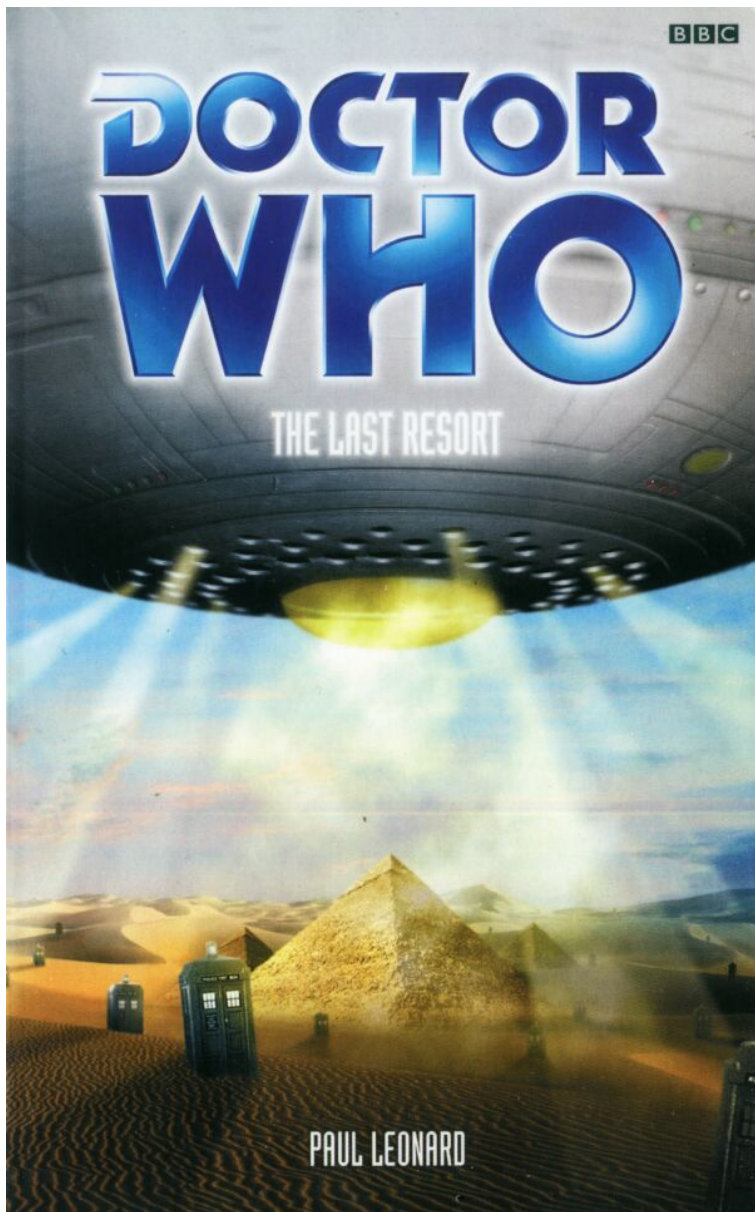


BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE LAST RESORT



PAUL LEONARD

'I think time and space just fell apart.'

Anji isn't sure, but then it's hard to be sure of anything now. Good Times Inc. promised a new tourist experience, with hotels in every major period of human history – but that kind of arrogance comes with a price, and it's a price the Doctor doesn't want to pay.

As aliens conquer an alternative Earth, Anji and Fitz race to find out how to stop Good Times without stopping time itself. But they find that events are out of control – they can't even save each other. And when the Doctor tries to help, it gets far worse. At the Last Resort, only Sabbath can save the day.
And then the price gets even higher. . .

*This is another in the series of continuing adventures
for the Eighth Doctor.*

DOCTOR WHO

THE LAST RESORT
PAUL LEONARD

BBC

DOCTOR WHO: THE LAST RESORT

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This novel is dedicated to Jim Mortimore,
who showed me unselfish friendship and great patience
and taught me all about writing novels
(everything else is my fault)

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Prologue

The King Is Dead

‘Your Majesty! If you could just turn this way...’

The man had an American accent, but he looked Chinese. He had used the wrong form of address as usual, but the High Supreme Ruler of the Two Egypts and the Greater World had long since ceased trying to insist, just as he had ceased trying to account for all the languages and races and strangeness of the time travellers. The small silver thing, the camera, flashed in Cheops’s eyes, dazzling him for a moment.

He tried to smile. ‘I think you will find –’ he began, hesitant as always in the tourist language, but a tour guide was striding across the stone floor in her sea-blue uniform, already shouting at him.

‘Mister Chee! I’m sorry but I really must ask you to put your camera away! The fabrics and materials here are very sensitive to the light.’

Mr Chee’s expression became flat, threatening. ‘I paid money,’ he said. ‘Good money, as good as the next man’s. Are you saying I can’t take pictures?’

The guide was facing him now, unintimidated by his anger. ‘The materials of the throne and the Pharaoh’s costume are quite irreplaceable.’

‘Because no one can do that any more,’ said Cheops, but both guide and tourist ignored him. The fabric that made his cloak and covered the throne had been soaked for hours in the clear Nile water, the colours flowing in, flowing out, like blood in a vein, a hundred times for the floods, a hundred times for the blood of the Hundred Gods –

But the Nile water was no longer clear, it was slicked with oil from the tourists’ boats, and their factories, and their markets, and their cars.

Mr Chee was still talking. ‘Stop me if I’m wrong but I thought that we’d travelled in time, like, in *time*, so surely these people can make some more of this lapis blue or whatever it is? I mean, it’s not like this is a museum or something!’

Cheops knew what a museum was, and knew that his Kingdom had become one of those dead places. He touched the Ring of Power, with its gold cast of

Osiris, but knew that Mr Chee had more power in the batteries of his camera than the Ring had in Egypt now. The Pharaoh looked round at the great hall, at the Italian marble and Indian gold that dressed the vast sandstone blocks his father's slaves had dragged along the valley of the Nile two generations ago. The doors were blue glass, fretted with gold, a time-traveller invention. When they opened, it was done by a machine, which made a slight humming sound. The guards stood by, resplendent and holy, and the women flapped the long fronds of palm, but they were gestures, camera-fodder; the guards unarmed, the women unneeded in the air-conditioned throne room.

Mr Chee and the tour guide were still arguing in low voices near the door. A bare-armed woman wearing black had joined them. She was probably Mr Chee's wife. Cheops became suddenly conscious of the sweat dribbling down inside the gold breastplate of his costume. He stood up, hoping to retreat to the inner courtyard of this tourists' temple. He would still be watched, walking amongst the low palms and hibiscus, but at least the air was green and soothing.

'O Supreme One!'

The words of the address were correct, but the tone was brisk. The man in the blue and yellow uniform had a tense, watchful expression. 'I'm sorry, but we must ask for another hour before you leave. There is a party of over-sixties from Boston due shortly.'

Cheops nodded, and sat down. He understood his obligations. Gold and machinery had a cost, and he could not say that he had not understood that cost when he had made his agreement with the time travellers, though perhaps he had not grasped the depth of the river of indemnity he had entered, the full extent of its flood.

'Is there anything we can bring for your comfort, O Supreme One?'

It was one of his own guards, resplendent in lapis and brass armour and peacock-feather headdress, bowing low as he spoke.

'All is well.' Cheops forced himself to speak as a Pharaoh should speak to a mortal, and the young man responded as he should, by silently backing away, still bowing, the peacock feathers swaying like flowers in the wind; but Cheops saw the slight twitch of the guard's lips below the gilded face-paint, the suppressed laughter, and knew that the laughter would escape when the guard went off duty tonight and drank beer in the American bar, wearing his Levis and Nike trainers. The laughter would escape just as the life of Egypt had escaped, to be pissed down the river in the dead of night. Cheops saw that his fists were clenched with anger.

'I sold –' He began to say it, then stopped, shook his head at the alien concept. He had not *sold out*, he had not *sold his soul*. He had made a stupid mistake. He had bargained with the Trickster, and that is a trade that the Gods themselves always lose. Why had he thought he would win?

A movement caught his eye: a young man pushing his way through the crowd, his belt crude stained bullock hide –

– *but it is the belt of a Pharaoh* –

– his face angry, sweat-streaked and watchful –

– *and it is my face and he is looking at me and he knows what I have done* –

The young man pulled a knife from his belt, long bladed, iron, but the point as sharp as glass. Cheops heard a woman's scream, saw the Levis-and-Nike guard moving away (but why should he defend him?) and before he could move the knife was deep within him, felt as an oddness, the pain afterwards and the blood spurting out, more screaming over the ringing in his ears, but it was that face, that face looking down at him, curved and cruel and familiar.

'You betrayed me.'

He thinks I am his father.

Cheops tried to reply, tried to tell the young man the truth before it was too late, but his breath was gone, he could only stare as the world went white and Horus came to greet him, his huge wings flapping slowly, slowly, his great falcon's beak descending on Cheops's chest, to pull out his heart and eat it.

Chapter One

There is No...

Fitz needed a beer. In fact he needed several beers, but he wasn't sure he would get away with that, with the clients due to arrive at any minute. Anji would go mad if she found out, never mind his supervisor. But he couldn't face staying here any longer: the bland, turn-of-the-century look of his hotel room was making him stir-crazy. The low wooden table, the pale rugs, the mirror-fronted wardrobe made of shiny white plastic, the glass bowl on the table with plastic grapes. This could be London, 2003, or it could be New York, 2003, or it could be Singapore, 2003. The fact that it was mid-Western America in 1852, when the place ought to have been full of pastoral Native Americans and fur traders, with the Wild Wild West just getting going, only made it even more dispiriting.

He looked down at the shapeless blue-and-yellow uniform with the Good Times logo blazoned on the lapel. He even had a name tag, 'Fitz Kreiner', with a little smiley face on it, perhaps in case he didn't feel like smiling at the customers himself. He fingered the cheap, hard-edged plastic and wondered if this had really been the best way to go about it. Getting the job had been hard enough. It was all very well for the Doctor to go on about infiltrating and researching. He didn't have to dress up in a suit and know about Excel 2000 when he'd been abducted from the world twenty years before the spreadsheet was invented. Anji didn't have a problem. She was used to wearing suits, used to smiling in the right places, used to talking the right kind of bull to get you the job, and, most important, used to Personal Computers. She'd sailed through. The girl doing the recruiting had, if anything, seemed puzzled that a person with Anji's CV should want to work for an outfit like Good Times at all. Fitz – even with the assistance of some fake qualifications – had nearly muffed it. Seriously, how was he supposed to know about word-processing and spreadsheets? What did they have to do with taking tourists to visit ancient Egypt, or the Wild West, anyway? Eventually, with the help of a few hints from Anji, he'd managed to bluff and flirt his way into the pool of sheepish-looking people who'd been accepted.

'They're desperate,' Anji had muttered.

After twenty-four hours on the job, Fitz could see why. If there had been any romance or glamour attached to this sort of time travel, it had disappeared long ago. The time-travel machines were bare silver cylinders without windows, and the 'timeport' looked just like an airport, complete with delayed flights, echoing announcements and bored and screaming children. The pay was four pounds an hour, which sounded a lot to Fitz, but Anji reliably informed him it was lousy in 2003, no more than the legal minimum. As for on-the-job perks, all Fitz had seen so far was a company pager each, one small van (for supervisor's use only, except in emergency) and a single motor scooter between them. If Anji hadn't used one of the Doctor's credit cards to hire herself a flashy yellow car at the timeport they'd have had to come here in a taxi. She'd also used the cards to buy them each a mobile phone and a hand-sized video camera – a little blue and silver thing that looked like something out of a spy movie, but which Anji assured Fitz was used routinely by tourists and wouldn't be even slightly suspicious.

For about the tenth time Fitz looked at the briefing notes in front of him, neatly laid out in a blue plastic folder. He'd filmed each page carefully with the tiny camera, feeling rather stupid. The listed destinations were represented by codes, with a name and date attached to each: AR501, Nero's Rome; AC624, Mandarin China. This one was WW486/7, the American West, mid-nineteenth century. The bright-faced woman who'd given them their three-hour Induction Training at the hotel had been quite definite about the contents of these folders: whatever the code, whatever the destination, the 'holiday experience' had to be exactly the same. The almost infinite variety of human histories was being packaged like varieties of breakfast cereal (yes, the woman had actually said that), different enough to cater to different tastes, but all manufactured to the same high standard.

'Manufactured,' muttered Fitz. That was the key word. He remembered the Doctor's face in the TARDIS, crumpling, amused and disturbed at first as he watched the almost identical collections of concrete towers and souvenir shops on the scanner screen, then hardening, angry, and finally, without expression. He hadn't let on what he'd been thinking, but it was clear that far from having put history to rights by his drastic intervention to stop Watchlar and the Eternines, he had failed totally. Things were much, much worse.

Fitz shook his head. He almost wished he'd stayed in Totterdown. He'd had a good job there, known some good people, and the beer was great. After a while perhaps he wouldn't have had any worries.

OK, after a while he might have ceased to exist altogether, but perhaps best not to think about that. . .

He definitely needed that beer, and quick, before the tourists arrived. He slung on his leather jacket over the featureless Good Times Inc. uniform, felt his mobile phone in the pocket. Good trick, that, being able to carry a phone around. He decided to give Anji a call, just to make sure it worked. Her posting had been the Oregon Trail, and she'd gone off with the party at lunch time.

Before he could work out which button to press, the phone rang, to the tune of the Beatles' 'Help!' Since only the Doctor or Anji were likely to ring him, Fitz had decided it was appropriate.

It was Anji. 'Meet me in the bar,' she said, without preamble. 'It's urgent.'

'Aren't you going to say hello?' Fitz wasn't really miffed: he recognised Anji's office-manager tone well enough. She didn't bother with greetings in that mood. And why wasn't she in Oregon?

'Fitz, when you meet me – oh, for Pete's sake just *hurry up*.'

The edge of panic in her tone got Fitz moving. He hustled out of his room and down the stairs.

The bar was as standardised as his room: plush plum-coloured carpet, fake-leather chairs, a steel counter in a style which he recognised as turn-of-the-century post-modern retro something-or-other. He almost didn't recognise Anji, though, sitting slouched against the steel with half a glass of mineral water in front of her. It wasn't the ill-fitting clothes, clearly not her own, nor even the fact that she looked tired and scared. She looked *older*. He could almost swear some of her hair was grey.

She looked at him over her shoulder, then stood up, spoke in her usual brisk way. 'Come on, we've got to get back to 2003.'

'Why? What's up? What about the greeting thing with the clients?'

Anji shook her head. 'I'll explain on the way.'

Fitz was beginning to feel annoyed. 'What was the point of spending two days getting the job and doing the training if I'm going to get myself the sack right at the beginning of the first assignment?'

She raised her eyebrows, looked around them at the three or four people in the bar who might be within earshot. He nodded, and she led him out through the door, out of the double doors of the lobby.

He stopped her there. 'Right, what. You've got to tell me.'

She looked back nervously at the hotel. 'We've got to get away from here.'

'Why? Is there a bomb?'

‘Worse than that.’ She was walking again. Fitz saw a silver taxi waiting, the late-generation petrol engine rustling gently. She gestured him in.

‘What happened to the hire car?’

She frowned at him.

‘The yellow hire car you got at the timeport this morning because you couldn’t be bothered to wait for a taxi.’

‘Sorry. Rather a lot has happened to me since this morning.’ She rolled her eyes in the direction of the taxi driver.

Fitz fell silent, watched the scenery swish past. Whatever was happening, it must be pretty bad if it wasn’t safe for a taxi driver to hear.

‘Oh, well, I don’t suppose I was cut out for the job anyway.’

Anji looked at him. ‘Don’t worry about it. I’ll tell you when we get there,’ she said. ‘Or at least I’ll try to.’

‘I don’t like these clothes.’ Fitz’s face was screwed up tight with irritation, his hand clenched over the tie half-tied on the collar of his white office shirt.

Usually Anji found this amusing, even charming – Fitz’s childishness, his lack of interest in anything that was routine, tidy or businesslike. Now she thought it was out of place. Way out. She felt her own hands clench and unclench, automatic, unstoppable, as if they belonged to another person’s body.

‘Don’t you ever think of anything outside yourself?’ she snapped.

‘What’s the point?’ He gestured over the vast rank of suits, the seemingly endless maze of wardrobe rails rising towards the roundelled walls. ‘We know what’s going to happen. It’ll all end happily ever after.’

His irony was out of place, too. ‘Be serious,’ she said; then regretted it. It was too much like what she would say – what she had said before when – what she might say if she hadn’t seen –

She felt giddy for a moment. She remembered Fitz’s uncomprehending expression out in the square in Jumpsville, his voice saying ‘Anji – stop messing about.’ Or had he said, ‘Be serious’, copying her? And she’d had to pretend not to know him.

‘Sorry.’ Fitz’s voice now was firmer, older. She looked up, saw that he was watching her. He looked down and began knotting his tie, inexpertly. Anji stepped forward to help him. Their hands touched for a moment. It wasn’t very reassuring.

‘What if...?’ he began. ‘I mean there must be some other way of doing this. After what happened to me in Bristol. What’s happened to the Doctor’s plan?’

Anji shook her head, avoided making eye contact. *I can't bear this*, she wanted to say. But she couldn't.

She tried to remember the last time she'd had a choice, a real choice that would actually make a difference. The vast clothing store seemed to fold in on her, like a Next warehouse painted by Escher, and the faint humming of the TARDIS in flight became sinister, oppressive.

With a slight popping sound, Fitz pushed a cufflink home. Anji smoothed her own charcoal-coloured jacket into place and they set off for the console room. Anji didn't want to see the Doctor, particularly, and was glad when they found the room empty, the central column on the console stilled. She checked the screens: they showed an office, steel and glass with a view of what she hoped was London in twilight. The yearometer showed 2003.

Good.

Anji flicked the door control, and led Fitz out into the real world.

What little was left of it.

Chapter Two

Happy Days

‘You should live your life in the best way you can. You don’t know what day the world will choose for you to die.’

The Martian’s twin antennae twitched slightly as he nodded. The deep grooves on the bony surface of his skull took up the sunlight from the open window. They looked like the canyon country of his native world in the famous Peter Scott picture: a polished russet with thin lines of black and green. His eyes, silver geodesic domes spotted with the ochre lichen of age, surveyed the plain red Formica top of the table he was scrubbing. He didn’t look up at Jack.

Jack, impatient, cracked his knuckles. ‘Does that mean yes or no?’

The Martian laughed, a sound like a saw biting metal. ‘You are not yet an adult, Jack.’ He turned with the cloth and sprayed a shimmer of polish on the front of the refrigerator, then began scrubbing. ‘You’re asking me for wisdom, but I’m a servant, a member of an inferior species –’

‘You’re the oldest person I know!’ And the most infuriating, thought Jack, but he didn’t say it. Mom had told him to always be polite to Martians. ‘And you’re not inferior!’

Sio’phut stopped polishing, turned his head on its pivot to stare at Jack. ‘Look at it this way. When your people came to Mars, we had a civilisation that had lasted a million years. We had ceremonies of negotiation. We had tiny, intricate machines that measured our water almost by the molecule. We spent entire seasons just setting out the pebbles in our courtyards so that they were in accordance with the traditions of a thousand generations of ancestors, and yet at the same time new. Your people had – what? Four spaceships, a couple of dozen oxygen tents, and a brace of assault rifles. It took ten years for you to all but wipe us out.’

Jack blushed. He wanted to say he was sorry, but he’d already learned that wouldn’t earn him the old Martian’s respect. He heard a motor outside, looked out of the window at the hard blacktop of the driveway: but the sound faded. It wasn’t his mom, not yet.

‘So the answer’s no? I shouldn’t use the machine? It would be a bad thing to do?’

The Martian’s big latticed eyes darkened from silver to amber, which was better than a laugh.

‘The answer’s “be careful”, Jack-o,’ said the Martian quietly. ‘Be careful, because nothing lasts for ever, and glory can turn on you.’

Jack nodded. ‘I’m going to try, anyway.’

Sio’phut turned back to the shining front of the refrigerator and began to polish it again. ‘Of course you are,’ he said.

Jack turned slowly and left the kitchen. He checked on his sister Sammy in the front room, but she was still asleep on the couch, her thumb in her mouth. His mom would be home in a few minutes. Sammy would be safe enough till then, with Sio’phut just in the kitchen. He tiptoed past her and out through the side door into the garage, then shut the door behind him as quiet as he could.

The garage wasn’t used for cars any more. His dad had built a double garage off from the house, so that he and Mom could have a car each. Jack had taken over this old one. It was an ordinary kid’s room, with posters of rocket ships and railway trains on the walls. There was a record player, a radio, even a black-and-white TV with the antenna wired up to the roof. Up against the opposite wall to the TV was a plain wood workbench, covered in electrical components, the resistors and capacitors sorted numerically, the wires in neat coils, the bigger stuff – valves, transistors, variable capacitors – laid out in plastic trays so that they couldn’t roll off. Several circuit diagrams in pencil were sellotaped to the wall above, and a soldering iron with its cord carefully coiled around the base hung from a hook.

Next to the workbench was the time machine. Jack couldn’t suppress the rush of pride every time he looked at it. This was something no other kid could do. It was nothing to look at, just a breadboard rig lashed to an old green armchair, with a car battery and a coil to get the voltage up for the valves. But he knew every wire in that circuit, every ohm of resistance and every pico-farad of capacitance. He could follow the trail of electrons along copper, the track of positrons along the saturnium coils of its QX No.4 valves.

It was his idea. He didn’t know how anyone could have missed it, but loads of people had. He’d been reading about the properties of QX No.4s and positron flow. The book had said that the positrons flowed *backwards* in time across the coils – just for a few hundred thousandths of a second. And he’d thought: *All I have to do is take that and amplify it.* He knew how to build an amplifier – he’d built his first push-pull two-stager when he was eight.

Now he was fourteen, and he'd built a time machine.

He sat in the chair, smelling its familiar old-cloth smell, checked the straps (a left-over car safety belt) and fitted them around his body. He put his hand on the cold smooth metal of the power switch. As he did so he caught a sidelong glimpse of himself in the shiny TV screen: a small, round-faced kid with freckles and short dark hair. An ordinary kid, as his folks kept telling everyone proudly, saying it as if *ordinary* meant *extraordinary*.

No. What his folks thought was what every kid's mom and dad thought, if they were any good. But a time machine meant extraordinary, no more questions asked.

A few seconds connected to the battery and the coil had enough power for the valves. Jack put his hands on the row of four plastic switches that controlled the power flow.

One – two – three –

The humming of the circuitry rose, not a brash loud humming like the machines in movies, hardly a sound at all. Jack's view of the doorway lensed as space-time warped. His image in the TV screen fuzzed and vanished, bent out of the edge of his vision.

Jack felt the fourth switch under his hand. It was the red one. The final amplification stage. So far he'd travelled back in time about two and a half seconds – long enough for him to know it was working, but not long enough to be very interesting. The final circuit provided the real power, boosted the interval to a hundred and fifty years. He'd thought about trying for a thousand – he could get enough power – but had decided that this was far enough. He could see the American wilderness just before the farmers came. He could see the bison, vast herds on the prairie instead of just a few standing around in the park. There would be Indians: he could find out if what Sio'phut had told him was true, about the whites deliberately wiping them out just like we'd done to the Martians, or whether his father was right and the Indians – and the Martians – had been no good anyways. He looked at the new valve, the bright solder on the mounting gleaming, barely cold.

He could have built a variable interval into the circuit, but he wanted to make sure he got back to the present when he reversed the polarity: what would happen if he tweaked the interval from a hundred and fifty to a hundred and forty-nine years, or a hundred and fifty-one? When he tried to get back he'd never get within a month of the day he left. The tolerances of the fixed capacitors and the valves were pretty good, but he knew that variable capacitors and potentiometers – which were his options for 'tuning' controls – were both

unreliable. A speck of dust could make it impossible for him to get home.

Even now, it was risky. If anything failed, there was no way back.

Still, Sio'phut had said 'be careful'. He hadn't said 'don't do it'.

Jack's finger pushed down the switch, and with a slight popping sound the world rippled into darkness.

Into light.

Darkness – light – dark – light – darklightdarklight –

Grey.

He thought he could see flecks of black moving inside it, like soot in smoke. He peered at them, leaning forward against the straps in an effort to see better. Some of them seemed to have shapes, like crystals – he wished he'd thought to bring his dad's field glasses. He hadn't thought there'd be anything to see whilst he was actually travelling. Some of them were getting quite big, boulder sized – then bigger still, like drifting mountains.

Jack felt his fists clench on the familiar cloth of the chair arms. If there was anything that big he was in trouble. What if he got hit?

There were lights on the drifting things now, bright pinpoints that sent dazzling rainbow discolorations through the grey like a bow-wave. Jack's machine began to jolt and rock like he was on a fairground ride. A vast shadow moved in the grey light, rippled into form, and revealed itself to be a building – a blue, silent building, with cathedral windows and a blue light flashing on top. For a second the light seemed to envelop him. Jack stared. Obviously he *wasn't* the first person to invent time travel! But it didn't look quite human, somehow – perhaps there were aliens who could travel in time.

Perhaps the Martians – no, surely not. Sio'phut would have known about it.

Bang!

The near-at-home sound made Jack jump – he saw one of the valves had blackened, the element burned out. The others were glowing far too brightly. Another burned out as he watched, then the last two died simultaneously.

The blue cathedral-building and its light were gone, and with it everything except a grey, empty mist. The time machine was twisting, as if it were an airplane, falling out of the sky without power. *I should have listened to Sio'phut*, thought Jack. *He was warning me, not egging me on. I'll never get home now.*

There was a bone-jarring impact, and Jack became aware that the chair wasn't moving any more, it was stuck at a slight tilt. There was a wind on his cheek, and he could smell fresh dry air. Ahead were electric streetlights, and the neon sign for what looked like a bar. It wasn't home, but it didn't seem dangerous, and he wasn't hurt, just shaken up a bit.

Five minutes ago this would have felt like he'd failed – whatever had happened to him, this obviously wasn't 1850, and the machine was broken. But 'failure' felt like 'survival' now. Maybe the machine hadn't worked properly at all. Maybe he was just down the road from home. Right now that would be good.

He undid the straps and got out of the chair, and almost fell on his face. He was on a grass-covered bank by the side of a road – a good, honest, blacktop road with a white line down the middle and streetlights. A car – no, a bus – was thrumming along the road towards him, its headlights bright. He stepped back on to the verge, and watched as it passed slowly. It was big, and silver, and quieter than the buses he knew. A couple of kids waved at him from windows that had neat little blue drapes. A woman in a lemon-yellow dress frowned at him. Then the bus was past, its tail lights red. He saw the orange tell-tale of the indicator, saw it turn in beside the neon sign. He looked at the wreck of his time machine, the straps trailing from the chair like the legs of a dead spider, sighed and set off after the bus. He wasn't home, or at least not anywhere he recognised, so he'd better find out where he was. These people should know.

It took a couple of minutes to walk to the bar. Jack could see the name now, picked out in blue and pink neon: 'Club Apache'. It looked like a sleazy nightclub, the kind of place his dad had told him to stay clear of. But there had been kids on the bus, so it was probably OK. He turned into the spur road where the bus was parked and saw the driver helping an old lady down the last step. As he got nearer, Jack saw the writing on the back of the bus in the lights from the club:

GOOD TIMES, INC.
TIME TRAVEL TOURS
OAKSVILLE, LOUISIANA

Time travel tours...?

Jack pinched himself. He didn't think he was asleep, not really, but this was impossible. There was no time travel, except his machine. OK, someone else might have already invented it in secret and he didn't know, but they'd hardly be running time-travel vacations without the whole world having heard about it. But here they were. Someone was organising secret vacations? It didn't make any sense.

Jack thought of going back, but remembered the burned-out valves. At the very least he would have to replace those. Anyway, he needed to find out what

was happening here. His heart thumping, Jack advanced towards the bus. No one took any notice of him. He walked past some of the people standing around with their cases. The bus driver was talking to a tour guide. There was a little stone bridge over a stream leading into the Club Apache. Jack went across, through a door which opened of its own accord in front of him (was he in the future? But how?). He found himself in a pine-walled lobby with a plush purple carpet. A rack of glossy colour brochures was against one wall. He picked one at random. The cover showed a rose-lit pyramid with fireworks going off above it and a gold-and-blue mask like Tutankhamen's.

THE SPLENDOUR THAT WAS IS...

EGYPT

YOU choose the period!

YOU choose the locations!

Jack flicked open the brochure, looked at the choices. The Valley of the Kings (2500 BC) – Alexander's Empire (330 BC) – Anthony and Cleopatra (34 BC). There was no doubt that these people meant business. He turned the page, saw an advert for a burger joint, McDonald's. Underneath the image of a sizzling burger for a dollar ninety was the strapline 'Now open in Giza/2500, Alexandria/330 and Cairo/2500/34!'

The numbers had to be the dates. But how...? Jack picked up another brochure. It was just the same, but the attraction was Tudor England. 'Visit the Home of the Rose – 1580 AD from only \$299!'

It seemed expensive. The components for his machine had cost less than five dollars, and most of that had been the valves. He supposed laying down roads and lights and burger joints explained the rest of the money.

'We did Medieval England last year. It was boring. And smelly.'

Jack jumped. He hadn't noticed that the lobby was filling up behind him. He turned, saw a small girl in what looked like a vest with something written on it, cowboy jeans and tennis shoes on her feet. She was about twelve, and was holding hands with a boy of about five wearing clothes that looked the same. Behind her, the other passengers from the bus were milling around.

