his feet. He is still unsteady after the crash, but his strength is returning quickly.

"The Okuri's a blunt instrument. It doesn't care who or what it destroys to complete its mission. Someone who uses a weapon like that, they're not someone I'm going to get on with. You I'm undecided about."

"The Okuri was sent by my brother, Katashi," Ryugin says. "He killed my father and now he wants to kill me so that he can become the next Daimyo."

"And what will you do, Ryugin, if you become Daimyo in his place?"

Ryugin looks away. He thinks of all the things Yoshido and his father had yet to teach him.

"I don't know," he says.

"At least you're honest, I suppose, though that's unlikely to be an asset in your chosen career path..."

The Doctor is cut off by the blare of the bus's horn.

The pre-arranged signal.

Jack has spotted the Okuri.

"Go, Doctor," Ryugin says. "It's me it wants."

The Doctor steps back. The shadows swallow him.

Ryugin steadies himself. Feet apart, sword held vertical. His left hand rests on a pouch at his waist.

His pointed ears hear a rumble carried by the wind, the low growl of a predator.

"Come out, demon," he yells into the night. "Come out where I can see you."

The growl leaps in pitch. The Okuri springs.

Ryugin is faster. He brings up his left hand, hurls three shurk'n at the beast. The small round blades embed themselves in its flank and the Okuri flinches. The perfect arc of its jump is broken and it lands awkwardly a few feet away.

"Now!" Alan yells to Mary.

The pair of them strain to tip over the cart. Alan's shoulder feels as though it is about to burst from his socket. He grits his teeth and pushes all the harder. Mary's feet slip and slide out from under her. She kicked her boots for dancing, not clambering about on the riverbank. She kicks then off, hoping to achieve more grip with her bare toes.

The cart rocks, teeters, tips. A waterfall of black cascades down the chute.

The Okuri hears the noise. Its ears prick up. It turns its head.

Too late.

The avalanche catches it in the side and carries the hound away with it. Coal and beast rattle along a conveyor belt and bounce over filters. At the end of the belt, the crusher waits, manganese steel jaws snapping hungrily.

"We did it!"

Mary throws her arms around Alan's neck and the latter picks her up and spins her round in delight.

Ryugin is less certain. He takes a step towards the conveyor.

Howling with pain, the Okuri struggles out from beneath the unprocessed coal. Its body is twisted, fur torn away in clumps, but it is an Okuri. It is driven by only one desire.

It launches itself at Ryugin. The prince tries to get his sword between him and the hound, but the angle is too narrow. The Okuri snaps its jaws around Ryugin's shoulder and bites down hard. It rakes at his torso with its claws.

Ryugin screams.

So does the Doctor.

"Ryugin!"

He dives out of the darkness. His shoulder catches the Okuri beneath its ribs and the two of them land on the belt of the conveyor. The Okuri's fangs slash at the Doctor, but he has his hand under its jaw, forcing it back. He is lying on top of the Okuri, pinning it down. The Okuri is strong. The Okuri struggles. It will be free in moments, but moments are all the Doctor needs.

Manganese steel jaws snap shut. Rock splits and shatters under their powerful bite. The jaws open, waiting hungrily for their next load.

Snap. Crush. Open.

Snap. Crush. Open.

The Okuri sees what is ahead. It struggles harder. The Doctor holds firm.

Locked together, they go over the end of the belt, tumbling into the expectant jaws...

Limbs flailing, the Okuri tumbles into the crusher.

The Doctor hangs in mid-air, the jaws snapping beneath his feet.

Gripping tightly to the back of the Doctor's duffel-coat, Ryugin hauls him out of the machine and deposits him on the riverbank.

At the far end of the crusher, a mix of blood, bone and coal are dropped into a bucket which is carried by cable to the coal staithes. The bucket tips up. With no boat to collect it, the debris is simply dumped into the Tyne. Further buckets follow, burying the remains.

* * * * *

Tom has a hand on both Ian and Hazel as he encourages them down the stairs.

"You again." The man at the door puts down his newspaper. "Where's that one and six you owe us?"

"He's paying for me," Tom says, pointing back up the stairs. He bundles Hazel and Ian out of the door.

The aliens stomp down the steps after them.

"I didn't see you come in," the bouncer says. "Where's your tickets?"

One of the aliens grabs him by the collar, picks him up and hurls him through the window. Tom winces as the glass shatters.

"So," he asks, "want to tell me why they've got a mad on for you?"

They run across the road, weaving between the slow moving traffic.

"I don't even know who they are," Ian says. "Or *what* they are."

"They're aliens," Tom says. "Probably."

"Know a lot of aliens, do you?" Ian's voice drips with sarcasm. Tom ignores it.

"One or two. Get down!"

One of the aliens is holding a sleek-looking pistol. Tom, Hazel and Ian duck down as he fires off three flechette rounds in quick succession. Two shatter the windows of the car they are hiding behind. The third bursts a tire. The driver screams.

"And do all the aliens you know want to kill you?" Ian asks.

"Not *all*," Tom replies.

People are staring at the aliens. Shouting. Screaming.