'Hey, are you OK?' asked the girl.

'I'm fine,' Jack said, staring at the vest. The writing on it said 'FatBoy Slim'. It didn't make any sense.

'We're going to do Egypt next year.'

She had an English accent, Jack realised. Or perhaps East Coast: he always got them mixed up. And why was she wearing a vest in the lobby?

'Are you sure you're OK?' she asked.

'I – yes. We were going to do Egypt too.' He wondered why he'd said that. Now she was going to –

'Which period? I think the Tutankhamen one's fascinating myself.'

'Uh – yes.' He tried desperately to think of something he knew about Tutankhamen. A violent drumming started, quite suddenly, so loud that it seemed to be shaking the floor. The girl took no notice at all, so Jack decided he'd better try to go on with the conversation. '1400 BC wasn't it?'

'That's right! They've got a five-star hotel in that period now. We usually go five-star but this time –'

'Ladies and gentlemen!' It was the tour guide. He spoke into a microphone, his voice booming above the drums. He was English too, by the sound of his voice. 'Welcome to the nineteenth century! In a few minutes there will be an orientation session, but first we'd like you to meet – the Apaches!'

An inner door burst open and an Apache warrior in full battle-dress burst in. The crowd jumped back, then, as the man smiled and began whirling a very fake-looking axe around his head, they began to clap in time with the drums. The 'warrior' gestured them towards the open doors beyond the lobby. Jack could see a swimming pool, and a stage with some very big loudspeakers.

The girl was laughing and clapping. With her free hand she grabbed Jack's arm and dragged him towards the inner doors. 'Come on!'

In the background, somebody began playing a trumpet. Jack couldn't see a trumpeter on stage – perhaps it was recorded?

But the tour guide had said it was the nineteenth century!

Suddenly Jack realised how all this might be happening.

'Are you from the future?' he asked the girl.

'What?'

Jack realised that the question didn't make much sense, so he rephrased it. 'What year are you from?'

'What year is it? 1852! Didn't you read the brochure?'

'No! You!' He pointed at her. 'What year?'

She frowned at him and moved away.

They were through the doors now. Four men were on stage, the Apache, a cowboy, but bizarrely also a policeman, a construction worker, a sailor and a man wearing an odd leather costume which looked a bit like a racing biker's.

They pointed out at the crowd, started singing, 'Young man, there's no need to feel down...'

Despite the gleeful tune, Jack was beginning to feel very ‘down’ indeed. His young companion had bounced off into the crowd, still holding on fiercely to her kid brother. Everybody else seemed to be dancing, except a few of the older folks who were watching from the sidelines. A banner above the stage, in blue paint on a pale wood, said ‘*Sponsored by Microsoft.*’

Who were Microsoft? Another time-travel company? Surely these weren’t real Apaches – or if they were, they’d stopped being warrior tribesmen a while ago. And the music was far too loud. Jack’s ears were ringing. He backed away through the crowd, confused. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned, saw the woman in the lemon-yellow dress from the bus. Close up, she looked older. The skin on her face was dry, her eyes grey, like pebbles. Her hand pinched his shoulder.

She led him into the relative quiet of the lobby, then, before he could think about objecting, into a small room behind the cash desk. There was an odd sort of typewriter on the desk, flat, without any paper in it, with a wire leading to a TV. A half-empty paper cup of coffee sat on a painted windowsill. The blind was open: Jack could see a small moth climbing up the window against the black night outside. A man sat behind the desk, a big man with dark eyebrows and dark glasses. His suit looked casual, but his manner was tense.

Nobody spoke for a moment. ‘Why am I here?’ asked Jack. This was too much like an arrest to feel comfortable.

The woman replied. ‘I saw your rig from the bus window. You need to be careful, you know. Homemade time machines are dangerous things.’

Jack couldn’t contain his curiosity. ‘You mean you have other sorts?’

‘Where do you come from, kid? Mars?’ She sounded amused.

Jack began to get annoyed. He was sure that wherever he was it was still America. These people didn’t have any right to just pull him in like this. If what had been done was illegal – well, they could tell him about it. He could apologise. Then they could take him home.

‘Jumpsville, Ohio, ma’am. I’m an American citizen.’

‘What year?’

‘Two thousand three.’

‘And – let me guess – you never heard of time travel up to now?’

Something in the tone of her voice – a slight hardening, as if she might have to do something unpleasant – set off alarm bells in Jack.

‘Well – kind of. But I’m the first kid in Jumpsville to actually build a time machine.’

The first in the world. But he was no longer so proud of that. Or so sure about it.

The woman nodded slowly, glanced at the man, who shrugged.

'You'd better come along with us. What's your name?'

Jack. Jack Kowaczski.'

'Mine's Lieutenant Grania Flynn. And this is Sergeant Jim Lamarra.'

'I guess I'd better get back to my machine now,' Jack said. 'I mean, I've proved it works. I should be going home. I don't want to interfere –' He remembered about the burned-out valves, but at the moment he just wanted to get away from these people. Perhaps there were other people here who could help him.

Jack wasn't surprised when Lieutenant Flynn shook her head. 'Your machine's probably burned out, Jack,' she said. 'And those homemade rigs are always one-way tickets. You go back in time, you change history. Every time. It's the first rule of the universe.' She squeezed his arm, not painfully, but hard. 'And I'm sorry to tell you this, Jack, but all the other rules are worse.'

They had a car outside. It was silver, and it looked strange. The body was curved as if it had been made in a jelly mould, more like a four-wheeled spaceship than an honest-to-goodness car. They put Jack in the back seat and locked the doors on either side of him. Sergeant Lamarra drove.

The road widened after a while, became a two-lane highway with strip lights overhead. It was busy, lots of buses and the jelly-shaped cars, most of them silver, a few black.

'So you're from two thousand three?' asked Flynn. 'Who was President in '74?'

Jack thought for a moment. 'Bob Heinlein, until the election. It was his second term.'

'You mean Robert Heinlein? The science-fiction writer?'

Jack frowned. Had Heinlein written anything? He couldn't remember. 'No, he was General Heinlein before he was President. He was the one who conquered Mars.'

Lamarra spoke for the first time. 'God, this one's way out. D'you think we should –'

'No. There's no point. There are too many of them.'

'But we need to know why it's happening.'

'No we don't.' Flynn glanced at Jack in the mirror. He saw her eyes there, still with that speculative frown. He wondered what they were talking about.

'Were there any Martians?'

Then Jack got it. Their history wasn't the same as his. They'd never had a President Heinlein. And – 'You mean you've never been to Mars?'

There was a slight pause, then Flynn nodded. Lamarra said, 'Of course. We sent automatic probes. But there weren't any Martians. There couldn't possibly be, except bacteria, maybe.'

Jack swallowed. 'You mean you're from a different possible – a different –' He'd thought about this happening, but it had always made his head spin. In the end he'd just decided it was impossible. Now he wished he'd thought about it some more.

'The word's "timeline",' said Flynn. 'And you're the one who's different, by the way. Did you really meet a Martian?'

'Uhh – we employ one. To do the cleaning.'

'Oh my Go-o-od!' Lamarra seemed genuinely amused. 'The boys at the lab are going to love this one!'

The car jolted under him, and Jack saw that the road had changed. This was more like the roads he would have expected in 1852: a rough mud track with stones on either side, curving between thin white trunks of pines. He stared between the flickering branches, hoping to see a glimpse of a real Apache, at least a tepee or log cabin.

After a couple of minutes' driving in silence, Jim Lamarra spoke again. 'What you've got to realise about these timelines, Jack, is that only one of them can survive in the end. It's like companies, or countries, or Red Indian tribes. The one that stays in business has to be the smartest, strongest, fittest. Has to have the most fun. That way, you get the greatest good for the greatest number. See? The greatest good for the greatest number. You don't go worrying about all the little numbers –'

'Shut up, Jim.'

'I'm just telling him, aren't I? What's wrong with that? He's got to know.'

'No he hasn't. Shut up.'

'I'm just telling him he doesn't have to worry about the numbers.'

'Stop the car,' snapped Flynn.

Jack was glad she'd said that. The way Jim Lamarra was talking was frightening him – it was almost like he was nuts.

The car stopped, too quickly, throwing Jack against the seat in front.

The doors opened. Flynn beckoned. 'Come on, kid. Get out.'

Jack got out, stared around at the empty forest in confusion. Had they stopped here just to have a quarrel? 'Where's the lab?'

'Just kneel down, Jack.'

Kneel?

Then he realised. Realised just before he saw the gun in her hand. He turned to run, but hit a barrier – Lamarra. He struggled, but it was no use. A rough leather glove covered his mouth, strong arms forced him face down against the hard, dusty mud. He felt cold metal against the back of his neck, felt the mechanism move as the safety catch was released.

A huge force slammed his head against the ground. He could see a dark tide spreading against the mud. With a dull shock, he realised it was his own blood.

This can't happen to me, he thought, I'm an American.

And died.

Chapter Two

Happy Days are Here Again

‘You should live your life in the best way you can. You don’t know what day the world will choose for you to die.’

The Martian’s twin antennae twitched slightly as he nodded. The deep grooves on the bony surface of his skull took up the sunlight from the open window. They looked like the canyon country of his native world in the famous Mary Scott picture: a polished russet with thin lines of black and green. His eyes, silver geodesic domes spotted with the ochre lichen of age, surveyed the plain yellow Formica top of the table he was scrubbing. He didn’t look up at Jack.

Jack, impatient, cracked his knuckles. ‘Does that mean yes or no?’

The Martian laughed, a sound like a saw biting metal. ‘You are not yet an adult, Jack.’ He turned with the cloth and sprayed a shimmer of polish on the front of the refrigerator, then began scrubbing. ‘You’re asking me for wisdom, but I’m a servant, a member of an inferior species –’

‘You’re the oldest person I know!’ And the most infuriating, thought Jack, but he didn’t say it. Mom had told him to always be polite to Martians. ‘And you’re not inferior!’

Another laugh. ‘I’m the one polishing the refrigerator, you’re the one who’s invented a time machine.’

Jack cracked his knuckles again. He wished Sio’phut wouldn’t always avoid the subject like this. ‘It’s a big decision.’

‘Hmmm.’ (A single metallic tone, like a pipe from a tiny church organ) ‘Not really. It is a decision, yes. There are many, many decisions. The resulting paths always seem different. Yet they are also the same path, part of the greater road.’

Jack frowned. Sio’phut was being even more confusing than usual today. Perhaps that meant –

‘The answer’s no? I shouldn’t use the machine? You think it would be dangerous?’

The Martian's big latticed eyes darkened from silver to amber, which was better than a laugh.

'Not dangerous, Jack-o,' said the Martian quietly. 'I'm certain you'll succeed. But success may not be what it promises to be.'

Jack thought a moment, then nodded. 'Maybe. But I'm going to find out for myself.'

Sio'phut turned back to the shining front of the refrigerator and began to polish it again. 'Of course you are,' he said.

Jack turned slowly and left the kitchen. He checked on his brother Sam in the front room, but he was still asleep on the couch, his thumb in his mouth. Mom would be home in a few minutes. Sam would be safe enough till then, with Sio'phut just in the kitchen. He tiptoed past the kid and out through the side door into the garage, then shut the door behind him as quietly as he could.

The garage wasn't used for cars any more. His dad had built a double garage off from the house, so that he and mom could have a car each. Jack had taken over this old one. It was an ordinary kid's room, with posters of rocket ships and railway trains on the walls. There was a record player, a radio. He'd been saving up for a TV, but they were still too expensive for kids. Anyways, the time machine had to come first.

It was there, next to his workbench with its neat stacks of components and coils of cable. Jack couldn't suppress the rush of pride every time he looked at the machine. This was something no other kid could do. It was nothing to look at, just a breadboard rig lashed to an old wooden kitchen chair, with a car battery and a coil to get the voltage up for the valves. But he knew every wire in that circuit, every ohm of resistance and every pico-farad of capacitance. He could follow the trail of electrons along copper, the track of positrons along the saturnium coils of its QX No.7 valves.

It was his idea. He didn't know how anyone could have missed it, but loads of people had. He'd been reading about the properties of QX No.7s and positron flow. The book had said that the positrons flowed *backwards* in time across the coils – just for a few hundred thousandths of a second. And he'd thought: *All I have to do is take that and amplify it.* He knew how to build an amplifier – he'd built his first push-pull two-stager when he was nine.

Now he was fourteen, and he'd built a time machine.

He sat in the chair, smelling its familiar stale-wood smell, checked the straps (a left-over car safety belt) and fitted them around his body. He put his hand on the cold smooth metal of the power switch. A few seconds connected to the battery and the coil had enough power for the valves. Jack put his hands on

the row of four plastic switches that controlled the power flow.

One – two – three –

The humming of the circuitry rose, not a brash loud humming like the machines in movies, hardly a sound at all. Jack's view of the doorway lensed as space-time warped. He felt the fourth switch under his hand. It was the red one. The final amplification stage. So far he'd travelled back in time about two and a half seconds – long enough for him to know it was working, but not long enough to be very interesting. The final circuit provided the real power, boosted the interval to a thousand years. *A thousand years*. He would be able to see the Indians, long before the white men came. He would be able to warn them. Perhaps he would be able to find a way of warning the Martians too. He owed Sio'phut one, just for keeping quiet. He looked at the new, final-stage valve, the bright solder on the mounting gleaming, barely cold.

Jack took a deep breath. Sio'phut hadn't actually said 'don't do it'.

His finger pushed down the switch, and with a slight popping sound the world rippled into darkness.

Into light.

Darkness – light – dark – light – darklightdarklight –

Grey. He thought he could see flecks of black moving inside it, like soot in smoke. He peered at them, leaning forward against the straps in an effort to see better. Some of them seemed to have shapes, like crystals – he wished he'd thought to bring his dad's field glasses. He hadn't thought there'd be anything to see whilst he was actually travelling. Some of them were getting quite big, boulder sized – then bigger still, like drifting mountains.

Jack felt his fists clench on the familiar hard wood of the chair arms. If there was anything that big he was in trouble. What if he got hit?

There were lights on the drifting things, bright pinpoints that sent dazzling rainbow discolorations through the grey like a bow-wave. Jack's machine began to jolt and rock like he was on a fairground ride. He could see some things that looked like fish, or birds – time-travelling *animals*? But how?

Then one of the mountains was close – too close. Jack felt an impact, like he was in a car wreck. There was no light any more and he couldn't breathe – something was sucking the air from his lungs. Pain shot through his arms and legs. Desperately Jack reached for the power switch and tried to toggle it back, but it was as if his arm was clamped to the chair.

I should have listened to Sio'phut, he thought, *He was warning me, not egging me on. I'll never get home now.*

There was another impact, then no sound but the roaring in his ears.

* * *

Jack was hot, prickling with sweat, and his head and chest hurt. Was he ill? He was sitting in the chair in the garage, but it felt like he was in the sun. No – wait a minute – he'd travelled in time –

He'd travelled in time. Jack remembered the black mountains, the weird animals in what should have been emptiness, the air rushing out of his lungs – but he'd made it. *He'd made it!* He opened his eyes, saw blue sky, and green leaves. Cautiously, he got up. He saw row after row of green bushes, neatly tended, curving around the gentle slopes of hills. It didn't look like Jumpsville in any period of history he knew about. Was he in the future? But how? Had he got the polarity wrong?

He saw movement between the bushes, and realised that there were people. People in dark clothes, all around him, moving slowly. They were picking something – fruit? He took a step forward. There was something odd about the people – their faces were all wrong, pushed forward like – were they apes? No, not quite. But they weren't human either. One looked up, stared into his eyes for a moment with a look that wasn't human or animal. The ape-man face puckered in a frown.

'Er – hello,' said Jack softly. He took a step forward.

The ape-man jerked his face down and began picking leaves frantically.

'It's okay,' said Jack.

No response, but the pace of the leaf-picking became a little less frenetic. Jack took another step forward. The apeman retreated, bowed down, his face in his hands. Jack could see him clearly now: his body was short, slender, but he could see the muscles under the skin. The skin itself was a dark brown, almost black, with long silver hairs on all visible parts of his body. He wore a loose brown shirt and black shorts, and his feet were bare, and oddly shaped.

'You can get up,' said Jack, but the ape-man only shivered. Jack began to feel nervous himself. If the guys were this frightened, what did people round here *do* to them? He backed away slowly, then turned and trotted back to the time machine. He needed to power up and get out of here. He'd seen more than enough to know that it worked. He could get the answers to the mysteries later.

There was a rustle of leaves behind him, and a swift footstep. An arm went around his neck, a hand across his mouth. Jack struggled, tried to shout, but the hand only clamped tighter across his mouth.

'Keep quiet and I'll let you go.'

Jack stopped struggling. The hand moved away from his mouth, though the arm stayed around his neck.

‘Right. Now keep low. Don’t let them see you.’

Jack was half pulled down, but gently enough to allow him to keep his balance.

‘OK, we can talk now, but quietly, right?’ The voice had a strange accent, half American, half something else. African?

Jack nodded. The man shuffled around him. He was dark, but Latino, not African. Jack tried to smile. ‘Where am I?’

The man laughed softly, and kept laughing, and laughing, until Jack began to feel uncomfortable. He took in the strange grubby vest and shorts, noticed a long curved knife in the leather belt.

‘You don’t need to know where you are,’ said the man. ‘All you need to do is tell me how to work this thing. It is a time machine, isn’t it?’

Jack nodded, then saw the man’s greedy smile and wished he hadn’t.

‘It’s broken,’ he said, hoping it wasn’t true. Wherever this was, he needed to get out of here.

‘It looks good to me. I can’t see anything smashed.’

Jack shrugged. ‘OK, I’ll try to get it working. But I need to know where I am and what year this is.’

The man nodded. ‘Does 2580 BC make any sense to you as a date?’

Jack felt his heart lurch. It was nowhere near where he was meant to be. And how come the man was speaking English? There hadn’t been any English in 2580 BC – and how come he knew it was ‘BC’? You could only know that *after* 0 AD – or more likely after about 300 AD when the new calendar got invented. And *ape-men*?

But Jack couldn’t afford for the man to know he didn’t know what he was doing, so he nodded as if the anomalies meant nothing to him. ‘And where –’

The man started laughing again. ‘A coffee plantation, on the far side of the Great Ocean – hell, what do you guys call it? The Atlantis?’

‘Atlantic,’ Jack corrected automatically. He was still in America then. But this was a strange prehistoric America – coffee plantations, a modern-looking man who spoke English, who knew what a time machine was and was trying to steal one.

‘Are you an escaped convict?’ he asked the man, careful to be casual about it, as if he met people like that every day.

The man grinned. ‘More like a potential recruit into the fake Pharaoh game who worked out that becoming an Immortal One might be a health hazard,’

he said. 'But you've got the picture. I need out of this place, and I need it right now.' He glanced over his shoulder. 'Picking coffee beans isn't much fun, especially with ape-men for company.'

So he *had* seen it right! Jack felt his heart thump with excitement. Sure, this was dangerous, but it was a really wild adventure. And the man didn't seem so frightening now. Jack extended a hand. 'My name's Jack,' he said. Jack Kowaczski. Who are you?'

The man hesitated. 'Just call me Ak.' He didn't offer to shake hands. Instead he sat in the chair of the time machine. 'Come on, how does it go? They're going to notice I'm gone soon, and then we've both had it.'

Jack pointed at the switches. 'You push them back, to go back to my time. But I'll need to sit in your lap.'

'No you won't.' Ak was pushing the switches home. One – two – three –

Jack stared. The circuit was powering up.

'You can't leave me behind!'

'Why not? It seems safer than taking you with me.'

There was shouting behind them, and Ak pushed the fourth switch closed. Jack jumped on the machine, but was punched backwards with a force he hadn't expected. He tried to get up again, but the machine was gone. His clothes felt wet: he looked down, saw that they were dark with blood.

His blood. It was rushing out, like water from a tap.

He felt his knees give way, felt the prickle of hot earth on his face.

This can't happen to me, he thought, I'm an American.

And died.

Chapter Two

... And Again

‘You should live your life in the best way you can. You don’t know what day the world will choose for you to die.’

The Martian’s twin antennae twitched slightly as he nodded. The knurled buds on his almost flat skull took up the sunlight from the open window. They looked like the canyon country of his native world in the famous James Scott picture: a polished russet with thin lines of black and green. His eyes, silver geodesic domes spotted with the ochre lichen of age, surveyed the red-and-yellow check Formica top of the table he was scrubbing. He didn’t look up at Jack.

Jack, impatient, cracked his knuckles. ‘Does that mean yes or no?’

The Martian laughed.

Chapter One

... Alternative

Fitz needed a beer. In fact he needed several beers, but he wasn't sure he would get away with that, with the clients due to arrive at any minute. Anji would go mad if she found out, never mind his supervisor. But he couldn't face staying here any longer: the bland, turn-of-the-century look of his hotel room was driving him stir-crazy. The low wooden table, the pale rugs, the mirror-fronted wardrobe made of shiny white plastic, the glass bowl on the table with plastic grapes. This could be London, 2003, or it could be New York, 2003, or it could be Singapore, 2003. The fact that it was mid-Western America in 1852, when the place ought to have been full of pastoral Native Americans and fur traders, with the Wild Wild West just getting going, only made it even more dispiriting.

For about the tenth time Fitz looked at the briefing notes in front of him, neatly laid out in a blue plastic folder. He'd filmed each page carefully with the tiny camera Anji had bought for him, feeling rather stupid. The listed destinations were represented by codes, with a name and date attached to each: AR501, Nero's Rome; AC624, Mandarin China. This one was WW486/7, the American West, mid-nineteenth century. The bright-faced woman who'd given them their three-hour Induction Training at the hotel had been quite definite about the contents of these folders: whatever the code, whatever the destination, the 'holiday experience' had to be exactly the same. The almost infinite variety of human histories was being packaged like varieties of breakfast cereal (yes, the woman had actually said that), different enough to cater to different tastes, but all manufactured to the same high standard.

He shook his head. Bugger boning up, he'd done enough of that. He definitely needed that beer, and quick, before the tourists arrived. He slung on his leather jacket over the featureless Good Times Inc. uniform, felt his mobile phone in the pocket. Good trick, that, being able to carry a phone around. He decided to call Anji. Her posting had been the Oregon Trail, and she'd gone off with the party at lunch time.

After three rings, she answered, a brisk hello.

‘Thought I’d see how it was going.’

‘Fine. We’ve just been briefed on Health and Safety.’

‘In the wild west?’ But Fitz hadn’t really expected anything different: he’d received the same briefing.

‘Hold on – can’t talk now, I’ve got customers. Call you later. See you day after tomorrow!’ The phone went dead.

Fitz shrugged and glanced at his watch. It was half an hour until his customers were here. He pictured a large glass of beer with a foamy head, smiled and made his way down the stairs.

Chapter Three

A Day in the Life of the Time Police

‘Just kneel down, Jack.’

Kneel?

Then Jack realised. Realised just before he saw the gun in Lieutenant Flynn’s hand. He turned to run, but hit a barrier – Jim Lamarra. He struggled, but it was no use. A rough leather glove covered his mouth, strong arms forced him face down against the hard, dusty mud. He felt cold metal against the back of his neck, felt rather than heard the snick of the safety catch.

‘Stop!’ It was Lamarra who was shouting, right in Jack’s ear. ‘There’s someone coming!’

‘It’s too late!’ Flynn’s voice, shrill with panic. ‘We’ll have to kill him too!’

Kill who? thought Jack. Then he could hear it: the roar of a motorcycle engine, already close, getting closer.

‘We can’t do that.’ Lamarra’s voice was close to Jack’s ear. The gun was still on his neck, the leather glove across his mouth. It was hard to breathe.

The motorcycle engine stopped. ‘I should put those things down. I don’t think you can really kill an officer of Good Times Incorporated going about his lawful business.’ The voice was a new one, strangely muffled.

‘We could arrange an accident.’ Flynn. ‘Riding a motorcycle on this kind of road is dangerous, you know that?’

‘You’re well outside your authority. And anyway, I know what you do, and why, already. You think I’m stupid because I’m not a cop?’

‘You think I’m stupid because I am one?’

Jack had a weird sense that the stranger and Flynn were enjoying this game, almost as if they were playing out a script. Perhaps it was a script – perhaps the guns weren’t real –

He struggled to move, but Lamarra still held him firm against the hard earth.

A booted foot appeared in front of his face. The hand moved away from his mouth, the gun was gone from his neck.

'You can get up.'

The stranger's voice was no longer muffled. Jack stood, but was surprised to find that his legs would hardly hold him. He couldn't stop shaking. The stranger took his arm. He was wearing silver leather and a silver helmet, more like an astronaut than a motorcyclist. The visor was raised, showing a pale face which, after a moment's confusion, Jack recognised as belonging to the tour guide from the hotel.

'I'm Fitz, by the way,' said the guide. 'And you are –'

'I – I – I –' He could think, but he couldn't speak.

'It's OK,' said Fitz softly. 'You're in shock.'

Am I? thought Jack. He opened his mouth in another attempt to speak, but Lieutenant Flynn got there first.

'You shouldn't be talking to him,' she said. 'We're still going to have to kill him. You know the rules.'

'We'll see about that,' said Fitz. He guided Jack towards a motorcycle lying on its side in the mud. To Jack's surprise it wasn't big, no more than a scooter, like one of those Italian Vespas in the movies, only blue and yellow.

'You can't take him anywhere without my say so,' Flynn again. She sounded edgy. Jack wondered if she still had the gun in her hand, but didn't dare look round.

'We've already had the discussion about the legality of having me shot,' said Fitz. 'I haven't got time for any more of it now.'

He pulled the bike upright, lifted Jack up and put him across the back of the saddle. It was a double saddle, and Jack found that it was easy to hang on to Fitz's shoulders once he'd climbed aboard.

The engine started up. As they began to move, Jack thought he felt the gun on the back of his neck again. He almost let go, but made himself hold on. There couldn't be a gun. He could see the speedo, blue and silver like something out of Flash Gordon. They were moving at ten – twenty – thirty miles an hour. The trees were flashing by. There was the roar of the engine, there was the jolting of the road, there was the smell and petrol and the sting of dust. He was alive.

'How did you know they wouldn't shoot you?'

'I didn't.' Fitz looked younger out of his leather motorcycle costume, wearing just a rumpled check shirt and black cowboy jeans. He'd put on sandals instead of the boots. 'It's just a trick a friend of mine uses, that play-it-cool stuff. It usually works for him, so I thought it might work for me.'

‘Why were they going to kill me?’ Jack knew it was real now. *He had nearly died.* He was still terrified: the fear kept coming back, gripping his whole body in a fit of shaking. He hadn’t thought he was such a coward.

‘You’re from the wrong reality,’ Fitz explained.

‘The cop said that. He said that only one reality could win.’

‘Survival of the fittest.’

Jack swallowed. The shivers hit him again. ‘W-w-why –’

Fitz glanced at him. ‘They’re right. Only one reality can “win”. At least, my friend thinks so. More likely none of them will, the way things are going.’ He shrugged. ‘But killing people won’t help. They don’t understand half of it.’ He screwed up his face; it made him look like a kid. ‘But then, neither do I.’

Jack looked around. They were in a hotel room. It was ultra-modern, with a low wooden table, pale rugs, and a mirror-fronted wardrobe made of shiny white plastic.

Fitz picked up a glass bowl from the table and tried to pluck himself a grape. Then he grinned. ‘I forgot. They’re plastic. Like everything else here.’

Jack wasn’t interested in plastic grapes, and he didn’t think it was funny right now. ‘I just want to go home,’ he told Fitz.

Fitz looked away. ‘Well – hmm. That could be difficult.’

‘Because my time machine’s broken?’

‘No, Jack, because time’s broken. Your “home” probably doesn’t exist any more.’

Jack stared at Fitz. He looked shifty, his gaze on the wall behind Jack, or the ceiling above him, anywhere but his face. Jack realised he couldn’t trust Fitz either. Just because he’d rescued him from death didn’t mean that he had Jack’s best interests at heart. Hadn’t he, too, said that only one reality could win?

Jack began to shiver yet again. ‘I doh-doh-don’t w-’ He didn’t even know what he was trying to say.

Fitz stepped forward, put his hands on Jack’s shoulders. ‘Calm down!’

‘I don’t want this!’ shrieked Jack. ‘I wanted an adventure! I wanted to be a time traveller! I wanted to be famous!’

Fitz shook him, hard enough to hurt. ‘Stop that! Stop it! What you wanted doesn’t matter, it’s what you get – oh, shit, what’s the use.’

The swear word made Jack jump. ‘I’m sorry,’ he heard himself say, though he wasn’t certain why he’d said it.

Fitz shrugged and turned away. Again Jack felt he looked shifty. ‘How did you know they were going to – that they’d arrested me?’

'I keep my eyes open. I wasn't going to let something like that happen.'

Jack considered this. 'If you knew it was going to happen...' He stared at the small window, which had plastic shutters closed over it. 'Why do you work for them?'

Fitz shrugged again. He still had his back to Jack. 'I've got a mortgage.'

'A what?'

Fitz turned round, sighed. 'Debts. I need the money.'

Jack thought that was what he'd meant, but it didn't sound like the truth. 'W-we-we -' He swallowed, made himself say it, slowly. 'We have to be straight with each other, Fitz.'

A pause, long enough for Jack to start shaking again. Finally Fitz said, 'Sorry, OK. I'm working undercover.'

'Who for?'

Fitz laughed. 'If I could tell you who for I wouldn't be undercover any more, would I?'

'We have to be straight with each other,' said Jack doggedly.

'It's the friend I was talking about. He's a good man, Jack. You don't need to know anything else. I'm - well, I suppose you could say I'm a professional adventurer.'

Jack thought about this, still staring at the shuttered window. 'OK,' he said. 'I can wear that. I suppose.'

To Jack's amazement, Fitz winked at him. 'That's better!' he said. He looked at Jack properly for what seemed the first time. He frowned. 'Your clothes are a bit - noticeable. I'm going to have to get you some better ones.'

Jack looked down at his blue check shirt and shorts, the brown lace-up shoes on his feet. 'Noticeable?' Fitz's clothes looked more 'noticeable' - in fact they were rather shopworn.

'Just a bit.' He grinned, and pulled open the wardrobe. 'Come on, Jack. It's time to join the age of cool. I ought to be able to find a T-shirt that fits you - that'll be a start.'

Jack frowned. What was a tea shirt?

Jumpsville looked different in the morning light. Bigger, for a start. The concrete hotels went on for block after block, the roads were busy with tourists wearing crazy bright shirts and shorts. Some of the women were in what seemed to be their underclothes, on the top half at least - it made Jack squirm with embarrassment trying not to look at them.

Jack felt safe with Fitz now, despite the crazy clothes and the lack of complete explanations. The 'tea' shirt was another one of those vests, black, with a red Coca-Cola logo on it. He also wore a pair of cowboy pants, heavy and blue and scratchy, and sports shoes with floppy laces. It didn't feel comfortable, let alone cool in the warm morning sunshine, though Fitz insisted it was. But Jack was satisfied that wearing these clothes made him less visible to the likes of Flynn and Lamarra.

He looked down at the logo again. 'You mean people pay to sell stuff on their shirts?'

'In some realities, yes,' said Fitz. 'Frankly, I prefer the ones where they don't.' A pause. 'But then, I don't suppose we'll get a choice in the end.'

They were passing a souvenir shop: plastic trinkets, Indians, Cowboys, covered wagons. 'Aren't they serious about wanting to see history?' asked Jack. 'I mean, don't they want to go and see the Apaches out there –' He waved at a solitary, distant, misty hill, vanishing in a haze of heat and car exhausts at the end of the concrete street – 'rather than here?'

'Some of them do. But the majority want the same as they get at home, but with guaranteed sunshine and cheaper beer.' He turned to Jack and winked. 'They have my total sympathy, by the way.'

Jack remembered what Sergeant Lamarra had said. *The greatest good for the greatest number.*

'There's an Indian village in the plaza,' said Fitz. He waved ahead, but Jack could only see more traffic. 'They make leather goods and do sketches of the tourists in headdresses. Seems pretty pointless, I know. But it wasn't much different in the real world.'

'Is it real Apaches?' It didn't seem very heroic, or authentic, somehow, to make a living by selling things to tourists. Though he knew the Indians did it in the Reservations, and the Martians, the ones who weren't servants, did something like it on Mars.

Fitz glanced over his shoulder at him. 'It was "real" Apaches doing the stage show last night, Jack. It's worse than you think.'

Jack looked at the ranks of manufactured goods. 'But if you've got real Indians doing things like that, surely they're not going to be real Indians again. I mean, the whole of history would be different.'

'Exactly,' said Fitz. 'No one knows what history actually is any more. It's like EarthWorld – except that this time we've done it to history. My friends and I saw JCBs digging the foundations for the pyramids, mammoths wandering around in Tsarist Russia. At the warm-up the supervisor told us that 1890s

Brazil is full of dinosaurs.'

'Dinosaurs!' Jack had hoped to see dinosaurs, when he had a better time machine.

'Yeah. He seemed to think it was funny, but it's chaos. Dangerous chaos.'

'What sorts of dinosaurs?' persisted Jack. 'Is there a T Rex?'

Fitz ignored the question, and after a while Jack realised it was a pretty stupid one. He remembered the gun at the back of his neck, the snick of the safety catch. *Survival of the fittest.*

'How bad is it?' he asked at last. 'You say only one universe will survive?' He couldn't afford not to know.

'Yes,' said Fitz instantly. 'Well – maybe. That's what I've been told.' Jack opened his mouth to ask another question, but Fitz got in first. 'Don't expect complete answers, Jack. It's not even that I don't know what they are. There just aren't any, not any more.'

Jack didn't know what to say about this, so he didn't say anything.

They were coming into a sort of open market now, coloured canvas stalls, rounded, space-age-looking vans gleaming in the bright sunshine. He could see the Indians, one wearing leathers and a headdress, the rest in Fitz's 'cool' clothing. The stalls offered leather jackets, belts, moccasins, feathered head-dresses, wooden carvings of various animals. Despite Fitz's cynicism, Jack was fascinated. 'Can I take a closer look, Fitz?'

Fitz shrugged. 'Help yourself.' But before Jack could decide where to go first, Fitz stopped, stared across the market square, frowning.

'That's funny. She said she wouldn't be back till next week.' He broke off, shouted. 'Anji! Anji! Over here!'

Jack looked around, saw a dark-skinned woman staring at them. A tall, heavy man was walking away from her purposefully, pushing through the crowd. Jack was sure they'd been together a moment before. The woman came across to them and glared at Fitz. 'Sorry, and you are...?'

'Anji, it's all right. Jack's a friend.'

'What are you talking about? How do you know my name?'

'Anji – stop messing about.'

'I'm not messing about! Who the hell are you?'

Jack stared. She swore, she wore trousers, she wasn't white – what sort of woman was she? And why did Fitz think she was a friend? She'd been with that other guy, hadn't she?

'Come on, who are you?'

‘Ma’am, he’s a bit confused this morning,’ said Jack quickly. He didn’t want too much attention – a few people were already staring. Next the police would arrive. ‘He had an accident last night.’

The woman laughed. ‘Accident with a beer glass, was it?’ She stared Fitz in the face. ‘I’d still like to know how you know my name. I’m certain I’ve never seen you before in my life.’

‘Uhh – you’re my best friend? We’ve been travelling together for ages and ages?’

‘Oh, just drop it.’ The woman raised a hand, turned and walked away, ‘You’d better look after him, Jack.’

The way she said his name gave Jack a weird feeling.

‘Anji!’ bawled Fitz. He started to run after her.

Lots of people were looking now. Jack raced after Fitz, grabbed his arm. Thankfully, he stopped.

‘Fitz, we need to think about this. She might not have known you, but I think she knew me.’

Fitz glanced down at him. ‘What?’

‘It was the way she said my name. It was like we were friends. Me and her. But I’ve never seen her before – I sure would have remembered her!’

Fitz looked into the crowd, but Anji had disappeared. He shook his head slowly. ‘And I know her and she doesn’t know me and – oh, God, this is worse than I thought. I knew I should have made the Doctor stick with us this time. Jack, I’m sorry, but I need a beer.’

The lemon soda was clear, bubbly and sweet, and it should have cheered Jack up, but the cafe was hot, crowded and it smelled of sweat. In addition, Fitz looked miserable. He had a beer in his hand, in a chunky glass – it was his second, and it was almost empty. Jack wasn’t sure it was polite of him to drink so much in front of a kid.

‘You’re not getting drunk, are you?’ asked Jack when Fitz started his third pint.

Fitz stared at him. ‘Yeah, and all I need right now is a censorious boy from the land of Apple Pie and Cream.’

Was his voice a little slurred? Jack began to be afraid again.

Fitz must have seen it, because he grinned and said, ‘Sorry. I suppose I might as well tell you what I’m trying to do, since the Doctor’s gone missing and Anji doesn’t know me any more.’

Jack grinned back. He thought it was the safest thing to do. 'The Doctor? Is that the friend you were talking about? The one you're working undercover with?'

Fitz nodded. 'His plan is to get people together from the different periods in History – real people, native American chieftains, Pharaohs, Chinese and Roman Emperors – and have a conference where they all reject the time travellers.'

'How could they do that?'

'If there was united opposition from all periods of history, Good Times would have to pack up and go home. They're not in a position to use force.'

Jack just raised his eyebrows. 'So who did you rescue me from?'

'The Time Police. Not the same thing.'

Jack considered for a minute. It didn't make much sense. In fact, it didn't make any sense at all. There must be something Fitz wasn't telling him. Either that or he was making the whole thing up.

He leaned forward, muttered, 'You're sure the Time Police and Good Times aren't working together?'

'No.'

'And this conference stuff? You think it'll work? It sounds crazy to me.'

'Not really.' Fitz took a slurp of beer. 'I'm not even sure that the Doctor does. But the alternative is to do what the Time Police do – kill everything that's different.'

'So how are you going to get the folks together?'

'I get some. Anji gets some. The Doctor collects them all in the TARDIS, where they'll be safe from the Time Police and anything that happens to the vortex –' He shook his head. 'Hell, I barely understand this stuff myself.'

'I'll help you,' said Jack. He still thought Fitz's plan was lousy, but maybe they could think of a better one after they got started.

'You haven't got a time machine,' said Fitz.

'No. But I know how to build one. In this timeline. We could buy the valves in a shop –' He looked around, but couldn't see anything that looked like a hardware store, only endless concrete boxes full of garish holiday clothes and trinkets. Still, there had to be something, somewhere. 'Or we could steal a Good Times one,' he suggested.

'That's a possibility. If we don't mind being arrested and summarily shot.'

'Looks like there's a good chance of that right now,' Jack reminded him. He was pleased that he'd managed to say it without shivering or stuttering.

‘Anyways, it’s safer if I try to build one. We need a hardware store. Do you know if there’s one round here?’

Fitz stared at him.

‘A hardware store. For valves, electrics. And we can’t risk going back to my machine, I’ll have to start from scratch, so that means resistors, capacitors, wire, a breadboard, and I’ll need a couple of soldering irons, some solder and four QX Number Four valves. It’ll all cost about five dollars. Can you lend me that much? My dad’ll pay you back.’ Even as he spoke the last words, Jack’s heart began to sink. *My dad is dead no never existed and my mom and Sammy and Sio’phut.* . . He began to shiver again.

Fitz was talking, gently, slowly. Jack, the timeline that Good Times operate in is a bit different from yours. You won’t get valves here. You might be able to get the rest of the stuff – but probably not, not without going back to 2003.’

‘I may be able to help you there.’

A new voice. Jack looked up, saw a man, heavy, round-faced, alert and intelligent-looking. He was dressed as if for the American Revolution, with a long greatcoat, which hung open to show a waistcoat beneath. His gaze flicked over Jack, returned to Fitz.

Fitz was looking startled. ‘So *you* still know me, then?’ he asked the newcomer.

‘There is somebody who does not know you any more? Anji – perhaps the Doctor? I cannot say that this is a surprise to me. Your friend the Doctor has meddled once too often. The fabric of time is becoming raddled to the point of disintegration. Have you noticed the lie of the land around here?’

‘It’s you that’s doing the meddling,’ said Fitz.

‘The Doctor would have told you that, would he not?’ He looked at Jack. ‘I don’t believe I have the pleasure of your acquaintance, young sir.’

Jack glanced at Fitz, who nodded, and said, ‘My friend Jack.’

‘Not Jack Kowaczski of the town of Jumpsville, Ohio? The inventor of the Time Machine at age fourteen?’

Jack stared at the man, half expecting him to produce a gun, but he only laughed and doffed his hat. ‘Pleased to meet another one of you.’ He snickered again, then said, ‘I am sorry. A poor joke. My name, by the way, is Sabbath. But you will have heard of me if you have been with Mr Kreiner long.’ He turned back to Fitz. ‘Mr Kreiner, we must do something. Surely you realise that?’

Jack looked at Fitz. ‘I don’t know what’s happening here. I never saw this man before.’ But even as he spoke, he wasn’t sure of that. Hadn’t he been with the woman, Anji? Or had that been someone else?

‘Don’t worry, Jack. I do know Sabbath – and I do know he lies.’

Sabbath threw his hands up in the air, but before he could speak Fitz went on.

‘Or, it’s possible that Sabbath might have met you without you having met him, if what just happened with me and Anji is anything to go by.’ Fitz sighed, and finished his beer in one gulp. ‘I am doing something,’ he said to Sabbath.

‘You are acting on the Doctor’s instructions, I presume?’

‘He’s got a plan,’ said Jack loyally. He decided to keep his mouth shut about what it was, partly because he didn’t want to give it away and partly because he thought it was ridiculous.

‘Yes.’ Sabbath leaned forward and put a hand on Fitz’s shoulder. ‘Mr Kreiner, that plan has failed already. There is little point in trying to work out what Good Times have done to the nature of reality, when so little of reality remains.’

‘I can see a fair bit of it,’ said Fitz. ‘It seems OK to me.’

That’s not what you said a minute ago, thought Jack. But he said nothing, just watched the two men. They were staring at each other like angry cats, or perhaps Sabbath was a dog, a big dog like a mastiff, and Fitz was a cat, a wily little cat with slitty eyes and an arched back and a waving tail.

‘The Doctor is dead,’ said Sabbath.

‘Rubbish,’ said Fitz at once. ‘You’re not going to catch me with that one.’

Sabbath handed over a piece of paper. It looked like it had been quickly torn from a newspaper, but the photo was in colour.

‘PHARAOH CHEOPS OF EGYPT DEAD’ screamed the headline. ‘Second Assassination in two days in TZE 2564 BC’.

‘What’s a TZE?’ asked Jack.

Fitz said nothing. He was staring at the picture, which showed the dead Pharaoh.

Jack tried to read the article, but could only see the section headers: ‘Zone Off Limits’, ‘Local Assassin Suspected’, ‘Time Travellers’.

‘You’ve faked it,’ he said to Sabbath. ‘This was another Pharaoh – I was even briefed about this when I started working for Good Times yesterday. Told what to do if anyone asked about it, you know the sort of thing.’

Sabbath said nothing, just pointed to the face in the picture. A nice-looking face, thought Jack, gentle even in death.

‘Come on,’ snorted Fitz. ‘Anji showed me how to do that on a computer. It’s not the Doctor and you know it and I know it, so stop messing about.’

‘Second assassination,’ said Sabbath quietly, pointing at one of the paragraphs. ‘Read it yourself. The Doctor decided to take Cheops’s place. I was

against it, because whatever our differences I need the Doctor at present. But –
'He shrugged. 'You know the Doctor, and how stubborn he is.'

'I still don't believe it,' said Fitz. But his voice was wavering.

'Perhaps you ought to at least check it out,' said Jack.

Fitz didn't appear to have heard him. He was still staring at the newspaper article. Then he frowned. "'...rumoured to have been Dr John Smith.'" A bit obvious, isn't it?

Sabbath nodded. 'I could have "faked" the whole article. Of course. But what would be the point in it? I could kidnap you without any such flummery, if I wanted to. I would rather have your help. The situation is desperate, and remains desperate. You know that full well. We no longer have the Doctor, or the TARDIS, as you see. However, there is the *Jonah*. She is less – interesting, but fully serviceable. With your help I may be able to do something.'

Fitz handed back the piece of paper, and Jack could tell from his face that he'd given in.

'I need to make a phone call first,' said Fitz. He felt in the pocket of his jacket, took out a small walkie-talkie unit.

Sabbath nodded, turned his back and watched the crowd. Fitz spoke briefly into the phone. He was probably trying to be quiet so Sabbath didn't hear; anyways, Jack didn't catch the words.

'What does it mean if the Doctor's dead?' he asked Fitz quickly when he'd hung up the phone.

Fitz didn't immediately reply. 'I hate to think. I bet – I *hope* it isn't true.' He stood up, and slapped Jack lightly on the shoulder. 'Come on – like you said, we'd better check it out.'

Jack's mouth was dry. As Fitz turned away, he took a quick sip of the man's unfinished beer, and grimaced.

Chapter Four

It's a Kind of Magic

The blue-green moon was huge, and close to the horizon. The ghostly rings around her looked as if they touched the ground.

'It's as if you could walk there,' said Aykesh.

Iyeeye nodded, but didn't reply. She was tired, her bag heavy with its load of tubers and seeds, the leather strap biting into her shoulder. In the dry smell of the night, the taint of the Others was strong. Were they here, gathering people in the same way as Aykesh and Iyeeye had been gathering plants? It might not be safe to talk. But Iyeeye hadn't the energy to shush Aykesh either.

'Etineyu says you could walk to the Moon once, before the worlds parted.'

Iyeeye didn't think so, but refused to return to this old dispute. The two women had gathered together since before Aykesh had married. Iyeeye had been the child then, thin, tough, wiry; Aykesh the willowy, earth-sensitive woman, showing her the best places to dig, the right times to pick the seeds and the nuts, the fruiting-places in the damp gullies. Aykesh had always wanted to talk about the Old Worlds, the magic, the legends. Iyeeye had always doubted – the stories sounded obvious, childish, things that people like Aykesh wanted to believe rather than things that were actually true.

Now, with Aykesh swollen-bellied, almost ready to bear her first child, she and Iyeeye had less in common than ever. Iyeeye knew the world needed more people to fight the Others, but, although she was almost fifteen and had been a woman two years, she had resisted marriage and the offers of men; she wanted to know the world better before she chose a father for her children. She wanted to hunt with the men, to track the taste and smell of meat across the dry plains by day, rather than grub at the ground in the cool of evening. A woman could learn the Hunt Magic, in theory, but in practice the need to bear children made it difficult. She had learned instead the Time Magic, which let her glimpse other worlds, worlds where high mountains towered above the plains, and strange beasts walked the lands. Worlds of green fog, and worlds of emptiness. Worlds without humans, and without Others.

'I'd like to find a world where there were people but no Others,' she said aloud.

That stopped Aykesh in mid-prattle. 'How could you do that? It's impossible to go to time-worlds where there are people. Everyone knows that.'

Not impossible, thought Iyeeeye, remembering her forbidden glimpse of the world of metal towers and stone ground, the world where trees grew in houses instead of outside, and lights came without fire. It had smelled of Others, and she hadn't dared stay. But it had been *there*. It hadn't been a Wish, or a Dream; it had been a World, and there had been people in it. Thousands and thousands and thousands of people, wearing thick, angular clothes. One day, she would find it again, forbidden or not.

A silence ahead disturbed her thoughts. She should have been able to hear the village by now: the dull tap of mortar on pestle, the crackle of fire, the mutter of voices, perhaps a shout from a child. She should have been able to smell the wood smoke, and the ripe steam from the cous-cous bowls, but all she could detect was the cold, metallic scent of the Others, stronger than ever now.

No human sounds. No human smells.

'Aykesh!' she whispered.

The older woman looked over her shoulder, stopped, clutched a hand to her belly. 'What?'

'Wait there!'

Iyeeeye moved past her friend, stepping silently through the rough grass, up the low earth ridge that protected the village. The smell of smoke was stronger – too strong – and there was –

'Oh *no-oo-oo!*'

Aykesh, from behind her. Iyeeeye saw it then: the shimmering bubble of an Other-shell, drifting as silent as the Moon itself, far above them. A crackling of grass as Aykesh pushed past her –

'No!' Iyeeeye's call was a harsh whisper. If Aykesh heard it she took no notice. She stamped on through the dry grass, shouting, '*No-oo-oo! Mamma!*'

There was a faint click, like two small pebbles touching in a busy stream, and a hissing sound. Iyeeeye smelled the faint mist of blood, and knew that the Others had not all left in the bubble above. Some were still on the ground, and one had just killed Aykesh.

Every nerve in her body was screaming at her to run, but she remained frozen, forcing herself to stand still, and to breathe, but as quietly as she could.

She heard Hartak's voice (Hartak who must have fought, and for all his wisdom and bravery must be dead by now, his scarred face without life, his body dismembered and bloodless). *'They don't hear well, they don't see well, especially in moonlight – if you're on your own you've got a chance. You just have to keep still. . .'* Iyeeeye kept still, as still as she knew how, until her legs ached and her head buzzed. When she had to move, she stepped backwards, without turning, one step at a time, like a cat avoiding a fight. After a dozen steps, she risked turning. After a hundred, she began to run, not fast, a gentle jog that she could keep up all night if she had to.

– killed, killed, killed her mother and her brother and her father and her sisters and the blood and the burned flesh and the stink of it, the killing –

No. She wouldn't think of it. She would just keep running. There was only one place to go that held any hope for her now.

It was almost dawn, and the Moon had set. The stone circle was dark and silent, the square megaliths vague patches of greater darkness in darkness. As ever, they gave Iyeeeye no comfort. They weren't meant to be comforting; they were functional, no more, no less.

'Iyeeeye!'

A whisper, no more. It had to be –

'Areene?'

'They came, didn't they?' The Time Priestess spoke aloud now, her voice weary and a little frightened. Iyeeeye saw her pale skin and hair, shapeless like ghost-flesh in the darkness. She must have been hiding behind the great rock that stood behind the stones, a rock she said had fallen from the sky in the days of the legends.

'I warned them. I saw it this morning.' Iyeeeye knew that Areene meant she'd Seen the killings in the stones, as a Wish or a Dream. There'd been a lot of false alarms, and Iyeeeye wasn't surprised the village men hadn't listened to Areene this time. Iyeeeye probably wouldn't have taken much notice herself. She found it difficult to take the Time Priestess seriously, with her matted hair and her ancient, muddy leather costume. A single gold bracelet, dull with age and twisted out of shape, proclaimed her office. For years Areene had watched over the stones, and meditated, and Dreamed and Wished and Seen. Very little of it had come true. When Iyeeeye had started to do it for herself, she had quickly discovered why. It was almost impossible to distinguish the phantoms in her own head from the realities the stones showed her – and Areene made no attempt to do so.

Iyeeye did, and walked on strange soils. Once, she had almost drowned in a deep black cold ocean – or perhaps a river – that had swept her away, so far that when she had returned she'd been half way back to the village, and level with the tree tops. The branches had broken her fall, and she'd dried off in the sun, and said nothing to anyone, not even Areene. A stork's nest, she told her father, to explain the scratches and bruises. She'd tried to harvest the eggs, and fallen.

'What are we going to do?'

Areene's voice brought her back to the present.

The Others. The *killing* –

Don't think of that.

'I'm going to See,' she said. 'I'll find a place where we can get help.' She didn't really think she'd be back, but she knew Areene couldn't follow her, and wanted to leave some comfort for the woman. As an afterthought she added, 'Go to Heneyeye, they will welcome you there.'

'No! The Others will come there too! I have Seen it!' The Priestess's voice trembled.

It was possible, but not likely. The Others seemed to treat people as a crop, to be harvested; having cleared one village they were likely to leave nearby ones alone for a while.

'I think you've Dreamed, not Seen. I've Seen nothing. And you can't stay on your own here.'

'If you had been here you might have Seen –' Areene stopped. 'Sorry.'

Iyeeye closed her eyes, clenched her fists, felt the anger wash over her, out of her. There was no point in being angry with Areene, or with herself. If the Others came to harvest a village, hiding was no help. She would never have got away now if there had been more than one sentry left behind. With a proper warning a few more people might have escaped as she had –

– *her mother and her brother and her father and her sisters and the blood* –

No. They would have returned. They would come back now, for her, and they would wait for days.

'Wait until dawn, at least,' said Areene. 'I don't want to be here on my own.'

'No waiting,' said Iyeeye briskly. 'It's getting light already.' There was no real light, but the stones were darker now, and it was because the sky was less dark. 'You should head for Heneyeye. You know the Others will wait at the village.' She walked to the middle of the stones, felt the neutral soil turn to cold rock. She sat down cross-legged, closed her eyes.

'Iyeeye. Please –'

‘Go quickly, Areene.’

A pause, then the woman at last seemed to accept it. ‘Good luck, Iyeeye.’

But Iyeeye could barely hear her mentor’s voice. The Grey was closing in as her mind began to move her through Time. *Forward*, she thought, *forward forward forward* –

The world jolted as Iyeeye fell on to hard rock. She opened her eyes, saw that the world had indeed changed. The Moon was out again, and the night felt younger, still warm. But the normally blue-green face of the Goddess had turned silver, as if She had been washed by death. The stars were fewer, more sterile, and none of them moved.

She concentrated on the stones, still towering unchanged in a circle around her, their carved rectangles pale in the altered light. *Take me back*, she wanted to say. *I want the world I understood, even if it was dying*. But nothing happened, and Iyeeye knew that it was because she didn’t really want it to. She had no choice but to go on. She wanted none of Areene’s weakness and cowardice.

The sky changed again, becoming dark; after a moment’s near-panic, Iyeeye realised that it was only a cloud passing over the face of the Moon.

No. It was more than that. She could see lights in the distance now, lights like those of the Others. Were they here, too? Was there no time, no land, where they had not conquered?

Iyeeye wailed aloud. There was no hope, then. No escape. She no longer felt like an adult, a woman of fourteen years, but like a child, lost without its mother.

A sound: breathing. Not Others, then. They did not breathe.

Iyeeye held her own breathing still, listened. She heard a faint creak of soil. A slight gasp: a human sound.

People.

These are still the Stones, she thought. This is still a holy place, in this different time. Any person will respect that.

‘I am Iyeeye,’ she whispered.

Another faint gasp, then the sound of footsteps, heavy, shockingly incautious, retreating. Could it be Areene? Had the old woman followed her after all? Her eyes had adapted to the dim light: she could see low bushes, and a stand of forest that had been cleared in her time, a darker blotch in the dark night.

‘I have come for help! Are there Others here?’

Silence.

She closed her eyes, wished a prayer to the now-dead Moon, and set off after the sounds that she could still hear, cracklings of twigs, swishing of branches.

An unintelligible shout, and a reply. A man's voice: certainly not Areene, then. Probably of this world, speaking a different language. Iyeeeye froze her body, imagining that she was a lion, waiting in the tall grass, waiting, waiting...

More shouting, and crashing sounds as a man – no, two men – approached. She could smell them: men, and an odd scent like unguent – an Other smell?

Maybe. She made herself keep absolutely still.

Light. A strong light in her face. An Other light, lifeless like the new moon. Iyeeeye wailed again, waiting for death, for the cold cut of Other metal as it sliced her body apart. But instead hands gripped her arms – human hands.

More incomprehensible words. Iyeeeye took a breath. 'I am Iyeeeye of the village Tyeeene. I have the Time Magic. Who are you?'

The men – there were two of them, one holding each of her arms – exchanged some more words. It was clear they no more understood her than she understood them. But after a moment they let go of her.

Iyeeeye looked at the one not holding the light: she could see him more clearly. Old, about her grandfather's age, but fit-looking. His face was pale, even paler than Areene's, and his uncut stubble grey. His clothes were unusual, too, made from a fine fabric, but worn and dirty – was he a chieftain, a Priest? Had he been attacked, lost his status?

Silly questions. The sort of questions Areene would ask. Of course the people of this world would not be like those of hers. The rules of her village were not likely to apply. Nothing she knew could be relied on, except what she knew of the nature of people.

Thinking of that, she smiled, as wide as she could, and met the eyes of the man watching her. She slowly pointed at her chest, said 'Iyeeeye.'

The man scratched his head, then pointed at himself. 'Bob.' He smiled too.

Iyeeeye felt her heart throbbing with relief. There were no guarantees, but it seemed unlikely they would hurt her. They had let her go, they had listened to her name.

Bob was shuffling about in his pockets. At last he produced a small, dark square of animal hide. He unfolded it to show delicate leaves, as white as clouds, patterned with black threads. He showed her one leaf, different from the others because it was covered with many colours. The pattern was meaningless, random as an infection on the skin of a fruit. She frowned at it. Bob was trying to tell her something – but what? Was this thing holy?

She shook her head, hoping the gesture would be understood.

The man said something to his companion, who laughed. He walked away, then turned and beckoned Iyeeeye to follow.

She smelled the Other ahead before she saw it. It was bloated, and oddly still, but it had the smell and it had the silver colour. Iyeeeye froze, right in front of its eyes.

The men walked up to it.

No! She had heard there were people who were in league with the Others but this was not her world – was not –

Before she could think of running, the Other blinked with light, its eyes blazing as if caught in a lightening storm. It issued a high, ridiculous blip and made a metallic *chunk*, as if about to spring. Iyeeeye jumped sidelong, somersaulted, rolled into the safe darkness of bushes. She had seen enough to know that it wasn't an Other as she understood it – there was still a chance of escape. Perhaps it was slow.

The men were shouting. Iyeeeye began to run. She heard the Other growl, then roar. She ran, ran, ran as fast as she could, not straight back towards the Stones – they might guess that and be waiting for her – but around. She would go back later, if she could escape now, and she would try to find another world, where there were no Others. If such a world existed. . .

Behind her, the Other was still growling, its wheels racing on the earth, its light-filled eyes whitening the undergrowth and filling the air with long, shifting, shadows. Her legs began to wobble beneath her as her muscles ran out of energy.

– I have to keep going have to go have to have to have to –

She almost ran into the strange Stone.

She stopped running, confused. This was not here in her world – yet it was a Stone. It was taller than she was, solid and warm, the surface engraved with the familiar rectangles. But it felt smooth, too smooth, and seemed to be singing. Behind her, the light of the Other was fading, and its sound retreating. Had it missed the way? Had this strange Stone protected her? She closed her eyes, leaning on the Stone, which was oddly warm and had a blue tint. Slowly, her exhausted body recovered, her breathing slowed, and she could hear clearly the faint, constant song through the body of the Stone.

'Hello.'

The voice startled Iyeeeye again. She opened her eyes, saw a woman with long, straight hair, bright-eyed, wearing silky fabric like a Festival queen.

'I'm Anji. You're not from here, are you?'

Iyeeye shook her head. 'I'm Iyeeye. I'm from –' She grinned. 'But you must know where I'm from if you speak my language.' She felt her eyes filling with tears of sheer relief.