Panicking.

They abandon the cars, choosing to flee on foot, but no one can decide which way to go to safety.

The taller alien grabs hold of the one with the pistol. He seems to be trying to drag him back inside.

Tom seizes the opportunity. He grabs hold of Ian and leads him down the street, using the crowd as cover. They rush past Christmas window displays, papier-mâché scenes enlivened with mechanical figures. Ian is holding on to Hazel's hand, but his palm is sweating again. His grip slips and, in the crush, he lets go of her.

"Hazel!" he shouts. There is no sign of her in the crowd.

"Keep moving." Tom tries to pull him along.

"But I've lost Hazel!"

Tom freezes. Images of summers spent at his nan's big house while his parents were away. Home-made lemonade. Playing at James Bond in the garden when the sun was out. Playing board games with his nan when it rained. He was a computer geek and he never let his parents forget how much he had to have the latest console, that brand new video-game. Yet on a soggy August evening, Scrabble with nan was the best thing in the world.

What if something happens to her? What if the aliens get her now, before I'm even born? Before mam's even born?

"Tom, look out!"

Ian shoves Tom in the chest with both his hands. Tom goes down, landing hard on his backside. He looks up. He sees a flechette whizz through the space where his head had been.

The flechette punches a hole in the shop window, knocks the head from a mechanical street urchin. Tom sees sparks at its neck. Now smoke. The polystyrene snow around it begins to blacken and burn.

Ian sees it too. They look from one to the other. They hurl themselves out into the road.

With a whoosh, the entire display goes up, fire engulfing the whole Christmassy scene. Great tongues of flames leap out from the window.

Ian and Tom roll over onto their backs. Sweat cakes their bodies and stinging smoke is in their lungs and their eyes.

A car pulls up with a screech beside them.

"Get in!" Hazel says. She is driving the aliens' stolen Ford Anglia.

* * * * *

Junior fires a few rounds at the rapidly accelerating car, but it is already out of range. He swears. Repeatedly.

"Feel better now?" Mk'Trk'chnk asks. He waves a claw in the direction of the blaze. "I thought we were supposed to be discreet."

"They were getting away. I had to do something."

"Looks to me like they got away anyway." Mk'Trk'chnk's communicator beeps. He raises the tube to his mouth. "Boss, uh, no, we haven't been able to eliminate the target yet."

"Good, good," G'Gugv'ntt says. "I've just had a call from this Richard Ferris person. Seems he wants to take charge of the Townsend situation personally."

"I don't follow, Boss."

"It means I'm aborting the mission. Ferris will make sure Townsend stays silent. Our secrecy is secure."

Mk'Trk'chnk looks at the fire, at the panicked mob.

"Boss, about that..."

* * * * *

"Are you lads all right?" Alan asks as he and Mary scramble down the bank.

"Ryugin's been bitten." The Doctor is examining the prince's wound. "The poison's already entered his bloodstream."

"My sister waits for me outside the Heavenly Palace of Jade," Ryugin says. "I do not fear death."

"You should," the Doctor says. "Take it from one who knows. If only I had the TARDIS."

"The what?"

"If I had access to the proper equipment then there's a chance I could filter the poison out of his system. As it is..."

"You did everything you could, Doctor," Ryugin said, "but you cannot fight death."

"Ten lifetimes and that's a lesson that still hasn't stuck."

"Isn't there anything you can do, Doctor?" Mary asks.

"No, I..." He runs his hands through his hair. "Maybe. It's a chance at least." He stands up. "Brooker, give me a hand with him. We need to get him back on the bus."

They do not drive far.

He and Alan half carry, half drag Ryugin across the open ground towards the abandoned building. The prince is slipping in and out of consciousness.

"What is this place?" Mary asks.

"Used to know it well, like," Jack says. "It's the old Barrett Brothers' alkali factory."

"Explains the smell," Alan says.

"But why here?" Mary says. "It looks as if it'll all come down any moment."

"No, this place has a few years left at least," the Doctor replies. "I just need somewhere I can leave Ryugin for a little while. He's deteriorating too fast to move him any further."

"And he'll be safe here?" Mary's voice is full of doubt.

"I don't know!" the Doctor snaps. "This whole scheme is littered with imponderables, but it's all I've got. If you have a better idea, let's hear it."

Mary looks away.

"Didn't think so. Now either shut up and help or go wait on the bus."

Mary follows meekly behind as they enter the bowels of the factory.

"Down to the basement, I think," the Doctor says. "It's more likely to be protected from the elements."

They descend an uneven flight of steps. A bat flies out of the basement at them and Mary jumps, but she will not scream.

Not in front of the Doctor.

Not in front of Alan.

They find a dry(ish) corner and lay Ryugin down. His eyes are closed and his breathing shallow. The Doctor kneels down beside him.

"My equipment is... a long way away," he explains, "and Ryugin would never survive the journey in his current condition so I need to buy enough time to get there and back."

"And how are you going to do that?"

"I was just coming to that, Mary, thank you. I'm going to put the prince in a coma."

"You can do that?"