Anji grinned back at her. 'Not necessarily. But don't worry, you're safe. Ish.'

Iyeeye wasn't sure what the last sound meant. She looked over her shoulder. 'What about the Other?'

'The – oh. It wasn't an alien, it was a cart. A tool.'

Iyeeye didn't see how something could be a cart and a tool. What was Anji trying to say? That the thing wasn't dangerous? It seemed like it. 'Things like that are very dangerous where I come from,' she said cautiously.

Anji laughed. 'Well they're not exactly safe here, but people control them. You're all right.' She glanced behind her, at the single Stone. Now that Iyeeye had time to look at it properly, she could see how finely carved it was, how lovely the mosaic of crystals in each of its faces.

'Does it protect you?' asked Iyeeye.

'The TARDIS? Sort of. Not much any more. The Doctor doesn't seem to be here. You haven't seen him?' A nervousness had entered her voice.

Iyeeye shook her head. 'I saw a man who said he was Bob, and there was a second man. They had the Other – the cart.'

Anji nodded. 'Did the second man speak?'

'No.'

'Not the Doctor, then. And probably not Fitz. Neither of them can keep their mouths shut for more than five seconds.' She frowned at the blue Stone, then glanced at a bangle on her wrist. 'Well, if they're not here I need to be somewhere else. Do you want to come with me?'

Iyeeye thought for a moment, then nodded. It seemed better than staying here on her own. She trusted Anji: the woman seemed like herself, open, confident.

'I will follow you,' she said.

'It means getting in a car.'

Iyeeye frowned, not sure what Anji meant, but followed the woman anyway. She saw the shape like an Other on the track, but forced herself to be calm. It was not an Other as she knew them. This was a yellow colour, like the yolk of an egg, and animal hide was stretched over the top part of it. No Other had ever looked like that. And she could see that it was a cruder shape than the killers of her world. When its eyes lit up she could see that they were not true eyes, but fires of some sort, tiny bright fires inside crystals. She had seen things

like that in the world she had visited where there had been so many people, and the tall buildings.

A thought struck her. Had the world she had seen really been of the Others? Or had the things she had seen been made by people, like this?

Anji opened a door in the side of the – cart? *Car*, she had said – and got in. With a *chunk* sound that made Iyeeeye's legs quiver, the door on the other side opened. Iyeeeye took a breath, fought the fear and nausea.

'Can I walk alongside?' she asked.

Anji laughed. 'Not really. It goes a bit faster than you do.'

Iyeeeye hesitated, then got in. It smelled of people inside, and also like the Others. She held her breath.

'I'll drive slowly,' said Anji.

Iyeeeye frowned. Drive? She couldn't see any cattle.

The car rumbled to life. The vibration and noise, and the swaying about, seemed alarmingly like being digested in the stomach of some alien beast, but Iyeeeye watched Anji's sure movements as she moved the handles and pedals that controlled the thing, and knew she was safe.

It didn't stop her feeling sick as they jolted and plunged up the road. The ride improved as they reached a bed of smooth stone, but Iyeeeye felt no better. Eventually she told Anji that she would have to vomit. Anji stopped the car and Iyeeeye relieved her heaving stomach by the side of the road, but it didn't make her feel any better. She clung weakly on to the metal of the open door – metal? So *much* metal? These people were incredibly rich! – and looked at the strange lights on the skyline. They threw the trees into shadow against a silver wash over the sky. She could see two towers, rising above the shoulders of the trees, like enormous illuminated Stones.

'Where are we going?' she asked Anji.

'Place called Jumpsville.' She extended a hand with a crumpled leaf in it, as white as snow on mountains. 'Have a tissue.'

Iyeeeye rubbed the leaf – *tissue* – on her mouth. It was dry and strange, but it cleaned up the mess. Her stomach began to feel better.

'It's not much further,' said Anji. 'Do you think you can manage to ride?'

Iyeeeye nodded and got back in. Anji drove more slowly, and the road was smoother: Iyeeeye's stomach quivered at first, but when the trees fell back and she saw the town, she forgot all about her sickness.

Jumpsville looked as if it were on fire. Light streamed out of the stone-made huts, flooded the streets. Cars moved everywhere, also alight. The lights changed – most were white, but there were colours, red, green, blue, amber,

flickering, chasing each other like kittens at play. There were hundreds of people, far more people than Iyeeeye had ever seen in one place before. The place of the Seeing, with the towers, had been a little like this, but it had been dimmer, less immediate. There had been lights, but there had also been daylight. Here, daylight was unnecessary.

Perhaps there *was* no daylight. 'Does the sun rise?' she asked Anji.

'Not for eight hours.'

'Why do they have all these lights when there's the sun?'

Anji glanced at her. 'Where *are* you from?'

Iyeeeye opened her mouth to answer, and remembered, and suddenly her eyes were full of tears.

Chapter Five

Multiplication, That's the Name of the Game

'So the Others were tools, not people?' Anji asked.

The question didn't quite make sense: Iyeeye was beginning to realise that although Anji spoke her language, she thought in a very different way. In Iyeeye's language, there were no adequate words for some of the things that Anji wanted to say.

'They are Others. They look like cars, but bigger – rounder. No lights. They are alive, but not like people, or animals, or plants, or Stones. Like –' She looked around the cavelike room that Anji had taken her to. It was flooded with light from various fires-in-glass. There was a smooth box in the corner, like a big pebble, black with a grey glassy front. She pointed at it. 'The same life-state as that. No – a bit more alive.'

'Robots, probably,' Anji appeared to be talking to herself. 'Oh, well. It doesn't matter.'

'It does matter. If they are here, you are in danger.' Iyeeye hesitated, then plunged on. 'You don't come from this place either, do you? Nor does your Stone. You have travelled, like me. Are you sure you know all you need to know?'

Anji stared at her a moment, then nodded. 'The "Stone" is called a TARDIS, and it isn't mine, it's the Doctor's, but apart from that you're right... about everything. You're pretty quick on the uptake. Want a job in futures trading?'

Iyeeye frowned. 'What's –'

Anji waved a hand. 'Sorry. Bad joke. Ignore me, I'm just being too clever.'

'The Others killed – ate people.'

'But they can't have needed food for themselves – oh, hang on. They must have been getting it for someone else. They were tools for harvesting people.'

Iyeeye nodded eagerly. 'You *are* clever! Most of the hunters in my village don't understand that, and not all of the women. I told them that if you call them tools instead of acting as if they're people, the Others become more –' She

felt the tears coming back – ‘it’s easier to decide what they’re going to do. But I didn’t do it. I didn’t do it right. And now –’

Anji put her arms around Iyeeeye, let her sob. ‘You couldn’t possibly have known,’ she said softly. ‘You didn’t have enough information. You were just guessing.’

‘No! I could See!’

‘See what?’

So Iyeeeye explained about Seeing, and Wishing and Dreaming, and the uses of the Stones for Time Magic. Anji listened, occasionally asking her to repeat something in a different way, otherwise making no comment. At last she said, ‘So, to sum up, you can travel in time just by wanting to?’

‘It’s more than that –’

‘But no tools? Just the Stones?’

Iyeeeye nodded. ‘But why do you think a tool could help you See?’

‘I wonder if the Stones are –’ She broke off, frowned. ‘What do they look like?’

‘There are six of them, in a circle. They are like your Stone –’ She couldn’t remember the word Anji had used for it – ‘but less alive.’

‘And you say they’re here? In this world?’

Iyeeeye nodded. ‘The men found me there. Not far from you.’

Anji glanced at the bangle on her wrist again. ‘We haven’t got time to go back now. I’m late as it is.’ She plucked a small jewelled object from her pocket and prodded at it with her fingers. It made an Other-ish sound; Anji spoke into it.

‘Fitz? I don’t suppose there’s any chance you can stand in for me at the second group induction party? I’ve picked up another stranger and there’s something we need to check out.’ A pause. ‘OK, fair enough. I think I can risk taking Jack with me. He might be able to help, and it’ll keep him away from the hotel if your uniformed friends call.’ Another pause. ‘Thanks. I’ll cover for you tomorrow.’ She prodded the jewelled thing, then looked up at Iyeeeye. ‘You think you can manage another ride in the car?’

Iyeeeye nodded.

‘All right, let’s take a look at these Stones.’

Anji had given Iyeeeye some of the Festival clothes she wore. It was obvious why; everyone wore them here. Iyeeeye’s leathers would have made her far too easy to be picked out as a stranger in a crowd. The clothes were a red top and blue leggings. They felt tight, but smooth on her skin. Anji also made Iyeeeye

splash some Other-smelling unguent on her; but once it touched her skin, the smell changed, and became a little like that of flowers. She still didn't like it. Finally she had produced a couple of pieces of animal skin and made Iyeeeye put them on her feet. They were well-made, cut into the shape of feet with thongs to hold them in place, but Iyeeeye found it difficult to walk in them. As soon as they left the room she surreptitiously shook them off and carried them in her hand. She might need to run. Surely nobody would notice her feet.

They went to another room in the complex labyrinth that Anji called 'hotel'. Iyeeeye had done her best to remember the way out, but knew if it came to it she might have to rely on Anji. She just hoped they were safe here.

Anji knocked on the door, and it opened to reveal two men, both of them pale-skinned like Bob. One was tall and middle-aged – perhaps older than Anji – the other a squat young hunter about Iyeeeye's age, with an unhealthy, worried look on his face. She wasn't surprised when this one was introduced as Jack, another traveller in time, from yet another different world. Fitz, the older one, was of Anji's people.

'Jack made his own time-travelling machine,' said Anji. 'Turned up by the side of the main road.'

'Good job he arrived when he did,' commented Fitz. 'The time cops had him kneeling in the dirt when I caught up with him. They might have been bluffing, but I think they were going to blow his head off.'

Anji looked at her friend sharply. 'I don't think Iyeeeye needs to know that sort of thing.'

Iyeeeye began to feel confused. How could you blow hard enough to take someone's head off? 'Who are the "time cops"?' she asked.

Fitz and Jack looked at each other. 'Dangerous,' said Jack. 'They told me they don't want there to be any more than one timeline. They'll stop anyone who comes from a different one. Even –' He took a breath which quivered with fear – 'kill them.'

Iyeeeye nodded. She could understand the time cops now. Like all men, they were just trying to protect their own way, their own village. You couldn't expect hunters to understand anything else. For all its differences from her own, this place was still a village. The men would try to protect it, and would invent reasons if they had to.

'How will I know one?' she asked.

'They wear uniforms,' said Anji.

Iyeeeye raised her eyebrows, and Anji grinned. 'Sorry. Black clothes with small pieces of gold on the shoulders, and flat hats – but as long as you pretend

to be a tourist – umm. Just keep wearing what you're wearing and you should be OK.'

'I shouldn't attract attention to myself,' said Iyeeeye. 'They mustn't know I'm not from here.' It didn't seem difficult. But then she remembered Bob, the strange patterned leaves, the incomprehensible words. 'I can't speak their language, so I will pretend I can't speak at all if they ask me questions.'

'Perhaps,' said Anji. 'Though you might find you're all right with the language now you're with us.'

Iyeeeye decided to wait and see. There were too many other things she didn't know, besides the language.

Leaving Fitz, she followed Anji and Jack back towards the car.

'What time are you from?' asked Jack as they walked.

'I don't know,' Iyeeeye confessed. 'Before this time. More years than I can count.'

Jack goggled at her. 'You lived in an Indian village?'

'We didn't call it "Indian". But a village.'

'Are you Apache or Yakotomak?'

Why did men always worry so much about what things were called? 'Neither. Perhaps they came here after us?' That seemed logical, if Jack knew about them.

Jack nodded. 'I'm from a hundred and fifty years in the future.'

'Then this world is still there in a hundred and fifty years. That's good.'

'Not necessarily,' said Anji. 'It might not be the same world.' They had reached the cavern where the cars were kept: their voices echoed. A car rumbled, but despite the stark light Iyeeeye couldn't tell where the sound was coming from. A movement made her jump, but it was only another car, a silver one, moving towards the exit. She closed her eyes for a moment, fighting the habitual fear.

Anji and Jack were talking about universes and timelines.

'Fitz reckons only one universe will survive. Is that what you think too?'

'Yes,' said Anji. 'The Doctor thinks so. It's what we do about it that matters. We're not going to sacrifice anyone this time.' An edginess had entered her voice: Iyeeeye wondered when Anji had sacrificed people, and who they had been.

They had reached the car. Anji opened the driver's door, then frowned at Iyeeeye. 'Did you see a sort of grey void when you travelled through time?'

Iyeeeye shook her head, but Jack said, 'Yes. I told Fitz. It was full of stuff, though.'

Anji looked at Iyeeeye.

She tried to work out what it would be safe to say. 'I didn't look this time. I didn't dare.' She registered the disappointment in Anji's face, took a breath and went on. 'Some of the other times I looked. Sometimes I saw the Stones, as if they were travelling with me.'

Anji didn't reply, just got in the car. Iyeeeye stood by the yellow thing, not knowing how to open the door, feeling foolish. After a moment Jack reached out and opened it from the inside.

'It's easy when you know how,' he said with a grin.

Iyeeeye grinned back, but she wasn't feeling reassured. She realised now that Jack was much closer in time and understanding to Anji and Fitz than she was. That was bound to make a difference when choices – perhaps more sacrifices – had to be made. Anji, Fitz and Jack were all she had at the moment, but Iyeeeye knew she couldn't entirely trust these people. She was on her own.

The moon was still high, though the light seemed less bright now, after the glare of the town and the hotel. The familiar night-sounds of the woodland seemed like silence. They trooped up to the TARDIS. To Iyeeeye's surprise Anji opened a door in it and stepped inside. She closed the door behind her, and stayed for several minutes. Was she meditating, perhaps, in the tiny space? Iyeeeye glanced at Jack and whispered, 'What's happening?'

He shrugged. 'I dunno. I just hope the time cops don't come while she's in there.'

At last the door opened, and Anji emerged. She looked worried. 'Trust him to disappear now.'

'Who?' asked Jack.

'The Doctor.'

'Your boss?'

Anji didn't answer, just said, 'He left a message a couple of hours ago, said we needed to meet urgently. He wasn't here an hour ago, and he's not here now. I'm getting a bit worried about him. Though of course he could be in the TARDIS somewhere, hiding.'

What was Anji talking about? There couldn't be anyone else in the cramped space inside the Stone. Then Iyeeeye remembered that Anji had spoken to Fitz from the hotel room using a thing she held in her hand: this Stone, then, must be another means of speaking to people who were not in the same place. Perhaps in this case the Doctor was in the space of the TARDIS but not in the same *time* as they were.

‘Come on,’ said Anji, breaking into Iyeeeye’s thoughts. ‘We’ll have to do without the benefit of his wisdom this time. Lead the way, Iyeeeye.’

Iyeeeye wasn’t too sure about her ability to lead them anywhere. It was easy enough to find her way from the TARDIS to where Bob’s car had been but after that, it was wildwood, without a path. The trees were unfamiliar, not the species she knew; they all looked the same. She tried to follow her own trail back from the mud ruts of Bob’s car to the stone circle, but eventually had to admit she had lost it. If only the men had let her learn the Hunt Magic. . . though that hardly mattered now. Her feelings about that were lost, disconnected, part of a world that no longer existed.

‘They can’t be far from here,’ said Anji. ‘How long were you walking with Bob?’

‘Not long.’ Iyeeeye could feel her frustration gathering. She wondered if the stone circle had vanished, gone like the world she had come from.

‘Wait a minute! Over here!’

Jack’s voice. She heard him crashing through bushes, and stepped lightly towards the sound. She saw him ahead, with moonlight and the dark, familiar, shape of the circle beyond him. She smiled in relief. If the circle was there, perhaps her own world was not entirely lost. She peered into the clearing, half-hoping to see Areene, but of course there was no one, only bare stone and the strange, grey moonlight.

Behind her, Iyeeeye heard a sharp intake of breath from Anji. She looked around to see the danger, but there was nothing. Anji was staring at the Stones.

‘What’s the matter?’ she whispered.

‘Can’t you see it?’

If there was something to see, Iyeeeye wasn’t going to risk speaking again. She just frowned, gestured.

But Anji just said, ‘Your Stones. They’re models of – no they *are* –’

Iyeeeye saw, as if for the first time, the rectangular carvings, the small round bulge on the top of each Stone, and knew what Anji was trying to say.

But it was Jack who put it into words. ‘They aren’t Stones at all,’ he said. ‘They’re more TARDISES.’

Chapter Six

Last Boat on the River Nile

They took a car out of town. Sabbath, despite his Revolution costume, surprised Jack by driving. Perhaps, thought Jack, his clothes were only a costume, his funny way of talking no more than a piece of theatre. Perhaps he was as modern as the rest of them, or even from the future.

Within a few minutes they had left the road and were jolting along another of the dirt tracks. Jack felt his legs trembling at the sight of the straight trunks of the pines flicking past. It was all too much like last night. Fitz, however, merely looked bored. Jack wondered if it was an act. Was he getting ready to pull another bluff and make a rapid escape?

The trail descended, and descended, the car lurching over rocks, sending stones and earth skittering down the steep sides of alarming slopes between tall thin fir trees. 'Where does this road go?' Jack asked, looking at Fitz, who shrugged.

'Don't you recognise it?' asked Sabbath.

Jack shook his head. 'That's the problem I'm having here. I don't remember anything like this around Jumpsville. I didn't think the town was this far above sea level.' The cliffs above must be a more than a thousand feet now. Jumpsville was up eight hundred and something, he thought.

'Some rivers run whose course is deeper than that of the sea,' said Sabbath.

Jack looked at Fitz again, but the response was the same: Fitz shrugged, then pointed out of the window. Ahead, the trees had cleared, and Jack could see water. It did look more like a sea than any river he knew. The grey water was whitecapped, and it was wide enough that the far shore was mist. Bizarrely, icebergs floated down the middle of it, as clear and serene as small mountains. Beyond, Jack could see what must be the Yakotomaks rising from the haze – but they were bigger than they should have been, and a plume of smoke rose from a white-clad cone that did not belong among the familiar Ohio hills.

'I told you it was chaos,' said Fitz softly. 'I'm certain this wasn't here this morning.'

‘W-wh-where –’ Jack could no longer repress the tremors of fear.

‘It is more a question of when than where,’ said Sabbath. ‘But there’s nothing to be afraid of. My vessel is still here. I can take you to safety.’ He pulled up the car on a narrow stone jetty, stopped the engine. Jack could hear the slap of water on stone.

Then Jack saw the iron ship. He’d thought it was a building off the quay, but now he could see it shifting slightly in the ocean-like swell of the vast river. It wasn’t big – no bigger than a large house – but it towered above the water, a dark enough grey to look almost black. It was spiny with armour, like a pineapple made from serrated steel, and four round turrets domed on its deck. Jack couldn’t see guns there, but as they got closer he saw blunt cannon hiding in ports on the sides.

Jack could barely catch his breath. ‘It’s *amazing*.’

‘Welcome to the *Jonah*,’ said Sabbath. ‘This ship is where I live. My headquarters, my centre of command.’

‘We’re honoured,’ said Fitz dryly.

They got out of the car. The air was cold, and smelled of smoke and ice. Jack saw a huge monkey perched against the rail of the ship, wearing a blue jacket and trousers like it was dressed up for an English tea party. It gazed at him with fierce, intelligent eyes. Sabbath waved at it, and it waved back, then unhooked a gangplank which wound itself down to the end of the jetty, snapping itself into place with grappling hooks.

‘It saves the trouble of rowboats,’ said Sabbath.

He was gazing at this ship with the same kind of pride Jack had felt for his own time machine. Jack kind of liked him, despite his strange accent and cold manner. He wanted to get Fitz alone, to find out what he had on Sabbath, why they didn’t like each other. But it didn’t look as though he would get the chance. Sabbath led them across the ringing gangplank (it was made of iron), across the swaying deck and through a narrow doorway into the turret. Inside, a spiral stairway led to a vaulted iron chamber lit by gas lamps and full of machinery that looked like something out of the first railroads: huge levers and metal dials, everything held together by bolts as big as fists and heavy, toothed rivets. Several of the apes were hanging around. Despite being crammed into the blue jackets and trousers they looked and smelled very much like wild animals, and their eyes made Jack shiver.

Finally a door of riveted black iron plates opened on a large room, with steel archways like a metal church. There were even curtained alcoves on each side, though the curtains were of iron mesh, and they twitched from time to time

as if living things were behind them. A map of the world covered in flags filled the whole of the far wall. Sabbath walked up to the map and looked at it, as if planning a campaign, though the placement of flags looked more like a weather map to Jack. He reached into a locker beneath the map and produced a decanter full of some kind of drink and two glasses. He poured one for himself, offered another to Fitz, who shook his head. 'Not after beer.'

'Now, Mr Kreiner,' said Sabbath, carefully putting the other glass away. Jack noticed for the first time how huge his hands were. 'We need to be clear whose fault this is. The Doctor doesn't – I beg your pardon, didn't – seem to understand time as it is constituted in this reality – in *my* reality. Your friend's botched attempts to "rectify" history have now created a situation where humans have discovered time travel at about the same time they discovered air travel. The paradoxes resulting from opening McDonald's in ancient Greece and rewriting the Holy Bible to include a "plug" for IBM, not to mention people having –' He coughed and glanced at Jack – 'carnal relations across time zones, have resulted in the chaos around us.' As if to reinforce Sabbath's words, the ship lurched to one side. The movement felt like it was too sudden to be caused by a wave: it was as if the water had disappeared from underneath them. Jack was reminded of the buffeting suffered by his own machine. He was about to mention it when there was another lurch and he almost fell against one of the curtained alcoves. He saw the metal weave twitch, as if in anticipation, and shivered.

'It's easy to blame the Doctor,' said Fitz. 'But he's been around a lot longer than you and this didn't start happening until you came along.'

'Personal time elapsed is of no consequence when you are travelling in time anyway,' observed Sabbath. 'It is a more useful observation that these corporations – McDonald's, Microsoft, Good Times, and the others – are from the Doctor's version of the world. Are they not?'

'I'm not sure of that. They weren't around in my time.' Jack could tell that Fitz didn't really know how to defend the Doctor. Would he change sides? Anything seemed possible.

There was another sharp lurch of the deck. 'It seems we are facing a rough passage,' commented Sabbath. Despite the measured words, he looked worried.

'And that would be because. . . ?' Fitz's tone was heavy with sarcasm. 'Perhaps you'd better admit you don't know what you're doing, before we all get killed.'

'Don't be so arrogant, young man, as to presume you know more about time than I do! Travelling with the Doctor is hardly a qualification for expertise in

these matters.'

Jack decided he'd heard enough. 'Can you two stop this? We're in trouble right now and we need to come up with a plan. Getting mad at each other isn't going to help.'

Fitz and Sabbath looked at each other. 'From the mouths of babes...' said Sabbath. 'He is right, to the extent that I will need to attend to the *Jonah*'s course or we will not arrive at any destination.' He got up and strode out of the room.

The ship lurched again, and Jack felt the floor vibrate. Fitz said: 'It's not as simple as a quarrel. The Doctor and Sabbath don't have the same aims – we really don't know what Sabbath's up to – but they're the same kind. And with the Doctor –' He hesitated – 'let's say, missing, there really isn't anyone but Sabbath. I don't like him, but I am going to work with him. For the time being. Until the Doctor turns up. Clear?'

'Clear,' said Jack. 'And anyways, I like him. Though this place gives me the creeps.'

Fitz stared at him. 'I'd be careful about liking someone like Sabbath.'

Jack just stared back. 'Why?'

'You'll find out.'

There was a sharp rap at the door. Fitz opened it, and Jack saw the ape that had been on the rail. Or maybe a different one. It was hard to tell one from the other: they were all black, they all had dirty, matted fur, they all smelled, and they all looked angry.

The ape beckoned. Fitz followed, leaving Jack with no choice but to do the same. They rose up through the maze of steel passages. Near the top Jack caught a breath of dry, warm, air, and saw a flash of sunlight. On deck, the light was brilliant, the air hotter than a Jumpsville summer day. The *Jonah* floated in a clear blue river, the shore a rich green dotted with low white houses.

Jack gazed at it, felt a surge of pure excitement. 'We've travelled in time, haven't we?'

'Probably,' said Fitz. He didn't sound excited at all. 'I'm more interested in where our host has got to.' He went back below.

There were two more of the apes on deck. Jack watched them nervously for a while, but they ignored him, preoccupied in unwinding a rope from a steel capstan. As the shore got nearer, Jack could see people, some in white robes, some nearly naked, standing by the shore and staring. He couldn't see any large buildings, or anything that looked like machinery. He guessed they were in the past, or in some odd kind of future where they'd stopped using machines.

Voices called them from the shore. 'Great ones... we are humble...'

They were getting down on their knees!

'There isn't any need to do that,' called Jack. 'We're just travelling... I guess we're a bit lost.'

'I should be careful what you say to them.' Sabbath's voice made Jack jump. Despite his size and the iron deck, he must have moved quietly. 'They're not stupid, or primitive. They are merely being polite in bowing down to a stranger. Furthermore, there are soldiers here.'

Jack could see the soldiers once Sabbath had pointed them out: three men in blue and gold armour, gleaming in the sun like statues, alert faces watching the ship as it closed with the shore. They weren't kneeling.

Sabbath gestured at the apes, who skittered across the deck and out of sight. 'We come with greetings to the Pharaoh from the land of Jumpsville,' he said, crossing his arms over his chest.

'The Pharaoh! So we're in ancient Egypt?' Jack remembered the brochure in the lobby of the hotel. Were the time tourists here? If so, were the time police here with them? He scanned the green shore again, the curved hills rising, fading to brown. He could still see no trace of anything modern. Perhaps he was safe.

Behind him, footsteps rang on steel steps. Jack turned and saw Fitz, who asked, 'Where are we?'

Jack explained, in an undertone. Sabbath was still standing with his arms across his chest: to Jack's surprise, Fitz stood and did the same. Jack copied the gesture too. The men on the shore – now only a few yards away – responded with outstretched arms and open hands whose friendly meaning would have been obvious in any culture. 'We greet you on behalf of the Lord of the Nile,' they said, speaking together like robots.

The *Jonah* bumped gently against the silty floor of the river, rocked a little and was still. The gangplank unrolled itself, rested on the washy sand of the beach. The men in blue and gold showed no surprise, though from the growing crowd around the houses further up, Jack heard the shouts of children, saw pointing hands.

'We would like to meet with your Lord; we believe we know things he would need to know,' said Sabbath.

One of the men nodded, and without a word turned and began to jog up the slope away from the river.

'We will show you formal hospitality whilst the runner travels,' said one of the others. 'Please alight: the Kingdom welcomes you.'

‘Why are they speaking like that?’ Jack asked Fitz.

‘Their language is probably a bit limited,’ muttered the latter in reply.

Sabbath had walked ashore now, and was exchanging bows and arm-crossing gestures with the armed men. On an impulse Jack followed him, forcing Fitz to do the same. They were introduced by Sabbath as ‘my house slaves’.

‘See?’ hissed Fitz.

‘See what?’

‘What about saying “my friends”, or better still, “fellow noblemen”? It gives him a big advantage if they think we’re slaves. The Doctor wouldn’t have done that.’

Sabbath was in earnest conversation with the two men. They started to walk up the rough path which led away from the river. Sabbath half turned, gestured for Fitz and Jack to follow. The path was no more than trodden earth, with a rough wooden handrail, the sort you might find in a city park. There was a steep slope for a few feet, then they reached a field of tall grass shimmering with heat. After a moment Jack realised the “grass” was a sort of wheat, though it was small and hard-grained compared to the stuff he’d seen growing around Jumpsville. The men marched on straight through it, as if they didn’t care about the farmer or his crop. Jack followed in their wake, brushing big black beetles and flies off his arms.

Fitz was beginning to think this had been a bad idea. Jumpsville had been dangerous, but at least he’d been somewhere near the centre of things. This place was just as bad and, worse, Fitz didn’t see how he could influence anything, or find anything out, unless Sabbath let him. Sabbath was in control here. Even Jack seemed impressed by him. The Doctor might not be dead – probably wasn’t – but he was effectively out of reach. Fitz cursed his stupidity – he should just have told Sabbath to bugger off. If it hadn’t been for that weird thing with Anji he would have done.

The boy nudged his arm: Fitz looked up and saw that there was a house ahead, a low curved building made of wood. There were no windows, but the doorway had a crude wooden arch around it. There was no door, just a curtain of what looked like dried reeds, crudely woven. The soldiers approached, walked in through the doorway without hesitating. Sabbath followed, leaving Fitz and Jack no choice but to do the same.

Inside, it was dark and damp. It smelled of grass and cow dung, more like a barn than a house, but when Fitz’s eyes adjusted he saw to his astonishment

a figure in a blue silk gown reclining on a couch which seemed to be made of gold.

Black eyes met his, flicked on, stared at Jack.

'I am the Lord Akhenaton,' he said. 'They think I am dead, but I have been waiting for you.'

Sabbath was all bows and smiles. Fitz muttered to Jack, 'That's the sort of greeting we *don't* want to hear.'

'Cheops has been afraid to leave the palace for years.' The man in gold didn't sneer, but the contempt showed in his voice. 'He says that his father's mistress is a witch, and she is making the lights, and that if he goes out into the world she will kill him. But I think that you are making the lights.'

'And who, exactly, do you think we are?' Sabbath had settled cross-legged on a reed mat by the blue couch, leaving Fitz and Jack to stand behind him. Just as if they *were* slaves, thought Fitz glumly. They were in trouble here. If only the Doctor were around, he would take control of the situation – think of something to say or do that would attract attention. Fitz was very conscious that he didn't want to do that. Attracting attention seemed like a good way of ending up dead.

'I don't know,' Akhenaton was saying. 'Messengers of the gods, perhaps? But you can do things that cannot be wrought by men, so you must be spirits, or connected with their world.'

'You are correct in your assessment.'

'You have travelled perhaps in the river of time, as well as that of Earth?'

Sabbath nodded. 'Would it be correct to assume, from what you have said, that the great Pharaoh will not visit us here?'

'He'll probably try to have you killed. That's what he tried with me. It would have worked but I knew a few tricks.'

Fitz suddenly realised that the man was now speaking very differently. In fact, he was speaking modern English. With an American accent.

It was Jack who said it: 'You're not Egyptian. You're American, aren't you?' He moved behind Fitz. He probably thought it was the time cops again, thought Fitz.

'OK,' he said roughly, and before Sabbath could get a chance to interfere. 'Who are you, and what are you doing here?'

Akhenaton looked up at him. 'Well, I guess this is going to be a bit of a shock, but I'm Jack Kowaczski.'

Chapter Seven

Down Among the Dead Men

‘Now we’ve *got* to find the Doctor.’

Anji was panicking, desperate. Iyeye had seen that feeling often enough to know what it meant. Anji was no longer being sensible. She was crashing back through the trees as if a fleet of Others was on their trail, when in fact there was no one but Jack, who kept saying, ‘Why is it so frightening? Why can’t there be more than one TARDIS?’

Iyeye didn’t know why either. She didn’t think Anji was the type of person given to irrational fear. ‘Anji – I have known the Stones since childhood. There is no harm in them.’

‘And how old are you? Seventeen? Eighteen? You can’t possibly know.’

‘I am fourteen, Anji. But I do know. The Time Magic was taught to me.’ It seemed impossible that Anji could travel in time and not be aware of the Time Magic. Perhaps the Doctor was the one who did the travelling, and Anji and her friend rode in his wake. That might explain it.

They were back at Anji’s TARDIS. Iyeye was more aware of the differences now. Softer in material, yet more definite in form, it was more alive than the Stones. Anji plunged in through the door, and this time Iyeye saw the space inside. Jack exclaimed, began babbling about it being impossible, but somehow Iyeye wasn’t surprised. The world folded in on itself; she knew that; even Areene knew that. This place was one of the denser folds, that was all.

‘It’s all right,’ she said to him. ‘There’s nothing to be afraid of.’

She went through the door, felt time and space close around her like a protective blanket. There was a big room beyond the doors, with a wooden hearth in the middle, and strange lights. Anji was looking into one of the lights, and calling, ‘Doctor, if you get this message you’ve got to get back to the console room. This conference thing isn’t going to work – things are much worse than we thought. But you probably know that. Oh, for goodness sake why aren’t you *here*?’

‘He could be in one of the Stones,’ said Iyeye.

Anji stared at her.

'I mean the other TARDISes.'

'They were too crude – he couldn't have –' She shook her head. 'Oh, yes, he could. Or at least he'd try to. He'd have felt them, like you do.' She pulled the jewelled thing from her pocket, the tool that she used to talk to Fitz. After a long silence, she cursed. 'How can he be busy?' She put the thing away, grabbed Iyee's shoulders. 'Look, Iyee, I need to find Fitz and I need someone to stay here with the TARDIS and bring the Doctor up to speed if he turns up. Can I trust you to stay put and not touch anything?'

'Of course,' said Iyee, keeping her voice calm, since it was clear that Anji was still anxious and she didn't want to make it worse. 'I feel quite safe here. What does your friend look like?'

'Oh, you'll know him. . . Long hair, a green jacket, usually. Very alive.'

Iyee nodded. 'That will be enough for me to know him.'

'Look on the screens.'

'The. . .?'

Anji gestured at the lights over the hearth. 'They show what's outside.'

Iyee looked, and saw that it was true. The squares of light showed dark, crudely coloured pictures of the trees. There wasn't much detail though, and you couldn't smell it.

'What's wrong with looking through the door?' she asked.

'There might be things out there that you don't want in here. Keep the door shut and you'll keep them out. If you have to open it –' She pointed at a handle on the central hearth. 'That one. And again to close it.' She demonstrated.

Iyee nodded, and Anji left, without any word of farewell. Jack was still standing outside; they spoke briefly and Jack went with Anji.

Iyee shut the doors and sat down by the hearth. It didn't give out any heat, despite all the light. The clothes Anji had given her were thin, and the air none too warm. She shivered. What she'd told Anji was true: she did feel safe here, as if the TARDIS and its folded time protected her. But she no longer felt so sure of Anji. Her manner as she'd left had not been that of a friend leaving, nor of any person leaving another when there was no quarrel between them. Yet there had been no trace of anger, no sense of deliberate threat. It was as if Anji were used to sudden arrivals and departures, and the possibility of never meeting a person again, every day of her life. She wasn't unkind, but she didn't seem to think there was a need to say anything. Iyee felt that Anji saw her less as a person, more as a set of attributes, something to be made to fit into the pattern of what needed to be done, like a needle fitting thread into cloth.

Yes, the right word was *tool*.

Was it because she knew many people? Her constant travelling must mean that, and her clan was small – Fitz, the Doctor – no others had been mentioned. The other people she met – would she think of them in the same way as her clan? Could you think of a hundred strangers as people who actually counted as much as those that you were with every day, and with whom you had the bonds of kinship? Iyeyee counted the strangers she had spoken to in the village, people who had come and gone again in hours or days without the need for caring. The list came to eight, and six of those were distant relatives of her father's, who made brief visits each year to the village to trade copper ore for pottery.

– the village which was dead now her home was dead dead and she had nothing but strangers to look forward to there would be nothing ever but these strangers who were tools to her as she was to them and weren't family and didn't care –

Suddenly being safe didn't matter any more. Iyeyee bawled out loud, her screams of despair echoing from the high vaults of the chamber.

She must have slept, in the end, because the movement woke her. She knew three things at once: her world was dead, she was in the Doctor's TARDIS, and the movement was not the Doctor.

So she wasn't safe.

She didn't move, pretended not to have woken up at all. But she half opened her eyes, just enough to see through her lashes, but not enough for person watching to notice. A hunter's trick: but an easy one, hardly a magic.

She saw a woman, light, thin, not very tall but wearing something attached to her feet which made her seem taller. She was crouching, brushing her mouse-coloured hair back from her face in a repeated, awkward gesture that made Iyeyee wonder why she didn't simply cut or tie it back. Her eyes were green, catlike, her nose long, her attention unwavering. She didn't smile, but she didn't feel threatening, and she didn't move for a very long time – almost five minutes. Then she stood up and slowly began to steal away.

Cautiously, Iyeyee opened her eyes wider, and frowned at the newcomer as if in surprise. 'Who are you?'

The woman turned round. 'Not another one!' She frowned, as if trying to remember. 'Let me try and remember my lines. Oh – that's it. "I could ask the same of you."'

Iyeyee stared. What was the woman talking about?

‘OK, let’s try it the easy way.’ Now the woman’s voice sounded different. ‘Where are you from, oh stranger in the night?’

Iyeeye began to realise that this woman was a clown. Perhaps she served the role of the Doctor’s clown, if he was a great hunter. Still, a straight answer would be best.

‘I am Iyeeye, of the village –’ She swallowed – ‘of a place that doesn’t exist any more.’

The clownishness vanished, replaced by a laconic nod. ‘Great. I come from one of those places too.’

‘Did Anji bring you here?’

‘Not exactly.’

That was two questions she hadn’t answered. Iyeeye didn’t like this woman’s deliberate evasiveness. It felt unnecessary, and a little threatening. She didn’t seem like a clown any more. Iyeeye wasn’t sure what she was.

‘I’m not used to strangers,’ Iyeeye said carefully. She sat up slowly and looked around her for anything she could use as a weapon. There wasn’t anything.

‘It’s OK,’ said the stranger. ‘I’m not going to hurt you.’ She looked rather worried.

‘I’m not planning to hurt you either, but it would be good to know who you are. Do you belong to the Doctor’s clan?’

‘I might do.’

Iyeeye began to feel a creeping mixture of exasperation and fear. She stood up, rocking on her heels, ready to run. ‘I don’t like the way you avoid the truth,’ she said. ‘Why are you here?’

‘I live here.’

‘Where? Show me the place.’ As soon as she’d said it, Iyeeye realised she was being unwise. The woman could easily lead her into a trap. All her feeling of safety had now gone. She turned away and loped towards the hearth, flicked the handle that made the doors open.

‘Hey! Wait!’

Iyeeye didn’t stop, just loped towards the outside.

‘I didn’t mean to frighten you.’

Iyeeye stepped on to the threshold, trying to restrain a growing feeling of panic. She certainly didn’t feel safe on her own *out* of the TARDIS. Not after what she’d heard about the time cops. She took another step anyway, on to the rough soil, holding the door against her body like a shield.

Outside, she saw another TARDIS.

Five others.

She was in the stone circle.

Confused, she tried to throw herself into the Time Magic, but it didn't work. *You're not calm enough*, she told herself, but only felt more caged, more afraid. A hand touched her shoulder. She screamed, and ran, pounding across the hard stone and the trail through the bushes that the three of them had made earlier, heading for the road, heading for where Anji might be, because only Anji was going to understand this, only from Anji was there any chance of help and *she mustn't let the strange woman catch her*.

When she reached the road she risked a glance over her shoulder. No one was following, so she forced herself to slow down to a steady lope. The road rose steeply: despite the slow pace Iyeeeye was soon gasping for breath, the unfamiliar clothes sticking to her body like a web. She wanted to scream, to go on screaming, but she forced herself to slow down, check behind her (nothing but the calm valley, beginning to be light, and a little mist) and look ahead, around (tall trees, darkness, and some light ahead that must be Jumpsville).

Keep running. That was all she had to do. Keep breathing the cool air. Get to Jumpsville. Find the hotel. Find Anji, or perhaps Fitz. Tell them what had happened, the stranger and the TARDIS moving of its own accord (or had it become one of the Stones of the circle?). Keep running, running, running. . .

She heard the sound of a car ahead, the Other-like roar of the engine and the wheels on the stone road. Almost by instinct she dodged under the cover of the trees, watched from behind a thick mossy trunk as the car drove past. It wasn't Anji's: she thought it might be Bob's, but it seemed smaller. The driver had a –

– *black clothes with gold* –

The driver was a time cop, and there was another one in the car with him. In the back seat she saw –

Jack.

And another man, it might have been Fitz but they were gone.

But it had definitely been Jack.

Fitz had said, 'They kill you.'

Something about the face of the time cop driving the car, even in that quarter-second glimpse, told her that Fitz hadn't been wrong. She hesitated, then set off after the car. It wasn't moving fast – the road was too narrow for that, and it didn't go on much further. Her mind screamed that she was getting herself into danger, for no reason. But she didn't have any choice. She barely knew Fitz or Jack, but they were two of the three people in this world that she did

know, which made them almost family. She couldn't abandon them to a certain death. She had the element of surprise: there was a chance she could help.

The car stopped as the road ran out. Iyeeeye took cover by the side of the road and watched as the time cops bundled two figures out. Jack and, yes, it was Fitz. She could hear his voice, with that slight ironic twang, though she couldn't understand what he was saying.

She slipped out of hiding, moved across the stone surface as quietly as she could. They were moving off into the bushes, following the trail to the stone circle. Had Fitz talked them into going there?

A wild idea began to form in Iyeeeye's head.

If they were in the circle. . .

If she could get close enough. . .

If she could make herself calm enough. . .

Then she could save them. She could carry them away into time itself.

Anji knew something was wrong even before she reached the hotel. There was a quiet knot of people outside, as if there had been an accident, but there was no sign of damage, no ambulance.

Anji stopped the car short of the crowd, but it was already too late. There were shouts of recognition, and a general movement towards her. A girl of about twelve popped up beside the car, apparently from nowhere, and said, 'The other tour guide's been arrested.'

'Fitz?' Anji tried not to let the fear, or the anger, show in her face. She'd known the risks: she had to keep a cool head now. 'What's he done this time? Drunk and disorderly?'

The girl's mother had caught up with her now. Blonde, bob-haired, she spoke with a Midwestern drawl. 'I think it's more serious than that, Anji. Something about an illegal time machine. And he had the boy with him.'

It was a second before Anji realised that she meant Jack. It also took a second before Anji remembered that Jack was sitting beside her, silent and staring in the passenger seat and *couldn't possibly have been with Fitz*.

'When Fitz was arrested?' she asked blankly. 'He had the boy with him when they. . . ?'

The woman nodded, jerked her head towards Jack. 'That boy.'

The sun seemed very hot on Anji's face. She could feel the sweat forming, her skin itching.

'Something's wrong, isn't it?' insisted the woman. Anji remembered her name was Mrs Jeeves. A silly, incongruous name for an American.

Anji shook her head. 'I don't know. I'll have to contact the office.' *I've got to get away from here.*

'Why didn't you tell me there were two of him, you stupid bastard?' she muttered under her breath. As she spoke, she realised that there might not have been two of them when she left. How had Jack turned up? She glanced at him, but his blank face showed that he knew nothing about his other self. So it must be in his future. Was he going to build a time machine? Travel with Iyeeey? In the TARDIS? Steal a Good Times machine? Anything was possible.

'What do we do? You've got to tell us what to do.'

Anji focused. She saw Mrs Jeeves's polite expression slipping away, being replaced by a hard anger. 'You've got to tell us,' she repeated.

Anji made a decision. She got out of the car, walked briskly towards the hotel. 'I'm sorry, but I'll have to call the office.'

'You're not going to leave *him* here.'

A man's voice, rough and heavy. Anji saw a check shirt, bulging muscles, and clever, shifty eyes staring from a fat face.

He meant Jack, Anji realised. The boy was still in the car. Anji looked back, saw the fear in his face, and knew that he had seen a threat in the crowd that she hadn't noticed. She saw the other men, flat-faced and angry, like big baboons getting ready for the kill. Surely they wouldn't –

No. They weren't a lynch mob. But somebody was going to call the police – if they weren't already waiting in the hotel. These people came from a culture where they had been told that refugees from other time zones were dangerous, that they threatened security, life, reality. They had their children with them. If Anji tried to drive off with Jack now, they would probably try to stop her. If she went in and left him, they might do anything.

She couldn't take the risk. Slowly, she turned and walked back to the car. Jack was staring at her, mouthing something. Anji had no idea what he was trying to say. Someone shouted. Anji didn't hear the word, but the tone was enough to know it was obscene. A stone whizzed past her ear, clacked on the metal wing of the car.

'You're not taking him away, you –' Anji heard the obscenity this time. She jumped for the car, felt a hand grab her arm, almost fell. Jack had the door open and was shouting, 'Get in! Get in!' She struggled over flesh and metal, heard someone screaming. A stone caught her cheek: she saw it fall into the well around the hand-brake, a streak of bright blood across it. Anji fell into the seat, closing the door, but it jammed. A leg was in the way, hairy, with a grey sock and a brown sandal on the end of it. There was a star of cracked

glass on the windscreen. She shoved at the door, realised it wasn't going to close. Someone else was on the bonnet. She got the engine started, reversed, heard something snap and realised it was bone. Screams of pain rose above the anger and taunts and Anji realised she'd just broken a man's leg. The door hung open: Jack slammed it shut without a word.

The car was clear of the crowd now, or they'd dropped back: Anji reversed into the main road, slammed the car into first and rocketed away towards the time port.

'We're going the wrong way!' shouted Jack. His voice shook with fear.

'We just have to go,' snapped Anji. After a second she realised that she should have told him she knew another way, or something, anything to show she wasn't as panicky and desperate as he was. Her hands were slipping on the steering wheel from a combination of sweat and trembling. She was weaving through the traffic, doing nearly ninety mph. That alone would get her arrested.

She forced herself to slow the car down, made a left turn as soon as she could. The road quickly ran out, leaving her in a circle of dry white earth surrounded by pine trees.

'Best to leave the car,' said Jack. 'It's about the only yellow one here. They'll find it, easy.'

He was right. Anji decided it was about time that she started doing some thinking instead of leaving it all to a fourteen-year-old. She turned off the engine and got out. 'We turned right,' she said, 'So we're on the same side of Jumpsville as the TARDIS.'

'About three miles that-a-way, I should think.' Jack looked at her for approval. Anji nodded, and he set off smartly enough into the shade of the pines. She followed, gradually feeling her panic subside.

'Fitz didn't say the ordinary people were dangerous too,' said Jack.

'Perhaps he didn't know. I didn't know. We didn't know much more than you, Jack – we're here to find out.'

'We'd better be careful. Stay off the paths. I know the land round here. We call it the Boondocks. Dad and I used to go walking when I was a kid. Can you navigate by the sun?' He made it sound like a special skill, rather than common sense. Perhaps he'd been in the boy scouts or something.

'Of course.'

'Good.' He glanced up at the sky, began following a steep, softly pine-needled slope. Anji could hear water ahead.

When they reached the stream, it was disconcertingly wide – over ten metres. ‘It’s not quite the same as it was in my time,’ said Jack. His voice had lost its confidence.

Anji wasn’t feeling too confident either. ‘I don’t remember a river bridge on the road to the TARDIS.’

‘The river might go underground.’

It seemed too big for that. They followed the bank for a while, watching the green water eddy and swirl. On the road above them they could still hear the hum of traffic. Gradually it faded, but then, disconcertingly, Anji heard the unmistakable howl of police sirens.

‘Time cops?’ asked Jack.

‘Yes, but don’t worry. Cars can’t follow us into the forest, and if they follow us on foot they’ll have to take the time to work out which way we went, which means we should be able to keep ahead of them. Anyway they’ll go to the hotel first.’ As if to prove the truth of her last words, the sirens died away.

Jack seemed reassured. Anji doubted if he realised how hollow her own words seemed inside her head. She felt a stab of apprehension for Fitz, but told herself not to be stupid. Fitz might have the dress sense of a chimpanzee at a tea party, but he could take care of himself. Most of the time.

The river was turning, slowly, its course moving towards due south. Anji realised that the TARDIS must be on this side of it. It was flowing quickly now, and there was a roaring ahead.

Jack spoke up, his voice nervy. ‘There isn’t a waterfall here in my time. Not white water, even.’

‘We’re probably not where we think you are.’

Jack shook his head. ‘There’s no white water anywhere round Jumpsville. It sounds as if it’s not just history that’s changed, it’s geography.’

‘Which is the same as changing history, but a lot further back. But –’

She stopped, remembered what Mrs Jeeves had said. ‘*Same boy.*’

It had been nagging away at her for some time. Mrs Jeeves couldn’t have thought that Anji had brought the boy who had been with Fitz back to the hotel. That didn’t make any sense, not if Fitz had been arrested. She mean it was the same boy *again*.

There were two Jacks. There were *really* two. It wasn’t just some crazy time-travel duplication that had happened in the last few days because of Good Times Inc and its stupid machines, the same kid getting caught up in a time loop and meeting himself. The two Jacks were totally different people, from different worlds.

One belonged in the world with the wide river and the white water (perhaps), this one belonged in a different world. When the second one had arrived, Fitz must have realised at once – the new Jack would never have met him before, to start with. How had the cops got involved? Perhaps they had sensors of some sort, could pick these things up. Or, given the mood she'd seen in the crowd, somebody had reported it.

A muffled shot sounded, not far away. Jack jumped, but then grinned at Anji. 'Car backfired.'

Anji knew better. She'd heard too many guns. A second shot confirmed it, and a muffled cry of pain, followed by a third shot. Anji felt her skin prickle. She began to move quickly along the path, towards the sounds, trying to keep as quiet as possible. Jack followed; he seemed to get the idea without having to be told. He didn't say anything when they saw the TARDIS ahead. Was this the right place? Had it moved? It didn't seem right, not with the big river nearby – but the road was there.

She heard Jack gasp and looked down, saw him pale, staring. She saw him rush forward towards the body on the ground – the body of a boy in a Coca-Cola T-shirt –

– oh no it was Jack it was Jack who was dead with blood splattering his face –

Jack had worked it out too and he was screaming and running towards the TARDIS.

'No!' shouted Anji.

The figure rising out of the bushes was wearing a police uniform and he had a gun and it was pointed at Jack –

'No! Don't –'

The gun moved, pointed at Anji's face. Jack carried on running and cannoned into the man as the gun went off. Jack's head jerked back but he was OK, because he rolled away and ran, ran for the TARDIS. He knew it had a door but did he know it was locked?

'Jack!' shouted Anji. She could see the second cop with a gun on her, and knew what she had to do. She jumped for the first cop, saw the gun spit again, felt a burning pain in her gut. Had she been hit? She dropped, saw she had collided with a warm, meaty object.

Fitz's body. His eyes were open, milky, like a dead fish, his flesh was like putty.

This wasn't supposed to happen. It can't happen to Fitz –

But it had. Anji could hear the cop approaching. She rolled in the cold leaf litter, heard the crack of another shot. Had Jack been hit? She tried to

squirm round, but was still hurting. She glanced down, couldn't see any blood. Perhaps she'd hit a stone or something.

A shout from Jack: Anji looked up, saw the TARDIS door wide open. Jack ran through with the second cop in pursuit. The door slammed in the cop's face.

'Doctor!' she shouted. 'Doctor, I'm out here!'

The door did not open.

I knew I was expendable, she thought. But before she could hold on to any of the feelings attached to that an arm caught her around the neck, dragging her back. She felt the metal of the gun on the back of her neck. She wondered where the Doctor was. She wondered if she would feel the bullet as it entered her skull.

Chapter Eight

You Can Run but You Can't Hide

'This isn't possible,' muttered Fitz, staring at the man who said he was Jack. Behind him, he could hear Jack breathing hard, beginning to panic.

'It is, I'm afraid, very possible,' said Sabbath. 'Though whether it is true on this occasion remains to be established.'

'I'm afraid it's so,' said Akhenaton (Fitz refused to think of him as Jack). 'Look, sorry about the Egyptian Nobleman stuff but I had to be sure you were really first-generation time travellers. There are some folks called the Time Police around, and they're not too nice if they know you've got a time machine. But I can see you're not them. I came out of Jumpsville in my own time machine, and I landed here. I guess you –' He nodded at Jack – 'landed somewhere else. I've met a couple of other people that might have been me. I don't know which version, or who, or how, or when any more. I kind of got tired of trying to work it out. I just keep some friends in the river house and keep the locals at bay with snake-oil miracles and bicycle lamps. I guess I don't want to damage time any more than I can help.'

'It's too late for that, Mr Kowaczski,' said Sabbath softly. 'Far too late.'

For once, Fitz could only agree with him.

'Let me take you down the river house,' said Akhenaton, glancing sharply at the big man, as if uncertain what sort of bargain to make. 'I'm sure you guys must be hungry.'

It wasn't far: back down the slope by a private path, avoiding, Fitz noticed, the wheat field and the Pharaoh's men. The river house was bigger than the other one. It was made of stone, which Fitz knew was almost unheard of in this era, unless you were a member of the priesthood, or dead. Obviously this Jack who had become Akhenaton hadn't done so badly in ancient Egypt. Fitz found himself wondering how: a naive kid, who didn't speak the language, who didn't have any family or wealth – had they just bowed down before him? Given him money, position, gold? If so, and if he lived so quietly, why was the Pharaoh trying to kill him? There was a lot about the story that didn't quite fit together,

and a hardness in the man's eyes that was disconcerting. He didn't look like Jack – but then, why would he after twenty years? He talked as if he had been Jack, once. He had the accent down OK. But he wasn't Jack any more. He was a rich Egyptian merchant who knew about time travellers and exploited that special knowledge. He was in some political difficulties. Whether these two last facts were connected remained to be seen. Once again, Fitz wished he had the Doctor to talk to. Or at least Anji. He didn't feel he could confide in his Jack – who was still gobsmacked by the whole situation – and he felt uneasy with Sabbath.

The big man was standing now under the stone lintel of the river house, filling the doorway, looking up at the place as if he owned it. Perhaps he did. Perhaps this 'Jack' was a plant, the whole thing a set-up from the beginning – but why?

When Sabbath went inside, Fitz beckoned to Jack, indicated that they should stay in the street, but the boy didn't take any notice. Fitz wondered if he would simply change sides, suborned by Sabbath like Juliette had been.

'No,' he told himself. 'We're not having that.' Though he had no idea how he was going to prevent it.

He went in. It was cool inside, and dark except for the light flooding through the doorway. When his eyes adjusted, Fitz could see more silk and gold, and a bicycle.

'I used it to power the machine,' said Akhenaton. 'I figured it would be safer if I took a power source that didn't need batteries. I didn't reckon on the valves burning out.'

'Yeah, mine blew too,' said Jack. 'Why do they do that?'

He was asking Sabbath the question, but Sabbath didn't take any notice. He was doing a Doctor-ish thing, wandering round the room peering at artefacts, nodding to himself, muttering occasionally. Yet from him it didn't seem friendly and harmless. It was heavy and threatening, as if he were getting ready to break up the place. Akhenaton was watching him like a wary cat.

'Why does Cheops want to kill you?' asked Fitz. 'Has he found out you're a time traveller?'

'Not quite. He thought I was good magic, now he thinks I'm bad magic.'

'A not unusual fate,' commented Sabbath.

Akhenaton ignored him, looked at Fitz. 'A lot of the trouble – no, let me get this right, a lot of the things that Cheops thinks are "bad magic" he's pinning on his dad's girlfriend. He thinks she killed his dad and is after the Kingdom for

the forces of evil. She's black, which doesn't help; the Egyptians of this period think blacks are animals, or pretty nearly.'

'Black?' Fitz felt a flutter of hope. Was Anji here as well? 'As in Asian, or African?'

'I don't know, I've never met her; they describe her as "Nubian", so that's African, I expect, unless she's really a time traveller. Which is also possible, I suppose. But I think she's local. Probably fell for Cheops's dad – the money, the glamour, the power – then had the misfortune to be around when he died.'

'So she's been here – I mean, if she is a time traveller –'

'Almost as long as I have. Longer, perhaps.'

Fitz frowned, thought of Anji twenty years older. Twenty years stuck in ancient Egypt, with no computers, no prospects, no smart clothes, no hope of going home. Yes, she would have tried to run the Kingdom, if she could. Even if it meant marrying the Pharaoh. It would be about the only thing that would interest her.

'I don't think it's anyone you know, Fitz,' said Akhenaton.

'I would not be certain of that.' Sabbath's voice, from right behind him, made Fitz jump. 'When everything else has failed, coincidence is what keeps time rooted. It is ultimately destructive, like bindweed in a brick wall, but it can delay the end with its substance.'

Akhenaton frowned at Fitz. 'Sounds great, I think.'

Sabbath's face also creased, but the effect was more a thunderous scowl than a frown. 'Don't mock,' he rumbled. 'Why do you think there are two of you in the room?'

'He's right,' Fitz heard himself say. He didn't want to agree with Sabbath, but two (or more) Jacks, and the hope of finding Anji, were too much for him. 'I think we should meet this "Nubian".'

'You're welcome to it,' said Akhenaton. 'I want to stay alive, thank you very much. I've done pretty well so far.'

There was a knock at the door. Akhenaton tensed, then, as the knocking went on in what was clearly some kind of code, he relaxed and opened it. Fitz noticed for the first time heavy iron bolts and hinges, of a sort he doubted were native to Egyptian metallurgists in 3000 BC.

A young woman stepped inside, carrying a basket on her head. She smiled at Akhenaton, glanced nervously at Fitz, then at Sabbath, before shutting away out of sight. Fitz heard her speak, as if to a child.

'My wife,' explained Akhenaton. He didn't seem to think any further explanations, or introduction, necessary.

'Is she a native?' asked Sabbath.

'Kind of. I found her wandering about in the desert five years ago. She'd been seeing things that definitely don't belong here, but I think she lived here before that.'

'You think?' The woman had seemed perfectly lucid. Didn't she know where she had lived?

Akhenaton shrugged. 'She only speaks the low language. Slave talk. I never quite got my head around that.'

Which seemed odd, since he'd had no trouble with the high language. Fitz became aware that Sabbath was following the conversation with some interest.

'Akhenaton. I think I need to speak with you alone.'

'Why?' asked Akhenaton.

Good question, thought Fitz. Had Sabbath, too, decided that Akhenaton's story didn't quite make sense? The big man was shepherding Akhenaton through the doorway and into the street outside. Fitz gestured at Jack to stay put, and went through the bead curtain where the woman had gone. It wouldn't do any harm to talk to her.

He found her nursing a baby, a wizened little thing that sucked frenziedly at her breast. She glanced up, frowned sharply. 'Not here,' she said. 'You shouldn't be in here. Babyroom.'

If that was all there was to Low Egyptian, thought Fitz, no wonder Akhenaton didn't have much time for it. Nonetheless he backed out, with what he hoped was a polite smile, and from outside the bead curtain asked, 'Where did you live as a child?'

'Child? My child?'

Was the woman an idiot?

'No. You. Where did you live when you were a child?' How much clearer could he make it?

'Ah. In land – beyond Egypt. Snow.'

Snow didn't sound very tropical. It didn't sound like anywhere within travelling distance of Egypt in something-thousand BC, unless there was some cheating going on. 'Snow?'

'Many kinds of snow. Ice. Slush. Sleet. Soft hail. We cover houses in snow. Akhenaton doesn't understand.' She emerged from the curtain, the baby in her arms, and now she was smiling. 'He thinks I'm mad, or that I was seeing – he calls them "time ghosts". But I did live there.'