Too late, Mary realises she has interrupted again. She claps a hand over her mouth. The Doctor raises an eyebrow, but otherwise does not comment on her lapse.

"It's just a theory – but it's *my* theory so it's probably accurate – but if I can slow Ryugin's metabolic rate to virtually zero then it should also halt the advance of the poison."

"And you can do that without killing him?" This time, the interjection is Alan's.

"That's the question, isn't it," the Doctor says. He raises his voice. "Ryugin, I don't know if you can hear me, but I'm going to put you to sleep. Given the way moths have been at the local space-time continuum, I'll probably have some trouble getting back, but just wait for me. I'll come back for you, I give you my word."

He extends his index finger. He touches the spot between Ryugin's eyes.

"Contact."

The Doctor's spine arches back and his body goes rigid. All is quiet. All is still.

"Is he even breathing?" Mary asks. Alan has no answer. "I've got a mirror in my bag. That's how you check, isn't it?"

Alan gives a faint nod, but neither moves any closer to Ryugin and the Doctor.

Minutes crawl by. In the distance, a boat sounds its horn.

The Doctor gasps, sucking air back into his lungs.

"Are you all right?" Mary rushes to the Doctor's side. "What happened?"

She tries to help him up, but the Doctor waves her away. He leans against the wall of the building, taking his time.

"I've put him under as deeply as I dared," he says. "Ryugin should be able to survive months like that. At least." The Doctor claps his hands together. "Enough of this. I need to be getting on and you, Alan, need to be getting Mary home. Be sure to memorise the address, you might need it in the future."

Alan blushes crimson and looks down at his feet, but Mary grins.

"Will we see you again?" Alan forces his embarrassment down.

"Yes, yes. It'll be a while, but our paths will cross," the Doctor says. "When they do, you must say nothing of what happened tonight. That's very important. Nothing, Alan, all right?"

"You can count on me, Doctor," Alan says.

The Doctor scowls.

"You have no idea how much I hate having to do that."

* * * * *

Half a city away.

"Sir, we've lost contact with the Okuri," the soldier says.

Katashi rubs his hands. "Excellent."

"Sir?"

"An Okuri is invincible, soldier," he says. "It stops for one reason and one reason only: because its prey has been eliminated. Ready the ship for immediate departure. We return to Draconia to... mourn."

* * * * *

Tom and the Doctor reunite where they had first separated, the Town Moor.

"Thought I'd find you here," Tom says. "You'll never believe what happened to me."

"That's not important right now."

"Not important, but..."

The Doctor holds up a hand. "No time. I need to get back to the future to save an alien prince."

Tom blinks. "You what?"

"No. Time." The Doctor scans the moor. "There, I think."

He jogs a short distance, drops to his knees and starts digging in the dirt with his hands.

"A little help would be nice."

Bemused, Tom drops down beside him and also starts to dig.

"What are we looking for?" he asks.

"That."

The Doctor's normally cold eyes are sparking, reflecting the light of the vortex they have just uncovered.

"It was buried under the Moor?"

The Doctor shrugs. "Why not? It has eleven dimensions to move through after all." He turns to Tom. "I want you to stay here."

"You're kidding, right?"

"The rift's becoming progressively less stable. You know what it did to you last time. Going back will be ten times worse."

"You're going."

"First, Time Lord. Second, I have no choice."

"Well if you don't have a choice then neither do I, man."

"Don't be an idiot, Brooker. I let you join my crew – on a *probationary* basis, remember – because you promised to obey my orders. I'm ordering you to stay behind."

"But..."

"No buts. I don't want to have to explain to your grandparents how I lost you. They're good people. Just goes to show it's not all down to genetics."

"Have I just been insulted?" Tom asks.

"I'll let you know when I get back. Stay. Put."

"Aye, aye, skip."

"Oh, what's the use?"

The Doctor straightens his coat before jumping into the vortex. He disappears in a shower of sparks.

Tom counts to ten.

Then he jumps in after him.

* * * * *

On the banks of the Tyne, the water laps gently against the wooden coal staithes and around the newly deposited pile of crushed rock. And deep within the pile, bits of bone and blood and sinew begin to twitch and knit themselves back together.

This story continues in Part Two...



The Angel of the North - Part One

"You can cheat anyone else, harm anyone else, kill anyone else, but family is sacred. The rest of the galaxy may be out to get you, but you can always count on family to hide you and to bankroll you because one day you'll do the same for them."

When a Lodge of Foamasi escapes into the past using a stolen tachyon reactor, it sets off a chain of events that will span three decades and involve four generations of Tom Brooker's family.

In search of the source of the disruption to the space-time, the Doctor and Tom travel to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in 1969, where Tom's maternal grandfather, Ian Townsend, is caught up in political corruption and becomes the target for a Foamasi assassination attempt.

Meanwhile, the Doctor, in the company of Tom's other grandparents, is helping Ryugin, a Draconian prince fleeing from his power-hungry younger sibling. But can even the Doctor save him from an indestructible cyborg hound programmed for one task and one task only: to kill?

This is another in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Tenth Doctor as played by Laurent Meyer

ISBN 0-918894-28-X