Fitz frowned. Why would Akhenaton not understand what was obvious, that this woman had lived in a very cold country, either in this time or (more likely)

an earlier one, perhaps during the Ice Age? Jack would know about snow, would have heard of Eskimos. So would any other American kid his age. So was Akhenaton really Egyptian? If so, how had he got the American accent? And how did he know about Jack?

‘You believe me, don’t you?’

Fitz became aware of the young woman again. Now that he thought of it, she wasn’t the slender build he’d expect of an Egyptian, more thickset with a slightly Eastern look. Or was he just imagining things? What had ancient Egyptians looked like, anyway?

‘Where are you, Doctor?’ he muttered under his breath. It was humiliating to realise how much he relied on the Doctor. Hadn’t he learned anything in his travels?

Oh Christ I hope he isn’t really dead.

Of course he wasn’t. Sabbath was bluffing, lying, something. Fitz was sure about that.

The woman was turning away, sheltering the baby. Fitz heard footsteps behind him, knew it was Sabbath.

‘We must move quickly,’ rumbled the familiar voice.

For some reason, Fitz felt sick.

‘The “Nubian witch” is Anji, don’t you think?’

‘Possibly.’

The woman spoke up. ‘Where is my husband?’

‘Where he should be,’ said Sabbath.

Fitz felt sicker. He turned to the woman. He realised he still didn’t know her name.

‘I think you’d better come with us,’ he said.

‘This is my home.’ Panic was creeping into her voice.

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea.’ Sabbath.

‘We’re not leaving her here on her own with the child.’ *Not after what you’ve just done*, he wanted to say. But he couldn’t think about what Sabbath had just done, didn’t want to complete the chain of reasoning that made it possible, then necessary.

Akhenaton had met the real Jack and had learned enough to make him rich, then somehow there had been a betrayal and Jack had died – been murdered? And Akhenaton thought that Fitz and Sabbath must be Jack’s friends and would need to protect himself and he was a killer so it was better to kill than –

No. That was Sabbath’s reasoning. The Doctor would have done something different. Fitz wasn’t sure what, but it would have been different. It would have

been something that didn't make him afraid to turn, afraid to see Sabbath's face, afraid to go outside.

Jack was standing in the doorway, and from his pale face Fitz could see that he had worked it out too – enough to scare him, anyway. Or he'd seen something, heard something perhaps.

They had to get out of here before the woman realised.

'We have to leave now,' he said to Akhenaton's wife. 'And you have to come with us.'

'But my husband. . .'

'We have to go.'

'You're right. Maybe she should come.' Sabbath seemed relaxed. 'And there's no hurry. There are ways, you know.'

Fitz shuddered.

Sabbath's hand touched his shoulder. 'You can't be so squeamish, Mr Kreiner. We have reality itself at stake. Everything that exists. We – you, me, Miss Kapoor – are critical to any chance there is of survival, for everyone. We can't afford to be murdered by a petty lord with designs above his station.'

'You didn't have to –'

'What else could I do?'

'We could have left.'

'He pulled a dagger on me. There wasn't time for niceties.'

Fitz wasn't sure if he believed that story. He wasn't sure if he was meant to.

'What has happened to my husband?' The woman's voice was thick with terror, now. Her mouth was open, and her eyes were darting from Fitz, to Sabbath, to Jack, as if she had found herself in a coven of demons.

'You must come with us,' repeated Fitz, in a blind panic.

'No!' she was screaming now. 'No! No! No!'

Sabbath had a knife in his hand. Short, dull, leather-handled, business-like.

'Definitely not,' said Fitz, catching Sabbath's broad arm. The strength in his own voice surprised him. 'Let's just get the hell out of here.'

Even more surprising, Sabbath put the knife away. 'You're right, Mr Kreiner. There are certain values that must be maintained. I'm sorry.'

He put the knife away and ran. Fitz grabbed Jack, hauled him up into his arms, and followed. Behind them, the woman's howls echoed on the stone.

Fitz wondered what Sabbath had done with the body.

Back at the *Jonah*, the Pharaoh's men were waiting. The sun was lower now and their armour burned russet. Sabbath made no attempt to avoid them,

merely bowed and said, 'It's done, my friends.'

Fitz felt his sickness return. Jack whispered, 'What's he talking about? Has he really killed Akhenaton?'

Fitz nodded.

'But why?'

'I'll tell you later.' Fitz needed to hear what Sabbath was saying. But it didn't appear to be anything of consequence: he was welcoming the soldiers aboard the *Jonah*. Fitz noticed that they glanced warily at the apes, but scarcely seemed surprised.

An arranged visit, then. So much for Sabbath's storms and unplanned voyages. He watched the dark man and the two warriors talking on the deck, their images wavering in the heat rising from the steel. 'We can't trust anyone,' he muttered to Jack.

The boy watched him steadily. 'Can I trust you?' he asked.

'I have a proposal to put to you, Mr Kreiner.'

They were in the bridge room, Sabbath at his most magisterial, with black gloves (like an executioner, Fitz thought). Jack had consented to try to sleep, in a small, stiflingly hot room that Sabbath had described as a cabin, but seemed more of a metal cupboard with a bolster. Fitz didn't think the kid was sleeping.

'You are interested to meet Akhenaton's "Nubian witch", because you think it might be Miss Kapoor?'

Fitz nodded.

'I would also like to meet her, though I think that you may be disappointed. I have my own reasons.'

'Someone else you want to kill?'

'Please, Mr Kreiner, don't be immature. You know how little I like killing; you know we had no choice. And it was not, as you seem to think, pre-arranged. You misunderstood.'

'"It is done",' quoted Fitz.

Sabbath shrugged. 'What else was I supposed to say? Akhenaton wouldn't have lived long, in any case. The Pharaoh's men were sent to kill him; I distracted them.'

Fitz decided it wasn't worth discussing exactly which set of lies he was supposed to believe. 'I don't particularly want to see Anji in your company.'

'You may find it difficult to make the journey on your own. It is some three hundred miles. The Pharaoh's men have offered to help – I can't take the *Jonah*.'

'Why not?'

Sabbath gestured at the flags on the wall behind him. 'There is a centre of relative temporal stability here. It would be foolish to move around it in the *Jonah* and risk its disruption. Besides, the place is inland.'

'Perhaps we should just stay away altogether.'

'We don't have the choice, having come this far.'

'Meaning?' Fitz was losing patience. 'Look, you tell me the Doctor's dead, which I don't believe. You take me away from Jumpsville, for no clear reason. You haven't explained anything.'

'Mr Kreiner: as we have agreed, in the absence of your ebullient friend I am the only one who knows what is happening, or has any idea what to do about it. I suggest that you take my advice and travel with me to this place, Ah-hak-Dal. I suggest that you trust me.'

'How can I trust a murderer?'

'And the Doctor has never killed anyone? What about Mr Malahyde's world?'
Eh? 'How do you –'

'Why are you surprised that I know?' Sabbath turned away, faced the map. 'And if I didn't know, I would guess. The Doctor has killed many times, Mr Kreiner. He has murdered many worlds. Entire races of beings gone, because the Doctor thought it necessary to remove them. Does his being something other than a man justify that?'

That was different, Fitz wanted to say, but he wasn't sure that he had the necessary philosophical reasoning ready, so decided on the easier line: 'He wouldn't have killed Akhenaton.'

Sabbath seemed to hesitate, then said gently, 'Are you sure?'

Fitz remembered a beer-soaked morning, sunshine, and a friend he had once had who no longer existed. And knew he *wasn't* sure.

'He wouldn't have killed Akhenaton,' he said again, just to remind himself whose side he was on.

Sabbath said nothing.

The size of the expedition surprised Fitz. He had long-distant memories of Hollywood films showing thousands of slaves labouring to build the pyramids, but the quiet riverside where the *Jonah* had been moored had not prepared him for the scale of operations that the Kingdom of Egypt could bring to bear when it needed to. There were thousands of people, men in armour marching in crude phalanxes, women, children, goatherds, priests in tall strange helmets crested with feathers. There were hundreds of animals, mostly oxen, some camels,

several huge, shaggy, semi-tame lions whose purpose Fitz couldn't imagine, and a flock of hobbled ibises in copper cages. There were ropes and tents and elephants, wooden palanquins the size of canal barges, wheels and rollers and canvas netting, and vast quantities of dust.

Cheops himself was sheltered in a huge silk-and-rope construction more like a movable palace than a tent, running on palm-log rollers and towed by four teams of oxen. A dozen or so slaves ran along each side of the giant palanquin, waving peacock-feather fans. Or perhaps they weren't slaves: Fitz noticed they were changed over every few minutes, which seemed overly considerate. On the other hand, that might be because the Pharaoh didn't like the smell of sweat.

It wasn't very organised. No one exactly told Fitz where they were meant to be, so he and Sabbath and Jack made up their own party, with a canvas tent from the *Jonah* and the couple of the Pharaoh's soldiers who had accompanied them from the riverside. It had taken about a day to meet up with the great army; there had been no need for fancy communications, it was a case of following the white haze of dust thrown up by the throng, until they were in the middle of it, Fitz and Jack sneezing themselves silly, Sabbath seemingly immune.

'He's getting more and more like the Doctor,' Fitz told Jack.

'What does that mean?' The boy's sense of adventure had returned smartly with the journey, and particularly after sighting the great army: his eyes were glowing, his face flushed with heat and excitement. This was, evidently, what he had signed up for.

'More powerful,' said Fitz. 'More dangerous.'

Neither of them had mentioned Akhenaton again: Fitz wasn't sure if driving home moral lessons would be any help in keeping Jack onside. Jack didn't rise to the bait now, merely pointed in astonishment at a man striding literally head and shoulders above the crowd, black skinned, with a golden helmet crested with blue feathers.

'The Pharaonic Guard,' said Sabbath. 'All Nubians. Racially and culturally distinct from the Egyptians, who of course think of them as barbarians. It has to be said that it is a sign of – shall we say, a certain lack of popularity, to use foreigners to protect oneself.'

'So why are we working for the Pharaoh?'

'It's "using him", Mr Kreiner. And the answer is "lack of choice", in case you hadn't guessed.'

'I still don't see why it's so important to find this Nubian witch.'

I've told you, she is in the centre of a zone of stability. Probably she is the cause of it, or has control over something that is the cause. There are some things here that shouldn't be – ourselves, for instance – but there is no "Good Times Incorporated", there are no hotels, nor holiday coaches. I need to know why.'

'How many are there in the Pharaonic guard?' asked Jack, shouting over the din.

'Probably not many,' said Sabbath. 'Twenty, thirty at most. The more people employed, the more there is risk of a breach of trust.'

Which made Fitz think of another point. 'So why are you bringing us with you?'

'It's "using you", Mr Kreiner. And the answer, again, is "lack of choice". And, as I have repeatedly explained, I'm afraid I am not at liberty to explain the why and wherefore at this stage.'

Fitz wondered if there was an answer, and if there was, whether he really wanted to know.

Chapter Nine

Wanna Live For Ever

On the third night, they began to see the ghosts. It was not long after sunset, but the stars were out, and there was no light but the campfires and the faint silver of a quarter-moon. Then, without any sound or warning, there was more light: dim outlines of square buildings, spaceship-shaped vehicles moving quickly above and through the encampment, the illuminated fronds of palm trees. Jack recognised it at once: these were the hotels, bars, souvenir shops of the world of Good Times Inc.

A woman in a red T-shirt and sunglasses walked right through him, holding a young kid's hand and smiling. Her feet were a foot above the sand, walking on what looked like golden paving. Fitz was staring at her, but then he would. Jack had caught him looking at the Pharaoh's dancers, who walked around with almost nothing on. Fitz was that sort of man. Jack's dad would have called him a waster.

The city became firmer, more real. Jack even thought he caught the whiff of exhaust gases from the cars. Some of the Egyptians were shouting in panic, but when Jack looked at Sabbath, he just nodded. 'This was to be expected.'

Jack nodded back. He'd decided to trust Sabbath. Neither Fitz nor Sabbath had explained it properly, but he'd figured it out for himself. Akhenaton hadn't ever been Jack. He'd been an Egyptian from some other version of the past who'd met a version of Jack and either that Jack had died or (if you believed Sabbath's hints) Akhenaton had killed that Jack to get his hands on the time machine. Either way Akhenaton had been dangerous. Jack wasn't sure that Sabbath ought to have killed the Egyptian, but with things as bad as they were, he may not have had any choice. He didn't think Fitz was right to make out that Sabbath was evil, just because of that. This was a sort of war, and people died in wars.

One of the Nubian guards appeared out of a ghostly souvenir shop, which faded away as Jack watched, like a torch with the battery failing. 'Sabbath, you must speak to the Pharaoh – he must know what is happening.'

Sabbath nodded, and with a wink at Jack followed the guard. Jack hesitated. It didn't seem likely the Pharaonic guard would let a kid close to the Pharaoh – especially not a kid from another time. But he slipped a bit further away from Fitz anyway, hoping for a closer look. To see a real live Pharaoh close up! It was worth taking a few risks. He walked on, keeping Sabbath's bulky figure in sight. The ghostly Good Times resort was very faint now, a glimmering barely distinguishable from the glow of smoke in the air, but Jack could still hear low, worried voices. A lion roared, again and again, as if something was hurting it.

At last Jack could see the pale shape of the Pharaoh's tent-palace ahead, guarded by tall Nubians with spears. A large fire burned in a stone hearth, its light drowning the remnants of the ghosts.

An arm went around his neck, a hand across his mouth. Jack struggled, tried to shout, but the hand only clamped tighter. He felt something cold touch his side, then heard a shout, felt a blow. He fell awkwardly, rolled over, saw a man –

– saw Fitz standing over him with a knife and a silly grin on his face, and behind him a man rushing forward with a spear –

'Fitz! Look out!'

Fitz moved aside but the man kept on, hurled the spear at Jack who rolled out of the way. He felt the ground shudder under the impact of the weapon and for the first time realised that the thing could kill him, kill him easily, kill him just as dead as a knife or a car wreck. He began to shout and the armoured man was on top of him, and there was the knife and there was Fitz with the spear, holding it clumsily, almost falling backwards. Jack was holding the man's knife arm with both hands as the spear slammed down and the hand holding the knife jolted back.

The two Nubian guards were pounding towards them. Fitz pulled Jack up so hard that he almost wrenched his arm off, and Jack saw the man with the spear sticking out of his neck and knew he was dead.

The face, blue and convulsed with pain –

The face was Akhenaton's.

'He wasn't dead!' shouted Jack. Which meant that Sabbath had lied which meant that – 'Fitz, we've got to get out of here!'

The Nubians were close, not running forward, watching, trying to figure out the threat.

'Fitz!'

'I've just killed him. I told Sabbath we would never do that and –'

Jack grabbed Fitz's arm. 'Come on! We haven't got time for that! If Sabbath was lying about how he killed this guy then it means he's going to kill us!'

The Nubians had started to move now. One of them had raised his spear, ready to throw. Even if he missed, they would never outrun this pair.

'I had to kill him. He said he was going to try to kill the Pharaoh,' said Fitz.

Jack realised he was speaking to the Nubians. They stopped, both with spears at the ready, only yards away. Jack could see the sweat gleaming on the nearest one's forehead.

'If I'd known he was still alive I would have been looking for him before this.' Fitz's voice was shaking.

This was a good story, thought Jack. It was fooling the guards. Or, any rate, they were still alive.

A shadow appeared in the curtained doorway of the silken tent-palace. Sabbath. 'You did the right thing, Mr Kreiner. But Akhenaton might still be alive.'

Jack stood in the sand, becoming aware that it was cold, his breath misting the air. He looked over his shoulder at Akhenaton, shuddered at the sight. The spear had almost taken the guy's head off – he *certainly* wasn't alive.

Fitz was frowning too.

'I see you still don't understand.' Sabbath sounded genuinely impatient. 'With a time machine, and none of your elemental friend's "Laws of Time" to stop you, it's possible to make as many copies of yourself as you care to. Think about it.'

The Nubians had lowered their spears. One of them turned to Sabbath. 'How many might there be here?'

'I have killed one, Mr Kreiner has killed another. I haven't seen any more, but it is possible that he might have made more than one copy.'

Jack was still trying to figure it out. 'How can you copy yourself with a time machine?' he asked Fitz. 'You can move about in time, but there's still only gonna be one of you.'

Fitz shrugged. 'Suppose so.' He didn't seem interested. Jack began to feel annoyed with him. Their survival might depend on thinking this through properly.

'Unless –' Jack muttered. Sio'phut had told him it was a good idea to start a sentence with 'unless' – it forced you to think. So – unless –

Unless you went back in time, met yourself, took yourself back to the future – but then the original you that had lived through the intervening time and done the picking up wouldn't be there any more –

Which must be what Sabbath meant about the 'Laws of Time'. Impossible things were just stopped from happening – if they weren't, time travel would be impossible anyway and that was that. But if suddenly there weren't any laws – if you could make a copy of yourself, even if it didn't make any sense – then you could make copies of anything. Your house. A city. A planet. The whole universe. But what from? The energy to make those things real had to come from somewhere. *Energy cannot be created or destroyed...* Jack felt a cold tingling in his stomach as he realised why Fitz, Sabbath and Fitz's missing friend the Doctor all thought the stakes were so high. It was hardly a surprise that they were seeing other worlds. What was a surprise was that anybody was still here at all. Something must be slowing the process down, something like a sort of time-travel inertia –

'Hey! You're hurt!'

Jack looked down, saw he was bleeding, a cut in the side soaking warm blood into his shirt. 'It's nothing,' he said. 'I didn't notice.'

It was true, it didn't hurt. Except when he touched it – then it hurt. He winced, sat down gingerly on the cold sand.

Fitz was standing over him. 'I think Sabbath has some bandages in the tent,' he said.

Later, Jack said quietly, 'I'm not sure I trust Sabbath any longer.'

It was dark in the tent; both ghosts and campfires dimmed outside. Fitz had found a cloth bandage and wrapped it around Jack's chest to protect the cut. He'd told Jack he needed stitches but Jack wasn't worried, it had stopped bleeding and he felt fine.

Sabbath had not returned from his audience with the Pharaoh, but Jack felt uneasy talking about him, as if he might at any time materialise from the shadows.

'You don't trust Sabbath? I'm the one who's killed someone now,' said Fitz.

'You didn't have any choice. And you saved my life. Besides I'm not so sure Sabbath did kill Akhenaton and there were two of them, like he said. I think there was only one.'

'And Sabbath did a deal with him?'

'Maybe.'

'If that's true then "maybe" we'd better leave. Soon.'

Jack thought about it. 'No. If Sabbath wanted us dead he could have killed us himself. Or got one of the other Egyptians to do it. Akhenaton was playing his own game.'

‘Easy to say that,’ said Fitz.

‘It makes sense.’

‘Yeah, but real life doesn’t, Jack. At least, not very often. There could be loads of reasons why Sabbath had to use Akhenaton, including several we haven’t a hope of working out.’

Fitz was beginning to sound weary again, and Jack realised that all his questions were starting to make him sound like a small kid. He wondered how much more Fitz knew, and how to get him to spill the beans now, rather than when it might be too late.

‘I’ll try a better question,’ he said after a bit more thinking. ‘Do we need to get out of here? Now?’

‘Probably. But I don’t want to let the Doctor down. I have to know what’s really happened to him.’

This time Jack couldn’t stop himself laughing, even if it made his side hurt. ‘You’ve just said you don’t know what Sabbath is doing, and that you reckon he’s lying to you. So what’s our reason for hanging around here? We’re going to be better off on our own.’

Fitz swore, and there was a rustle of movement in the darkness. ‘Come on, we’ve got to find out what he’s up to.’

Just what I was gonna do in the first place, thought Jack, *Before you decided I needed bandages.* But thought he’d better not say any more, so just followed Fitz out of the tent.

Outside, it was almost pitch dark. They stumbled through the darkness for a few paces, then Jack jumped as he became aware of someone touching his arm. A voice spoke in Jack’s ear, urgent, hoarse.

‘You fought bravely in the last hour, my friends, but I think you should leave now.’

There was a smell of sweat, a glint of golden armour: the Nubian guard.

‘Oh, why’s that?’ Fitz sounded unconcerned. He was good at that, Jack had to admit.

‘The Pharaoh will tell me to kill you soon.’

Jack tried to still his thumping heart, but his knees were quivering. The man was saying something else, but he was saying it to Fitz and Jack in his fear and confusion discovered he’d missed most of it. *Get a grip,* he told himself. *It’s no use panicking – you’re gonna have to stay alert to stay alive in this situation.*

Fitz grabbed Jack’s arm and dragged him back the way they’d come, around Sabbath’s tent, and on across the encampment. They tripped over bedrolls,

trod in the embers of a fire and had to back off. One or two soldiers swore at them sleepily, but no one stopped them.

Jack kept quiet until they were away from people. Fitz had got a flashlight out: it showed dry sand and pebbles, grey as moondust.

‘Where are we going?’ he whispered at last.

‘The witch’s palace, I hope.’ As usual, Fitz didn’t sound too sure of himself. ‘The guard used to work for Cheops’s dad, apparently, and he doesn’t think she’s up to any mischief. He thinks it’s Sabbath – he doesn’t trust him any more than we do.’

Useful, thought Jack. But he caught himself wondering if it was true, and which version of the Nubian guard they had been speaking to. Or were they walking on the moon?

‘Fitz,’ he said quietly. ‘Am I going crazy?’ He tried to tell Fitz how he felt, but it sounded like baloney even as he said it.

‘No,’ said Fitz after a while. He touched Jack’s arm gently. ‘We all feel like this. All the time.’

It was a couple of hours’ walk to the ‘witch’s palace’, and by the time they got there it was beginning to get light. Jack had been expecting a stone fortress, thick walls, gold decorations, huge statues. Instead, there were circular earth banks, covered in tall grass, with palm trees peeping over the top. A wooden gate stood open and unguarded.

Inside, the air smelled of mist and sweet fruit. Several young palms, twice head-high, fringed a small clear lake. Irrigation troughs ran off to the base of the banks, which were covered in flowers. Small fields of wheat, tomatoes, corn and what looked like small peach or plum trees grew in the watered enclosure. Everything was clean and green and well tended. A circular house like an African hut sat about ten feet from the ground, supported on the stump of a palm. At the foot of the stump, at the bottom of a ladder to the house, sat an African woman, cross-legged, surveying her tiny kingdom.

She got up as Jack and Fitz walked up a vine-fringed path towards her. She wore a grey suit, like a man’s, and a red T-shirt. Jack saw that she wasn’t young: older than his mum, probably. Her face had a serene look which reminded him of Sio’phut.

‘Hello,’ she said. ‘I’m Iyeeeye. You will be Anji’s friends. Fitz and Jack.’

‘I don’t remember you.’ Fitz sounded wary, and Jack began to feel uneasy, serene look or not.

But Iyeeye only smiled. 'I don't know what to say to you, Fitz. I know you will not remember me, but I remember you.'

Jack thought about this for a moment, and realised what the woman meant. It was like Fitz with Anji in the square at Jumpsville, only the other way round. He opened his mouth to speak but Fitz got there first.

'Where is Anji?'

Iyeeye shook her head.

'She's dead?' Fitz sounded as though he didn't believe it were possible.

The woman didn't reply.

'What happened?'

'She died of a fever. Ten years ago. I'm sorry.'

'Ten years –'

'Fitz,' said Jack. 'You're dead too, in her world. And me.'

Fitz whirled round. 'What?'

'He's right,' said Iyeeye. 'I saw you die.'

They could see the army coming from inside the hut, a cloud of white dust spreading over the desert, glinting here and there. Iyeeye only glanced at it, smiled slightly. 'Eat some peaches,' she said, offering a collection of the fruit in a wooden bowl. 'You will need them. I'll bet you haven't had breakfast.'

The room around them was big – bigger than it had looked from the outside. Dark wood was decorated with brightly dyed reed mats, covering the floor and also hung on the walls. It was clean, and there was fresh water. Jack had thrown some over his face and neck, and felt cooler and better than he had done since the *Jonah* had arrived on the Nile.

'You are here on your own?' Fitz was asking Iyeeye.

'I had a few of Memhennon's servants, but I have sent them away; I don't want them to die with me.'

'You know the Pharaoh's trying to kill you, then,' said Fitz.

Iyeeye nodded. 'Of course. Please, eat some peaches. I have some dates in coconut milk if you would prefer that.'

'Don't you think we should leave?' said Fitz. He was staring into the white light outside the window, frowning, perhaps trying to work out how long it would take the army to reach them. 'Or at least that you should?'

'I won't leave my garden. And anyway, do you think I can control time and yet not know my own future?'

'You know you're gonna die and you won't go?' asked Jack, his heart beating faster as he sensed heroism.

'It isn't that. I promised Anji I would wait for you; I have done so. She kept a diary – you might need it. She spoke your language, knew your world. I do not, not really.'

'Come with us –'

'This is my garden. And this is my life. I'd prefer it to end in the way I've chosen.'

Fitz and Jack looked at each other. Jack wondered if Fitz, like him, was remembering their talk that morning about going crazy. 'What do you mean, you saw us die?' asked Fitz suddenly.

Without a word, Iyeeeye picked up a notebook with a blue plastic cover and a biro attached by a string. Jack saw the Good Times Inc. logo on the cover. Fitz took the book, flipped it open; Jack stood on tiptoe and read:

'... decided to marry the Pharaoh. I couldn't sell myself like that. She doesn't see it that way. Just a means of survival...'

Fitz flipped back a few pages, stopped:

'... the only way I'll see you alive again is if another version of you comes here. It seems a long chance, but it has to happen...'. Fitz flipped forward, then stopped. Jack saw scrawly writing, like a child's. Fitz tried to read some, shook his head, put the book in his pocket.

'Thanks,' he said to Iyeeeye.

She nodded. Something in the solemn way she did it made Jack twig: her whole life had led up to this moment. Preserving this place, protecting Anji, marrying the Pharaoh, whatever else was in that book – everything had been done in the service of Anji and Fitz's mission to save the universe. Iyeeeye believed in it, had sacrificed herself to it without understanding it at all. A life had been dedicated to the cause of somebody she had never met on the say-so of one person...

Jack decided he'd better be dedicated to the Doctor's cause too. If somebody like Iyeeeye believed in it, then it had to be good.

They could hear the army now: a distant rumble of footsteps, the faint groans of camels, even human shouts. Iyeeeye looked from the window, said calmly, 'I don't know what will happen when I die. The Pharaoh doesn't understand that far from bringing a blight to his land I have been keeping it away. When I die, his world will change. You will have to help him.'

'You don't have to die,' said Jack.

Iyeeeye smiled down at him. 'Yes, I do. You can't get home otherwise. Anji explained it to me – read her words.'

Jack looked at Fitz, who got the book out again. This time he put it down flat on the table and they began to read it through from the beginning.

‘Fitz –’ (it began)

‘It’s taken me a long time to work this out, so please read it and don’t make a fuss. There’s only one way we can get out of this mess. There will be lots of worlds where you’ll never get here, but there has to be one where you will, otherwise –’ (a couple of words were crossed out, then it went on) ‘The first thing you have to understand, if you haven’t worked it out already, is there is more than one of us. More than one of *all* of us. OK, don’t go ape. Just read and understand. I wouldn’t have believed it either.’

Jack glanced at Fitz, but he wasn’t ‘going ape’.

‘Let me start at the beginning,’ (the journal continued). ‘I think you’re going to have to have Jack with you, for it to work, but you might not, so in case you don’t know him he’s a fourteen-year-old kid from a very odd version of America, complete with Martians, who invented his own time machine. Two of him – at least – arrived in Jumpsville; one ended up with you – no, not you, another Fitz – and they both got shot by the Time Police –’

Jack felt his stomach lurch, and closed his eyes for a second. *He had died* –

For a moment he felt pain, a constriction in his chest, desperate breathing. Then he felt a hand brush his arm, saw Iyeeeye. ‘Worlds touch each other,’ she said softly.

Fitz looked up, frowning. ‘You OK?’

Jack nodded and forced his eyes back to the page. Iyeeeye’s touch had made him feel better.

‘– the other Jack was with me at the same time and – sorry, Jack – he got killed too. I nearly did, but Iyeeeye had been watching and she was able to save me – just like she saved you, I think. If that’s the way you got here. You might have come some other way. Anyway, Iyeeeye got me out, and I got here, and we waited for you or the Doctor, or even Sabbath, or *anyone*, to show up. We waited and waited.... well, you didn’t show. I won’t go into our adventures, just say that I wouldn’t be a dancing girl, but Iyeeeye decided to marry the Pharaoh. I couldn’t sell myself like that. She doesn’t see it that way. Just a means of survival, according to her, and we were lucky to get the chance.

‘I suppose it was when I began thinking about how lucky we’d been, and how unlikely it is that anyone would find us here – this was after a year or two, when I’d had time to think, and time to realise that if the Doctor had given up on me I’d never get home.

I almost gave up. Living, that is. Iyeeeye had to force-feed me, pretty nearly. I kept asking her why didn't my friends come and save me, and she kept telling me that life didn't work that way, and I kept telling her the Doctor never let anyone down and dammit even her standing stones had been something to do with the TARDIS, he *must* be able to find me. I can still feel that anger now, just thinking about it. Eventually she taught me to accept, or just kept on being a good friend until I taught myself to – well, OK I don't accept it, Fitz, not really, not talking to you, even in a bloody notebook. But here's how it is.

'You have to turn up *after I'm dead*. If I live to be a hundred, it has to be after then. I think Iyeeeye knows how long I have – she says she knows how, and when, she's going to die – but she won't tell me, and I'd rather she didn't. But if you turn up before I'm dead, it won't work.

'What won't work? I can hear you asking it, in that sardonic tone. Well, the answer's "Saving the Universe", capital S capital U, of course. What else is worth all this? Dammit Fitz, I didn't think I'd be called on to make the ultimate sacrifice but it doesn't work like that, I suppose we all are in the end. Sorry, rambling. It's nice to "talk" to you, even like this, but I'm running out of notebook and there's a couple more things you need to know.

'You're wondering why you have to turn up after I'm dead. This is why: there's another me, that corresponds to the other you. *There must be*, or the Doctor would have looked for me, and found me, because he never lets anyone down. Unless he knows it's already too late, which it will be. I must be an Anji who is already dead when he finds out about me, otherwise he'd rescue me. So you must be a Fitz who got rescued by Iyeeeye instead of me and didn't get shot outside the TARDIS, and for that reason you've probably got Jack with you. You can't have run into the Doctor yet, because you have to tell him I'm already dead. He can't come back and save me then because he'd be breaking his own rules, and things are bad enough already.

'This is probably making your head ache. It makes mine ache every time I think about it, but we have to get it right. I can imagine your objections, so let's take them one at a time.

'OK, I know the Doctor might still turn up for me now, but after three years I don't think it's likely. Or he might be dead, in which case we're all dead anyway and I'm wasting my time writing this, but I don't think that either because if the Doctor was gone the TARDIS would go too, I think, and Iyeeeye wouldn't be able to do what she does, which is to maintain the integrity of local time. She can't help doing this, by the way, it's something to do with her connection with the stones which are connected with the TARDIS and neither of us understands

it properly so please don't ask her about it, her time is too precious now. But it happens, and I think it would stop if the Doctor died.

'More objections? Yes. Iyeeeye might die before me, in which case local temporal integrity will break down, and I might be lucky and get away alive – that's possible, but I don't want to chance it, I'd rather leave this document behind, because I'm about fifteen years older than her and more likely to die first. Anyway, like I said, I'm sure Iyeeeye knows the truth. I can tell by the way she looks at me sometimes, though she must try so very hard not to show it.

'Finally, you might not turn up, or not survive. Maybe Iyeeeye didn't rescue Fitz in any reality, perhaps you always got shot by the time cops. OK, that's more than possible. But then the Doctor would never see you again either, and he would know something was wrong, and he would rescue me, which he hasn't. See? Anyway, of course you're here, or you wouldn't be reading this.

'Don't try to save my Iyeeeye, by the way, and don't let the other Iyeeeye do it, if she's still with you. You're wasting your time. She was talking about committing hara-kiri at one point, so that I could go, but it didn't seem certain to work and I wasn't prepared – I *absolutely forbade* her to do it. I know the Doctor wouldn't have – oh, he probably would. But I wasn't about to. Ancient Egypt isn't so bad, I suppose, once you get used to it. But she knows that you *have* to go, or it's The End, Big Time. There aren't any more alternatives. Hang on – there's some more working out here –'

A few lines were scribbled over, then it went on – 'No there isn't. I can't think of any more justification, I just won't let her do it, OK? And you must. Sorry.'

A couple of blank lines, then a scrawled addendum, at the bottom of the page. 'She can't read. Fitz. I should have let her die. Now it's me. It was her or me. All along. Why was I so *stupid*?'

Jack looked at Fitz. He was still reading, his eyes moving as he followed the words. When he had finished, he swore again, and this time Jack didn't blame him.

'I'm sorry, she was your friend. Reading that must have been bad for you,' he said.

Fitz shook his head. 'It's not that. Not just that. You can see what she thought – that we would arrive with Iyeeeye. She doesn't mention us arriving with Sabbath. The Anji we knew in Jumpsville is someone else entirely –' He broke off, wiped sweat from his forehead. 'It doesn't make any sense, any of it. She built her whole life on this little piece of logic – this rescuing and not rescuing stuff – but it's wrong, because everything else has gone wrong too. I've got no idea why the Doctor hasn't rescued her. Perhaps he's dead. Perhaps

there are two of him, as well. I suppose she reckons that the TARDIS must be OK because she thinks Iyeeeye gets her power from it, but we can't even be sure of that.' He flung the book down. 'It's rubbish, Jack. All of it. Anji was cleverer than that when I knew her. She would have known it was rubbish if she hadn't been falling to pieces. She died for a piece of totally crap logic. She could have got out any time.'

Jack frowned. 'How? I reckon she died because she didn't want Iyeeeye to have to die so she could get out.' He followed the logic through in his head for a few seconds, then added. 'Which means we're stuck here until Iyeeeye's dead.'

Fitz shook his head. 'Weren't you listening? That's crap logic. Iyeeeye doesn't have to die, she doesn't have to do anything – bloody hell!'

He was still looking at the book. Jack suddenly noticed the man was crying.

Chapter Ten

Just the Two of Us

‘Anji!’

There was no response. Jack kept yelling into the thing – it was a sort of microphone, wasn’t it? He couldn’t understand any of the switches on the console, didn’t want to touch too many of them – the last thing he needed was another unexpected trip in time.

‘Anji! Can you hear me?’

Still only silence. The two time cops had long gone – they’d tried shooting at the TARDIS, but it must be tough because Jack hadn’t even heard the guns go off, nor any impact of bullets. It had been like watching a silent movie on the console screens. Then they’d called base and gone. But he knew they would be back, with back-up, before long. If Anji was hurt Jack knew that he had to get her in here before then, or she was dead. If they hadn’t killed her already.

He looked around at the huge chamber that was somehow folded into the tiny box. It was an extraordinary sight: as if his own armchair time machine had taken root and grown, become a world of machinery and light, wheels and dials and screens... He felt the pull of fascination, but that was yesterday’s feeling: he wasn’t a child any more. Machines weren’t going to save him. No gadget was going to be any use to Jack without someone to help him understand it.

He called Anji one more time, then knew he was going to have to go outside and look for her. But how did he get the door open? There was a large lever on the console – it might be for the door, or it might engage the main drive, or whatever this thing had. He put his hand on the lever –

‘I wouldn’t do that if I were you.’

Jack almost jumped out of his skin. He whirled round, saw a figure, almost screamed with terror.

‘It’s OK. I’m not the cops.’

Jack’s vision cleared: he saw a woman, light, thin, not very tall, not wearing a uniform. She sure didn’t look like a cop. She was leaning against the wall,

brushing her blonde hair back from her face in a repeated, awkward gesture. Her eyes were green, catlike, her nose long, her attention unwavering.

Jack took a deep breath. 'Who are you?'

'Good question. I could ask the same of you.'

'I'm Jack, and I live –' He swallowed. 'I guess I live in a place that doesn't exist any more.'

'Great,' said the strange woman. 'I come from one of those places too. *And* I seem to have had this conversation more than once already. But that's hardly a surprise. I'll probably have it again before I'm much older.'

Jack decided to ignore these complicated half-explanations. 'Did Anji bring you here?'

'Not exactly.'

That was two questions she hadn't answered. Jack didn't like it – there was something fishy about this woman. And Anji had never mentioned her – didn't seem to know she existed.

'You could tell me your name,' said Jack.

'It's OK,' said the stranger. 'I'm not going to hurt you. Why are you here?'

'Because they nearly killed me. And there was another – another me. They killed him.' As soon as he'd said it, Jack wondered if he should have given this away. 'Why are you here?'

'I live here.'

'How come Anji doesn't know about you?'

The woman tossed her hair, grinned. 'Anji doesn't know everything. She just thinks she does. I bet she was the one that told you that you can't go home.'

Jack nodded. 'Fitz told me.' He felt a gut-wrenching surge of hope. Could Fitz and Anji be wrong?

'It's worse than that,' said the newcomer. 'Do you know why she really wants you to stay in the TARDIS?'

Jack shook his head.

'The Doctor says that when all these different realities come together again, there'll only be one reality. And anyone –' She rolled her eyes – '*left over*, if you know what I mean, will just – cease to be.'

Jack stared at her. 'You mean they'll kill me?'

The woman shook her head. 'Uh-uh, dumb. You just stop, right? Like vanish into thin air?'

Jack didn't feel afraid, for some reason. There was something too theatrical about this woman. The exaggerated Southern drawl of her last speech had

replaced what had sounded like a British accent. He didn't think either voice was for real.

'Look, stop playing games. I'm scared about being shot by the time cops. I'm not scared of time travel, because I've done it and I know it works.'

The woman said nothing, just raised her eyebrows.

'Who are you, anyway?' persisted Jack. 'How do you know all this stuff?'

'I can see you're getting used to this.' The British accent was back. Perhaps it was the real one. 'How long you been travelling?' A New York accent now.

'About six hours. And quit the thing with the voices, I don't care how you speak.'

'OK.' British accent. 'Just practising.'

'Why do you need to practise?'

'I never know what role I might be asked to play.' It was another accent, European of some sort. She flicked her hair back as she spoke, then began urgently tying up the back of it in a plait, like a cat suddenly preening itself.

Jack decided to ignore the playacting. 'So you tell me – how long have you been in the TARDIS?'

'Months. At least, I think it's months. It might be years. Centuries even. Do I look a hundred and fifty to you?' She was still fiddling with her hair. 'You probably know how it is already, Jack. You quickly lose all sense of personal time in the TARDIS.' She paused, examined her hair using one of the console screens as a mirror. 'I think Fitz managed to work out when his birthday was, but I don't know how. Perhaps he just wanted a birthday.'

'Did he invite you to his party?'

Jack had thought he was being clever, getting information in a sidelong fashion like that, but she only stuck her tongue out at him and said, 'No, neither of them knows I'm here and I don't think the Doctor does, either. I'm a stowaway.'

'You need a ticket to travel on the TARDIS?'

They both laughed, and just for a second Jack thought the woman was being genuine.

'Must be pretty lonely, hanging about in here with no one to talk to.'

She began doing the thing with her hair again. 'I keep myself busy. Eavesdropping, playacting, the occasional grand larceny.'

'Do you have a name?'

'Call me Scarface.'

'Be serious.'

'OK, call me... Tee-Ex.'

'Tee Rex?'

She giggled. 'Might as well be. But it's TX, as in "transmission cancelled" – oh, but you wouldn't know about that.' She sobered up again, said, 'Look, Jack, this business is more serious than you think.'

'Everyone keeps telling me that. In fact, you told me that once already.'

'I'm not talking about the end of the universe as we know it. That's always happening, if you listen to the Doc and his friends. I'm talking about the practical effects of it all. Has Anji told you that every time you step outside the TARDIS door – or go in that time machine of yours, or one of the Good Times ones – you get duplicated?'

'Duplicated?'

'Cloned. Photocopied. Made into two separate people, one of whom is going to have to die, as explained in the previous explanation.'

Jack looked around the looming machinery of the console room. Suddenly it didn't make him feel at all safe any more. And what Tee Ex said made a weird kind of sense. How else was another one of him lying dead outside? 'Are you sure about that?'

'Certain.'

'So you don't leave the TARDIS? Ever?'

'I did, before all this got too bad. But not now. I can't. In my reality, humans don't exist at all.'

Jack stared. 'You mean you're not a human being?'

A slight smile. 'You asked why I was practising. Now you know.'

'But you look human.' *And you're a show-off.* But he didn't say that bit. 'I don't think you're telling the truth.'

'It's called plastic surgery, Jack. And a little bit of jaw reduction.' She looked away. 'You see, there's a reason why humans went extinct in my reality. We ate them.'

Jack had to laugh. 'Now I *really* don't believe you.'

But she just stared at him, with those catlike eyes, and the laughing dried up in his throat.

Anji could hear the cop approaching. She rolled in the cold leaf litter, heard the crack of another shot. Had Jack been hit? She tried to squirm round, but was still hurting. She could see the TARDIS door open, saw Jack run towards it with the second cop in pursuit.

There was a shot, and Jack fell. 'Doctor!' she shouted. Surely he had to be in there?

I knew I was expendable, she thought. But before she could hold on to any of the feelings attached to that an arm caught her around the neck, dragging her back. She felt the metal of the gun on the back of her neck. She wondered where the Doctor was. She wondered if she would feel the bullet as it entered her skull.

‘I wouldn’t do that if I were you.’

The Doctor’s voice seemed like a hallucination. Anji had been so certain she was going to die that for a moment she wondered if she had been shot in the brain and this was a dying illusion – but no, the Doctor was standing there, his hands in his pockets, leaning on the frame of the TARDIS door as if it were a country cottage. His hair gleamed in a stray beam of sunlight, his jacket looked burnished. Anji had never been more relieved to see a living being. Whatever happened now, she knew she would *survive*.

The cops didn’t seem particularly convinced by the Doctor at first. The gun stayed against Anji’s skull, and the other cop – an olive-skinned woman – simply turned on the Doctor and said, ‘Who the hell are you?’

‘Someone you can’t kill easily. Also –’ He reached into his breast pocket with a flourish and drew out a holographic object. He didn’t Say anything more, just smiled, but whatever the thing was, it worked. The guns went away, and Anji was hauled to her feet, though her arms were kept behind her back. ‘And Anji is a friend of mine,’ the Doctor added helpfully.

The cop let go, rather more slowly than Anji would have liked. She became aware that he smelled of meat and onions, as if he’d been eating fast food recently. She began to feel slightly sick.

‘And it’s safe for my other friend to come out of hiding, too,’ said the Doctor, pointing at a dark spot amongst the trees.

Anji saw Iyeye detach herself from the shadows and walk towards the TARDIS. She took Anji’s hands, gestured at Fitz’s body. ‘I couldn’t get near enough to save them. I’m sorry. I’m so so sorry.’ She was crying.

Anji looked at Fitz and felt a gut-wrenching sense of anger. ‘It’s not your fault.’ She looked up at the Doctor. ‘What happened? Why weren’t you there for him?’

‘I was too late,’ said the Doctor simply. ‘I felt it happen, but I was too late. By the time I got up there wasn’t anything I could do.’

Anji looked from the Doctor to Fitz, and from Fitz to the Doctor. Yes – he was upset, anguished even – but –

There was something wrong, frighteningly wrong, but she wasn’t sure what it was.

‘Come on,’ said the Doctor. ‘Let’s go inside. You’ll understand –’ He stopped, shook his head. ‘You’ll know. When you see it.’

Anji and Iyeye looked at each other. Anji slowly nodded, and they walked inside.

They hadn’t gone five paces into the console room when the Doctor stopped. ‘Oh, no,’ he said. ‘I knew it was a mistake.’

‘What was?’

‘He’s gone.’

Anji looked around. ‘Who?’

‘Jack. He’s gone.’ The Doctor sounded devastated, a lot more so than he had when he’d been looking at Fitz’s dead body. But he hardly knew Jack. Surely he cared more about Fitz?

The Doctor was at the console. He pressed a few switches, looked at the screens, then nodded. ‘Anji, this is why I’ve been trying to keep out from this as far as I can. Now that I’ve got involved reality has changed inside the TARDIS. Count the dead bodies outside.’

‘I’d rather worry about the fact that they were my friends.’

The Doctor grabbed hold of her, forced her to look through the open door.

She couldn’t see Fitz, but she could see Jack. She leaned out of the doorway, saw the other two bodies. ‘Three. Fitz. And Jack, twice.’

‘Or thrice. I saw both versions, you see. In one version Jack made it into the TARDIS because I happened to open the door just as he arrived. In the other, I was a few seconds too late. Perhaps the cop fired earlier, I don’t know.’

‘So where is he? This other Jack? Why isn’t he here?’

The Doctor just looked at her.

Then she twigged.

‘You mean he’s in *another version* of the TARDIS?’

The Doctor shut the door and nodded slowly. ‘I’m not certain yet,’ he said. ‘But I think we’ll find that there’s now more than one of *me*.’

Jack didn’t know what had happened to Tee-Ex. One minute she’d been there, teasing him about being an alien. The next she was gone. It was almost as if she’d fallen for her own story and just *ceased to be*.

He was still looking around in confusion, wondering what had happened to her, when a man’s voice said, ‘Funny, I could have sworn there were two of you.’

Jack turned to face the newcomer. He saw a light, beaming man, with dark brown hair and a broad smile.

'You'll be Jack, then. Where's Fitz?'

Jack swallowed. 'You're the Doctor?'

The man nodded. 'Fitz told you about me, then. That's good.'

Jack bit his lip. How could he tell him... ?

'Your friend –' He gestured at the screens above the console. 'Take a look. But don't open the doors.'

The Doctor frowned at him, ran to the console, pressed a couple of switches. Jack didn't dare look around, but he heard the Doctor's intake of breath, the soft words, 'Why Fitz?'

'I don't think they got Anji,' said Jack, without quite knowing why he'd said it.

'I can't see anything,' said the Doctor. 'And they didn't go away with her?'

'No.'

'Then someone else did.' He frowned. 'Perhaps that's why I thought – oh, never mind. The other body – that's you, isn't it?'

'Yes.' Jack became aware that his voice was quivering. 'I'm sorry, Doctor. I shouldn't have travelled in time. I know why they wanted to kill me now.'

'It's not your fault.' The Doctor's voice was soft, distant.

'Whose is it, then?'

'It's everyone's fault. Mine, mostly, I expect. I don't know.'

Jack opened his mouth to ask if Tee-Ex was involved, then thought better of it. He didn't know everything here. The Doctor seemed OK but his friend had just been killed. Anything might happen. Tee-Ex, despite her weird act, might be able to help him. Betraying her wouldn't help anyone. Unless it was *her* fault...

He shook his head. Too much of that sort of thinking was going to drive him mad.

'I'm sorry.' The Doctor's hand touched Jack's arm. 'It must be terrible for you.'

Jack turned to face him. The smile had gone, but the eyes were kind, warm. 'Not really terrible, mister. I'm just kind of – numb.'

'Yes, yes. That's to be expected. So am I.' He glanced up at the console screen. 'He's not dead, not everywhere, and yet he is dead here. And Anji –' He looked down at Jack. 'There was a woman in here, wasn't there? An African?'

Jack realised he meant Iyeeeye. Might have been talking about Iyeeeye all along, not Tee-Ex. 'Yes. A coloured girl. But she isn't here – we left her – no, hang on. We did leave her here when we went back for Fitz. You haven't seen her?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'I thought I saw someone –' He looked around. 'The old girl is filling up with ghosts. She won't travel away from the Earth any more. It's as if the rest of the universe isn't –' He shrugged. 'Anyway, I can't rely on her much longer.' He looked at Jack, and suddenly smiled. 'Jack, I'm going to need your help.'

Jack had a sudden feeling of dread. This man was like Sio'phut, but even more alien. It wasn't that he would deliberately hurt Jack, or even that he wouldn't care – he probably would care, but he was – bigger, somehow. *Beyond*. He was sad that his friend Fitz was dead – but he was more worried about something else.

It was scary.

He said, 'What do you need me to do?'

'I'm going to go back a little in time. Then I need you to go outside for me. I need to find out what the other me is doing.'

The other me? Jack's dread crystallised, like a knife forming in his stomach. He knew he was going to die, not once, but many times. And he knew there was nothing he could do about it.

'It's not fair!' he screamed, and began to run.

'There's more than one TARDIS already,' said Anji. 'Iyeeeye's whole world seems to be based on "Time Magic". And it comes from here.'

The Doctor shook his head, tut-tutted at something he saw in the numbers reeling over the configuration screens on the console.

'I tried to warn you,' said Anji. 'As soon as I got your message I came over here.' She could feel herself getting irritated. 'I left a message, I even used the bloody mobile phone.'

'Sorry. I was – somewhere else. There were things to prepare.' He looked at her. 'There are things the TARDIS will need to do –'

Now Anji felt the anger rush right through her, almost choking her. 'You let Fitz die! You let Jack die! You let us down, you – you –' She didn't seem able to think of a suitable word. Swearing wasn't enough, somehow.

'Yes.' The Doctor was still staring at the console. 'I did. And I'm going to have to keep doing it, until it works.'

'You did it *deliberately*?' She stopped, feeling the tears in her eyes. She saw Iyeeeye, cowering from the pair of them. 'Sorry, Iyeeeye. Let's get out of here. Come and look at my room.'

But Iyeeeye shook her head. 'Your friend is dead. It wasn't the Doctor's fault.'

Iyeeye's calm observation only made Anji angrier. 'You don't know him. He promises everything, says he can do anything – then –'

'Something else is wrong,' said Iyeeye simply.

'Yes,' said the Doctor.

'There was a moment,' Iyeeye went on, 'When I felt the Time Magic touch me, just as I was getting near to Fitz and Jack. That was when the cop shot them. I think – I think I might have saved them, in another – I think I *have* saved them. And also there was a world where I saved you, Anji. I took you away through time and we came out in a place where there was sand and sunlight. There are different worlds.'

'You can feel them too?' The Doctor's voice was suddenly full of hope. 'Maybe you're the missing piece of the puzzle, then. Maybe you can – but, no, he's *dead*.'

'Is he? What if we used the TARDIS to travel in time? Would he still be dead?'

Anji had a feeling that the conversation was drifting away from any reality that she wanted to understand, or live in. 'He would still have died.'

She waited for one of them to say, *but that doesn't matter*. Neither did, but she guessed that the Doctor at least was thinking it. He was back at the console, and Iyeeye was watching him closely, her face rapt, as if breathing in the Time Magic.

Good luck to her, thought Anji. I need some sleep.

She walked away, without a word, found her room and lay down on the bed. But she didn't sleep, just stared at the pale ceiling, her jaw clenching and unclenching. It had been bad before, but never like this. Always before there had been something to do, a way out. There might have been risk, fear, anger, betrayal – but not this gnawing hole in reality, this feeling that whatever she did, whatever the Doctor did, events were just going to roll on over them all. It must be like this in an earthquake, she thought, or a flood: the feeling that events had taken over, and that you, your thoughts, your decisions, your actions, had simply become irrelevant.

The Doctor caught up with Jack in a room full of hats and umbrellas. It was a crazy place. It wasn't just that it was big – though it was the size of a shopping mall. The umbrellas were nearly all pink and silver, with just a few yellow ones, and the hats were all white, or cream. There was a faint smell like a hardware store – wood and linseed oil. Jack stared up and down the vast aisles. He was just taking in the fact that the room didn't have a roof but instead was open to

a sky big with grey and purple storm clouds when the Doctor tapped him on the shoulder.

'It's no safer in here, you know.' He smiled, and held up a finger to the air. 'And it might rain soon.'

As he spoke, heavy drops began to descend, splashing coldly on Jack's cheeks, making dark impacts in the dust on the red and white tiled floor.

'This room belonged to me,' said the Doctor, still smiling. 'At least, I think it did. A long time ago.' He handed Jack an umbrella, a yellow one, then grabbed a floppy cream hat and jammed it on his head. 'Perhaps I got tired of it.'

The rain got heavier. Jack opened the umbrella, half-expecting that he would start to fly like Mary Poppins, but the rain just drummed on the plastic. The floor was awash, but the water flowed away underneath the stacks of umbrellas.

Lightening flickered. The Doctor grabbed Jack's hand. 'Come on! I said it wasn't safe!'

Outside, the quiet hum of the TARDIS had been replaced by an uneven keening that even Jack knew was wrong.

'She's in pain,' muttered the Doctor. He seemed to be talking to himself. 'She's being divided, and divided, and divided again. It has to end soon. I've done my best to be prepared, but I'm not sure it's going to be enough.'

They were back in the console room, where the weird lighting had got even weirder. It was like before a storm, glassy and bronze, and it felt hot. Jack glanced up, but he couldn't see any clouds. But he could feel lightning, coiled to strike like a rattlesnake. He shivered.

There was a lurch, like a small earthquake, and all sound stopped. The light dimmed.

'We're here,' said the Doctor. He was still holding Jack's hand. Though he should have been able to pull away, Jack somehow couldn't. It felt like a prison warder's grip might.

The console had vanished. In its place was a miniature world: a city, with concrete towers and pyramids. Jack shivered. It was kind of like being a god. Except that you weren't a god, you were a kid fourteen years old and below you the world was laid out like a model railway set. Tiny people moved up and down the intersections of the city, tiny traffic lights changed colour. The Doctor was fiddling with something just out of sight behind the image. It was exactly like a boy fiddling with the controls of a railway set, thought Jack. As he watched, a shaky second image appeared, badly superimposed on the first: a circular wall around an oasis and neat green fields. In the middle was a

hut on a stick, and next to it was a blurry image of the TARDIS. Around it, tiny figures scurried about. As Jack watched, the scurrying slowed, became an antlike crawl.

‘Now what?’ asked Jack.

The Doctor ignored him. He was staring at the image in front of them.

After a while, he said, ‘I have to talk to you.’

He reached out, and his hand shrank. Half his body shrank, as he leaned forward. It should have been impossible, but it seemed natural, as if he were an image in a fairground mirror. Jack heard his voice, but couldn’t make out the sense of it. It was blurred, echoing, as if the Doctor were singing in harmony with himself, or talking to himself.

He heard words: ‘*dead*’, ‘*Pharaoh*’, ‘*no time*’, ‘*agree*’.

Abruptly, the image disappeared, and without any apparent movement the Doctor was back to normal. The console reappeared too, and a quiet humming filled the TARDIS as if it was happy with itself.

‘Well?’ said Jack, after what seemed like hours of silence had passed with the Doctor staring absently at the wall.

He didn’t look at Jack, but murmured, ‘It seems I’ve drawn the short straw.’

There was a knock at the door. Anji realised that she’d been nearly asleep, half dreaming of a vast flood.

The knock was repeated. ‘Come in,’ she said, although she didn’t really want to talk to the Doctor, or Iyeeeye, or anyone.

The door opened, and the Doctor walked in. He was wearing a black tie, and a black armband. She looked at him for a while, took in the sombre expression, the deep worry, and the need to be forgiven. ‘Yes?’ she asked.

‘I’m sorry, Anji,’ he said. ‘But I think it’s time I told you the truth.’ A slight smile. ‘And I need you to do something for me, of course.’

‘Of course,’ she said. To her surprise, she managed a smile too.

‘What you have to do is this,’ said the Doctor solemnly. He had returned from speaking to Anji with a troubled face, and it was no less troubled now.

Iyeeeye watched him, sensed that he was reluctant to speak. ‘More people have to die.’ She said it as if stating a fact: it was, anyway, obvious.

The Doctor glanced towards the passageway where he had returned after speaking to Anji. ‘I was going to ask her but –’ He looked at his hands.

‘You don’t think she’ll do it.’

‘Not after this. I’ve given her – well, I hope it’s the easier role.’ He gestured outside, at the dead Fitz. ‘She won’t have to kill anyone. But it will be more difficult for you, because of that.’

Iyeeye nodded slowly. ‘I’ve never killed a person,’ she said, ‘But I’ve killed goats.’

The Doctor nodded, but his eyes were focused on the wall behind her.

‘That’s good,’ he said at last.

‘I’ll need a knife,’ she said, feeling slightly sick. What was she agreeing to do? What was this the beginning of?

The Doctor said nothing.

‘I don’t like killing, Doctor,’ said Iyeeye, when it became clear he was lost in his own thoughts. ‘And I might not win. But I’m willing to try, if it’s important. I can see how bad things are in the world. I knew even before I came here that more was wrong with the world than the Others.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘Win? What will you need to win?’

‘I have to win the fight. If I’m going to kill someone I have to fight them, right?’

‘You don’t need to worry about that,’ said the Doctor. ‘There won’t be a fight.’

Their eyes met, and even before the Doctor spoke again, Iyeeye understood.

‘You see – it’s me you’re going to kill,’ said the Doctor.

Chapter Eleven

Don't Wanna Live For Ever

It would have been funny, if it hadn't been scary as hell. The Pharaoh's army had unpacked siege engines, wooden contraptions higher than the palm trees, made of lashed-together wood and towed by teams of six oxen. They reached so far above the walls of Iyeeeye's oasis that they were almost useless, more like floodlights at a baseball ground than a means of entry. And anyway, the gate was open.

Jack and Fitz watched from the window of the tree house as the soldiers standing on top of the siege engines swayed like commuters on a bus, gripping the rails for grim death, their armour glinting in the sun. More soldiers had entered the gate and were standing guard along the peaceful pathways, spears at the ready, some with long knives drawn. Iyeeeye sat cross-legged at the foot of the tree house and waited for them. The only incident was when one of the siege engines crashed into the wall. Several of those inside the garden whirled round and threw their spears at it, imagining themselves under attack. The spears clattered off the inside of the walls and vanished into the tall wheat field below. There was shouting and laughter.

Then there was a growing silence. The Nubian guard approached, helmets polished, and behind them the Pharaoh, cross-legged like Iyeeeye, and dressed in white on a palanquin of pure gold. Slaves waved palm fronds above his head. For the first time Jack saw his face properly: it was pale, arrogant, long. His eyes and lips were black with make-up, but Jack didn't think he was a sissy. He looked angry and dangerous.

Iyeeeye just sat there.

'What are we going to do?' Jack asked Fitz.

Fitz's fists were clenched, his knuckles white. 'I don't know.'

'We've got to stop this. We can't let them kill Iyeeeye. She was Anji's friend.'

'I know. I'm trying to think of something.'

The Pharaoh's palanquin was ten feet from Iyeeeye: in an eerie silence the slaves lowered it to the ground. The Nubians made a solid wall between their

master and the small woman, like a team of football players blocking a goal. Their huge bodies even made it look like they were wearing the padding. Jack could see the sweat on their faces.

Iyeye said, 'Son of my master, it is good that you choose to visit me here.' Her voice was calm, normal, despite the formal language.

The Pharaoh said quietly, 'Murderess of my father, it is good that I have the chance to call you at last to account.'

'I didn't murder him. You know that. Kill me if you want to, but at least don't tell lies about it.'

There was a moment's silence. Jack could see the Pharaoh's face twisting, like he was a mad ape. 'You killed him! I have it on the authority of the God Amun Himself!'

'I didn't know you believed in Amun. You told me –'

'Kill her!' roared the Pharaoh.

The Nubians moved, like robots, their spears hitting Iyeye's body with a sound like a knife cutting a watermelon.

Jack rolled back from the window, as if he had been punched. He felt his stomach heave. He hadn't believed they would do it, not just like that. This might not be America, but it was still a country where there were laws. He had expected a trial, a kangaroo court maybe, but something. A process where he and Fitz could intervene and bring about justice. That was what was supposed to happen, wasn't it?

Jack could hear Fitz swearing: obviously he'd thought the same.

'Shut up!' Jack said in a loud whisper. 'We don't want them to know we're up here.' His stomach heaved again. He swallowed, but it was no use: he had to be sick. Vomit spattered over the clean rush matting. His throat burned. When he stood up, he was swaying. For a moment he blamed his own weakness, then he saw Anji's diary slide off the table to the floor, saw the mirror on the wall rattling. Were they knocking the tree house down?

'Take a look outside,' said Fitz.

Jack didn't need to. He could hear the shouts. The world outside had gone dark – was now growing light – and then dark – darklight darklight darklight –

'We're travelling in time!' he shouted.

A roaring sound filled the air, rising and falling. It was loud, but not just loud: there was a sense of enormous power, as if the sound came not from a single source but from every molecule of the air, all singing at once.

'Oh, thank merciful...!' muttered Fitz. He began waving out of the window, shouting at someone or something.

Jack staggered towards him, gripping the furniture to avoid losing his balance, and saw the huge blue cathedral shape – the same one he'd seen from his own machine when he'd first travelled in time. It surrounded them, became a cream and copper world. A vast face floated in the void, a dim outline that slowly became real.

'Doctor!' yelled Fitz.

'*That's* your friend?' said Jack. It looked more like a visitation from God. The face reached down, shrank, confusingly, to a human size, though it was still connected to an infinity of weird colour in the sky. Just for a moment Jack thought he saw himself in the colour, his own face the size of a cloud, distorted like in a fairground mirror. Then it was gone, and there was only the Doctor. He could see another TARDIS now, floating just off the ground below the window and in front of the disembodied face.

Iyeeye's body was right next to it. Jack couldn't make himself look, didn't want to. It might be rescue – even a really weird and spectacular kind of rescue – but it was a minute or two too late.

He saw Anji's diary, open at his feet where it had fallen from the table. The careful writing: '... please don't ask her about it, her time is too precious now.'

Jack felt tears on his cheeks.

The tree house trembled again. Outside, the light had changed back to a normal daylight, though there was something different about it. Cautiously, Jack peered out of the window.

The face had gone, and the weird sky with it. It was late afternoon. The walls of Iyeeye's garden cast long shadows across the fields. The Pharaoh's soldiers were scattered like broken toys – at first Jack thought they were dead, but gradually they began to move; picking themselves up, and he realised that they were only terrified. On his palanquin, the Pharaoh was buried under the bodies of slaves protecting him. They too gradually moved aside, and the Pharaoh emerged, his make-up smudged, his hands shaking.

In front of the palanquin, next to Iyeeye's body, completely solid now, stood the TARDIS.

There come times in your life when you realise that you don't have any choice. Anji supposed that, if she hadn't been snatched away from the world she had known, that time would have come, sooner or later, in her job. She would have had to choose between keeping her career, with the money and status that it brought, and the benefits for her, her partner, perhaps their children – and losing it, because she chose to be principled, because she chose not to screw

the other person over, because she chose not to betray. Because she chose what in the world of work is called incompetence, and disloyalty, and stupidity, and ineptitude – in other words, not doing what the boss says, without question and without regard for the consequences. She'd worked hard, she'd played hard, she'd pretended that it was easy, that it was just a matter of commitment, dedication, team building – but she knew that somewhere, above her, in front of her, in the whispered meetings and dark politics of management, the day for that choice would come.

Maybe she'd thought she wouldn't have to choose, here in the time-travelling circus that was the TARDIS. Maybe, deep inside, she'd imagined that she could continue to be a child, and the Doctor would continue to be her father – the perfect father, the easy-going god, all-knowing, inept himself sometimes, yes – but tolerating her when she cursed him, because there was truth and love in their relationship.

Now, standing in the doorway of the TARDIS looking at Iyee's dead body and a horde of terrified soldiers, she knew that reality intervenes everywhere, eventually. The soap-opera truths she had assumed she could live by didn't exist in this new wilderness, where Fitz was dead and the Doctor didn't seem to care, but had his eye on the bigger picture. How could she have imagined that the small world of human friendship and the physical reality of a universe in terminal danger could be reconciled for ever? What toddler's storybook had she been reading? The Doctor was her manager, not her friend: because that's the only relationship there can be between human beings (or any beings) when the going gets tough and survival is at stake. The manager and the managed, the one who gives the orders and the one who obeys them. It was no good being stupid about it: she had no choice.

Someone had to go outside, and it had to be her.

She was going to die, and she knew it, and the Doctor knew it too. That was the truth he'd told her.

And somewhere deep, deep, inside her, she was relieved that it was death she was being forced to choose, and not one of the worse things.

Fitz had never been so relieved to see another living being as he was to see Anji's face. She was scowling, as usual: in fact, she looked furious. She stared at the angry Pharaoh, looked around at the shattered garden and the still-terrified army, then just flicked her arms at them as if they were of no consequence.

You had to admire her, he thought.

‘Yoo-hoo!’ he called.

She looked up. Her eyes lit up for a second, then her lip curled. ‘Don’t be so cheerful, you know what’s happening as well as I do.’

‘Do I? I know I’m glad to see you alive again.’

She gestured at the army. ‘And you think that’s going to last?’

Fitz considered them, then pointed at the TARDIS. ‘Got any fireworks in there?’

‘Isn’t it about time you got out of the playground?’ She stepped forward, walked almost right past the Pharaoh, ignoring the batting arms of the protective slaves.

The Pharaoh himself was standing up, his face working. Fitz wasn’t sure whether he was angry, or afraid. Probably both. Either way –

‘Kill the witch! Kill her now!’ he bawled.

– had been a predictable result.

Soldiers started moving, but slowly, hesitantly. After what they’d seen they weren’t sure about obeying the Pharaoh’s orders any more, and Fitz didn’t blame them. He leaned further out of the wood-framed window, wondering what the Doctor was playing at (apart from making astral projections of himself), and how much longer he was going to have to do his job for him. ‘Stop whatever you’re doing,’ he said, putting on his best laconic voice, ‘Anji’s my best mate, and you don’t want anything to happen to her or Sabbath might get angry. And you’ve already seen some of that.’ As he said it, he wondered where Sabbath had gone.

It was the only ploy he could think of. At least they all knew who Sabbath was. It seemed to work: the Nubians were sufficiently confused to hesitate, for long enough for Anji to clamber halfway up the ladder to the tree house. One raised a spear, then glanced up at Fitz, who recognised the man who had warned him last night. Fitz shook his head, and the spear was lowered. The other Nubians also stood, silent. Fitz glanced at the Pharaoh, who seemed to have changed tack: he was now prostrate before the TARDIS, stuttering something about angry gods.

‘Well, aren’t you going to say hello?’

Anji’s voice brought Fitz away from the window. His sun-blinded eyes saw her dimly in the wooden room, like a ghost.

Jack spoke up, ‘I don’t think he wants to speak to you. Last time you saw him you said you didn’t know him.’

Anji looked confused. ‘That – umm –’

‘Wasn’t you. Yeah. It was the one who died, huh?’

Anji swore gently. 'One of the ones who died, Jack. Maybe. To be honest I don't even know what you're talking about. Fitz, do you know anything about this?'

Fitz shook his head. 'But one of you did die. Here. She wrote a diary.'

'So has at least one of you.'

'I know.'

There was a silence. Outside, they could hear voices, but no one seemed to be coming near the tree-house. Jack picked up the journal from the floor and silently handed it to Anji. Fitz became aware that the room stank of vomit.

'What are we going to do?'

'Die again, I guess.' Jack's voice was shaking, and Fitz realised he was serious. And terrified.

'No we won't,' he said quickly.

'We've lost our immunity, Fitz,' said Anji quietly. 'We're expendable now, just like the rest of the world. The Doctor as good as said so when we left Totterdown, and he said it again just now. Before shoving me out here to certain death, by the way.'

Fitz shook his head impatiently. 'We'll certainly die if we start getting defeatist about it and so will everybody and everything else. What we need to do now is solve the problem –' He stopped. Outside there was a whisper, which quickly became a roar, as the TARDIS dematerialised.

He frowned at Anji. 'What...?'

She only looked away.

Fitz remembered what Anji – the *other* Anji – had written: '... there is more than one of us. More than one of *all* of us.'

'But surely the Doctor wouldn't...?'

'... deliberately kill you, and me, for the sake of reconciling the balance-sheet of time? That's what I just said, Fitz. Weren't you listening?'

The room was hot, but suddenly Fitz felt cold. 'I'm not the "right" Fitz, am I? I'm one of the wrong ones?'

'How do I know? I know I'm not the "right" Anji, though. The Doctor said –'

'The Doctor does what he has to.' Now it was Sabbath's voice that made Fitz jump. He looked down, saw the lantern-jawed face incongruous at floor level, like a carving of a demon's head. 'As I do. As do we all.'

Anji, Fitz and Jack stared at him as he shouldered his way up into the room. The wooden floor groaned under his weight.

He glanced from one to the other of them, as if weighing them up. 'I have an offer to make. If we do things my way, I see no reason why all three of you

should not survive. And as many more of you as there might be.'

'Why doesn't that make me feel any better?' said Fitz. 'And why did you tell me the Doctor was dead?'

'He was dead when I told you that. He will die again soon. It doesn't end.'

'Perhaps it should,' said Anji.

'What do you know about this baloney?' Fitz asked her.

There was a murmuring outside, getting louder. Orders were being shouted, and there was the tramp of feet.

'Whilst we argue, the natives are getting restless,' commented Sabbath, without a trace of irony.

Fitz giggled. Anji gave him a look, then frowned and went to the window. She beckoned to Fitz. He heard a sound: for a moment he thought it was the TARDIS again, then he recognised an engine, a powerful engine under stress, slowly getting louder. No, several engines. *Internal combustion* engines.

He could see them now: a line of trucks, some with trailers, rumbling along a road which hadn't been there five minutes before. Blurred figures moved, darting about like insects, and the frameworks of buildings formed in rapid flickers, like a speeded-up film. Some of the Pharaoh's soldiers were spilling in through the gate. A siege engine collapsed as Fitz watched, but in slow time. The soldiers blurred, flickered away long before the thing hit the ground. Yet the sun was still there, low in the western sky, unmoving, or at least not moving any faster than it should. Was the rest of the world catching up, somehow, with whatever distance they'd travelled in time?

He glanced at Anji, but could tell from her face that she had no more answers than he did. Jack was watching too, in blind fascination.

Outside the walls, half a city was already built: tall white concrete towers, glassless windows. Neon signs began to flicker, and the streets filled with a blur of dull colour that must be traffic. A couple of modern-looking kids strolled in through the gate, arm-in-arm, and stared at the enclosure and the small phalanx of men who remained guarding the Pharaoh, then turned tail and ran. One of the soldiers pursued them and didn't come back.

'A new world,' rumbled Sabbath, with all the satisfaction of a purring lion. 'Does this not make you "feel better", Mr Kreiner? Justice, ease, and a sort of democracy have replaced the Pharaoh's rule.'

'Are you the one stopping time, then?' asked Jack.

'No. This is the effect of the Doctor's intervention.' But he sounded less certain than usual, thought Fitz.

Behind Sabbath, Fitz saw a movement, saw the dark head of the Nubian soldier. The man climbed into the room, moving slowly, his eyes moving cautiously from one to the other of the four people there: Anji, who backed away, frowning, Jack, who stared literally open-mouthed, Sabbath, who merely watched with folded arms and confident eyes, and Fitz himself.

Finally the soldier spoke to Sabbath.

'The Pharaoh of Egypt requests that one of the magicians present gives him guidance, in the new world in which we find ourselves.'

'Well, that's a relief,' said Anji. 'I thought he was trying to kill us.'

'He has seen his mistake,' said the soldier, bowing to Anji. 'He requests your divine assistance.'

'We are grateful that he should ask us,' Sabbath rumbled. 'And we are obliged to assist him.' He made for the steps.

'Oh no you don't.'

Fitz was amazed by the sound of his own voice, could barely believe that his body was moving, faster than Sabbath's, past the surprised and frightened soldier, down the steps into the hot sunlight.

'Fitz!' Anji's voice. 'No! It has to be me!'

Fitz knew what she meant at once. The Doctor must have told this version of Anji that she was supposed to die – which meant there was a chance that he wasn't. He felt sickened by the surge of elation that filled his body at the thought that he might survive. No wonder Anji was so angry. He wasn't surprised, though, when she pushed past him, ran to where the Pharaoh was standing and said breathlessly, 'Your Majesty, it is necessary for you to leave this place. With me. Now.'

'No!' snapped Fitz. 'With me!'

'I should accompany you.' Sabbath's voice. 'Ignore these children.'

The Pharaoh looked from one to the other of them, an alert, intelligent look from which all the anger and most of the arrogance seemed to have been leeches. Perhaps the shock had been good for him.

'You –' He pointed at Sabbath – 'led me in to this. And you –' He pointed at Fitz – 'left my army to come here with the woman who bewitched and murdered my father.' He looked at Anji. 'It might be that you are no better than either of these, but I must have a guide and you are the only one not to have proved yourself false.'

'That is not so!' Sabbath's anger sounded genuine.

Fitz tried to make an objection, found that his mouth was too dry. Or maybe he wanted to live too much.

'It is the will of the Pharaoh.' The young man looked about him, wiped sweat from his skin. 'I still have my men. My will is still law here.'

'I would not be certain of that,' said Sabbath, with a confident smile.

'I would.' He gestured at the Nubian. 'Kill him.'

The Nubian swung his spear, without a word. He let it go, and it travelled towards Sabbath... and landed in empty dirt at Fitz's feet. Fitz stared at the haft, the hard wood gleaming in the sun. Sabbath had gone, vanished into the air without even a whisper.

'The woman will go with me,' said the Pharaoh.

He didn't seem fazed by Sabbath's vanishing, but then, he knew the guy was a magician. But Fitz wondered how Sabbath had done it. Had he become able to travel in time without the *Jonah*? It seemed the only explanation. But that implied... He shook his head. He had no idea what it implied. Trouble, that much was certain.

The Pharaoh was speaking again. He gestured at Fitz. 'You will stay here until sunset. If we don't return, the men will kill you.' He stared hard at Anji. 'Is that understood?'

Anji nodded, glanced at Fitz. He swallowed. So much for being the one who was going to survive. It sounded like they were both dead. Unless Anji was angry because she'd been ordered to betray him? He looked at her face, saw a white tension there that might have been fear, or anger, or both.

Anji led the Pharaoh away. Two of the Nubians followed, though no order had been given. The rest stayed near Fitz, uncomfortably close. He could smell their sweat. The sun seemed closer to the horizon than it had been. Fitz wondered how much time he had.

Chapter Twelve

You Can Check Out Any Time You Like

The burger bar was on the corner of New and Gizeh. It wasn't cool, not cool at all. It was retro red plastic and geeky gap-year staff in white polyester uniforms. It was the smell of polluted beef and stale coffee. It was plastic menus and American dollars. Ak went there because it was on the way home from work, and because he was desperate.

Only his mother called him by his proper name, Akhenaton. She could remember the old days, and never stopped talking about it: custom and tradition and Isis and Osiris, washing your clothes in the river, the peace, the silence. She wasn't old, only forty; Ak reckoned she must've been about six when the future people came. He told her everyone liked life at age five, and she said he didn't understand.

OK. He didn't understand. He didn't understand why he had to slouch in the corner of a Formica burger bar with a view of the Pyramids, sharing the air with a couple of elderly future people and drinking bitter coffee grown two and half thousand years ago by slave ape men, when he should be at the Snakepit or Auntie Cleo's, where they had UV lights and young people, real young people in gossamer clothes, and real future women with tight shirts and available smiles. But they didn't let you in those places without money, and money was a problem for Ak right now.

He scratched in the pocket of his leather jacket, found the packet of poppers, shook it, heard the rattle, pulled it out. Two left. They would have to do: at least it was something. He shook the tiny white pills into his coffee, not bothering to look at the counter staff to see if they'd noticed. They wouldn't care, anyway. They'd see the crude untrendy dinosaur-leather jacket, the sallowness, the angry eyes, and think, *timey*. He'd heard the word: it meant stuck in one time, boring, uncool, *poor*. It meant you hadn't been born in the future, and would never go there. Ak clenched his teeth, felt the poppers hit. The table tops brightened, every surface in the joint seemed flooded with colour and life.

Ak felt a childlike wonder at the neon lights of the street, the green-and-purple floodlit slopes of the Pyramids beyond.

In seconds it was gone, the colours receding into the grainy video of his life, a bitter taste in his mouth all that was left of the high.

'No-good drugs,' he muttered. His body began to shake, more from anger than the low. 'No good timeys.'

He saw the a girl behind the counter noticing him, saw the small frown that wondered if it should call the manager. He smiled and waved at her, still shaking. She turned away, still frowning, but he didn't think she'd make trouble now.

The door opened, and Ak turned, saw the familiar heavy figure of Khal, his long greatcoat, his dark eyes. Ak felt a hit almost as strong as the poppers: the world brightened again, his heart thudded. *This was it.*

Khal waved, almost as an aside, as if nothing was up, then went to the counter and got himself a burger, some fries, a coffee. Ak could see the sense in it, making it look like they'd just met by chance, but he was almost fainting with impatience by the time his friend sat down.

'Hi matey,' Khal said. 'Fancy a chip?'

Ak took the chip, took several, gobbled like a greedy vulture. His body began to shake again.

'That bad?' said Khal after a while.

Ak nodded.

'You'll be pleased to hear it's all arranged, then.'

Ak made himself nod again.

Khal began talking between mouthfuls of food. 'Look, I know what you're feeling, but you don't have to do anything.' Another mouthful. 'Nothing at all. Just stand there, OK? Let it happen. That's all they want.' Another mouthful. 'It's not as if it's making any difference, right?'

Ak shook his head.

Khal clapped him on the shoulder. 'Right. Fifty dollars now –' He opened his wallet, peeled off some money, put the notes in Ak's hand, then spoke a bit louder – 'and I'll owe you the rest, mate, if that's OK.'

Ak jumped. Khal's changed voice said somebody was looking at them. He looked around, breathing hard.

'Don't leave it on the table!'

Ak nodded, picked up the money, stuffed it loose in his pocket. He wanted to go, go now, down the Snakepit, get away from here, forget the Palace, forget everything.

'You do that, matey.'

Ak jumped again as he realised he'd been speaking aloud. He could hear the edgy mumbled voice replaying in his head. It was sad, stupid, *timey*, to be like that. To be so desperate, so angry. He got up from the table, barged out of the place without saying goodbye to Khal. The air outside was warm and polluted, the Pyramids thankfully invisible behind the plate-glass and neon of the shops.

Ak made himself stop in front of a window, pulled his jacket in line, straightened the collar, slicked back his hair. He got the money from his pocket and put it away in his wallet, except for one. Ten dollars. That would get him into The Snakepit. Twenty dollars for the stuff – that left plenty for other things. And another payment to come. Khal had said it: Ak didn't have to do anything. Just let things happen. That would be OK. That would be *cool*.

He smiled and walked into the night.

The women were washing their clothes in the river, and the Pharaoh was making an announcement. He stood in the water, and said, 'We must live in the way of the River God once more. We respect the future people for the things they have given us, but we must have less of them.'

'Well you heard that, Immer – what do you make of it?'

Ak realised the Pharaoh was standing on a radio – no, the radio was the one beside his bed and there was no Pharaoh, just 'Immer' Hotep, somewhere inside the golden speaker grill, laughing and saying, *'Well, John, not much to be honest. The Pharaoh has made statements like this before. In the end, we all know that "The River Kingdom", as he's so fond of calling it, depends entirely on tourism for its existence. It isn't just a matter of economic hardship – without the tourists and the associated industries, there would be mass starvation.'*

'So when he talks about the gods looking after us...?'

Immer laughed. *'God went home a long time ago.'*

'So when the Pharaoh talks about getting together with other leaders of the time-colonised nations, you don't think that will make any difference?'

'Not really. Most of the people he's going to meet have already introduced restrictions of some sort. These sorts of things are bypassed or ignored. People want to travel in time, they want to explore the universe, and they have the money and resources to do so. I don't see how you can stop that, and in fact I don't see why you should. It's a liberating experience –'

Ak sat up, rolled out of bed, and switched off the radio. He winced as his head reminded him of last night.

The he remembered.

For just a second he thought it was a dream, another, earlier dream. The burger joint. Khal. The fifty dollars. Letting it happen.

No.

The money was spent, his headache testified to that, and the dryness in his gut. Had that woman...?

No. Not even that. He remembered her laughter, then her friend leading her away, the slightly uneasy look in their eyes.

Timey.

Ak winced again, this time at the sound of his mother's voice. 'Akhenaton! It is no good turning the radio off. You will be late.'

'I'm up.' His voice was hoarse. He staggered across the room, grabbed his robe, walked to the bathroom and splashed water on his face.

Water. Who did his mother think had paid for the taps? She ordered him around like a servant, yet he was a member of the Pharaonic Guard. He was –

– *had been* –

– rich, or at least well paid, his pay enhanced by tips from the tourists. If he hadn't –

– *was there one left? Had he saved one or just taken them all last night?* –

He sat down and covered his face with his hands. There would be a hundred and fifty more dollars tonight. That was all he had to think about. A hundred and fifty American dollars. And what they could buy.

Outside the compound, Anji had expected a building site, but she got a city that looked as if it had been there for years. It was depressingly familiar: the sky was harder and brighter, otherwise it could have been Jumpsville, or Nero's Rome, or any one of the dozen or so Good Times resorts she, the Doctor and Fitz had scanned before concluding that the whole of history had been irretrievably corrupted. She remembered the Doctor's face, crumpling, amused and disturbed at first as he watched the almost identical collections of concrete towers and souvenir shops on the scanner screen, then hardening, angry, and finally, without expression.

She knew what he had been thinking, now. Whilst she and Fitz had still thought of Good Times as a sort of cosmic joke, tourism gone mad amongst the natives, the Doctor had seen it for what it was: the end of history, and therefore the end of Time itself, at least for the Earth, probably for everyone. But despite everything, despite the Doctor's warnings, despite the fact that Fitz had almost become a native of another version of history in Totterdown, she had failed to work out the real implications until about half an hour ago.

Perhaps nobody did, until it was too late.

She looked at the Pharaoh, who was walking between the two Nubian guards he'd chosen to accompany him, staring at the alien city with wonder. 'This is the place where Amun lives?' he asked her.

She shook her head. 'I'm afraid not. More like –' She discovered she couldn't remember the Egyptian name for the Big Bad God, so just said – 'the Devil.'

Cheops looked unfazed. 'I think not. It does not feel evil.'

'Not the sort of evil you're used to,' Anji conceded. How could you explain to an Egyptian princeling used to a society where most people grubbed a fairly miserable living off the land that a huge gorgeously coloured city full of people enjoying themselves could nonetheless be the fount of all evil? Especially when none of them actually wanted to hurt anyone. She didn't doubt that ninety per cent of them would have voted against a war, of any sort, whoever they were fighting, repelled by the horror of innocent lives being lost; yet the system that was supported by their greed and shortsightedness was destroying every human being in every culture in their history, and with it everything that existed, forever, with no coming back. What worried her was that she had used to think that way, too. Buying eco-friendly soap whilst living and working within a trading system that enslaved and impoverished three-quarters of the population of the planet, and destroyed the ecosystem to boot. Empty gestures.

'They say travel broadens the mind,' she muttered. 'Shame it's too late.'

'Look!' The Pharaoh's voice.

Anji shook her head, blinked. She had to admit she hadn't really been looking at anything. The Pharaoh might have got himself run over crossing the road, and then what price saving the universe? She followed his pointing finger, saw a vast, golden pyramid, towering above everything else in the city. On its side were hieroglyphs, each character twenty stories high, made out of what looked like gold, jade and lapis lazuli, but was probably plastic. The words also appeared in English, in blood red, like the sign for a supermarket: **CHEOPS'S PALACE**.

Cheops was staring at Anji, a broad smile on his face. 'So this palace is mine?'

Anji nodded, then wished she hadn't. The truth was, it could be anybody's. It might even be a casino. Or a supermarket. But the Pharaoh was already striding towards it, the tall Nubians flanking him. People made way for the little procession, and some applauded. Cheops glanced at them with disdain. 'Are these slaves?'

'Tourists,' said Anji.

‘Travellers should have more respect for the land which offers them hospitality. Bow down! I am Cheops, Pharaoh of the River Lands, Lord of the Egyptian peoples!’

A few people did bow. Others took photographs. Anji waved at them irritably. It probably didn’t matter: the Doctor had said that as long as the Time Police thought that Cheops was a distraction, a sideshow for the tourists, they wouldn’t catch on – not quickly enough, anyway. There was still the question of getting into the palace, now towering above them like a manmade mountain, but the Doctor had assured her that it would be taken care of. Anji wasn’t surprised when the huge plate-glass doors of the palace opened and the guards waved them past without a word. She was a little surprised that the throne room appeared to be directly inside, like a vast hotel reception. Then she saw Cheops looking around, smiling. ‘The Room of Greeting. My people will still know –’ He stopped. ‘Who is on the throne?’

Anji opened her mouth, but was unable to speak. She could only wonder how she was going to die.

– surely I don’t have to don’t have to don’t have to –

But Cheops was taking no notice of her; instead he strode across the Throne Room, alarmingly silent and purposeful. The Nubians followed in his wake. She saw the knife in his hand, wanted to shout, *You don’t have to do this*, except that Anji knew he did have to do this, that all this had to happen –

– including the blood and the dying man’s face and why did it have to look like that, look like murder? Because it was still murder and –

‘Behold, I am the true Pharaoh of the Valley of the Nile!’

Anji saw the men in dark combat suits and without thinking flung herself flat on the floor.

‘Mortal! Bow to your knees or die!’

Anji raised her head, saw a young man smiling, backing away slowly. Was he a guard? One of the ones the Doctor (or Sabbath?) had ‘arranged’ to allow the killing? Would they kill him, too? She felt her stomach clench, felt cold pins-and-needles in her arms. Perhaps they wouldn’t kill her. Perhaps they would think she was one of the tourists. Perhaps she could slip away into history, and no one would ever notice.

But there was a rattle of gunfire around her, and her hands were getting colder, and there was blood on the floor.

‘Behold, I am the true Pharaoh of the Valley of the Nile!’

Ak, still shaking, looked from the dead face of the Pharaoh to the living face framed by the crude bull-hide armour. They were the same.

Angry eyes flashed into his. 'Mortal! Bow to your knees or die!'

Ak only smiled.

Furious, the young Cheops shouted at the cowering tourists. 'All of you! Bow down before the God-Pharaoh!'

Ak turned and walked away, slowly, and began to laugh. He laughed because, even before the future men in their black armour burst in through the glass doors with their guns, even before the true God-Pharaoh of the Valley of Osiris collapsed on top of his other self with blood oozing from the bullet wounds in his head and his chest, even before the black-coated guards walked towards Ak and told him he was under arrest, Ak had sussed it. There was no 'true Pharaoh' any more, no true Time, no true anything. There was only need, and greed, and power, and plunder. There was only life, wasting itself in infinity like water flowing into the sand, just as the two dead Pharaohs' blood flowed into the gutters of the throne room. It was all so funny, so stupid, so uncool. And so true.

When they arrested him, he waited to die, but they didn't kill him. They had better ideas.

Khal explained it, in a bare, cold, stone cell somewhere deep under the prosperous street. 'We need a reliable Pharaoh,' he said, offering Ak a popper. Even his voice had changed, the accent and timbre altered almost out of recognition. He sounded like a master now, not a friend.

But there were no masters, no slaves. Nothing mattered. Ak couldn't help himself: he laughed, and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

Chapter Thirteen

Bad Moon Rising

When Anji realised that she was alive and unhurt, her first thought was that another version of her must be dead. She caught herself looking around for her own body. But the blood soaking her clothes came from the two versions of Cheops, both dead, though 'her' Cheops's eyes were still open, staring at her as if in accusation. The Nubians stood in silence, their backs to the wall, their eyes filled with terror.

It occurred to Anji that she should help them. But before she could even begin to think about how, two men in black combat suits had grabbed them and were pulling them forcibly out of the hall. Two of the costumed guards were taken too: one was laughing. Nobody tried to touch Anji. She stood up, bloodied and battered, jumped at a touch on her shoulder.

'Are you OK, ma'am?'

A young American woman in the sea-blue uniform of a Good Times tour guide. Her face was pale, stretched, panicky. Anji managed a smile. 'Still alive, which is more than I was expecting a minute ago,' she muttered.

'You're not hurt? You're covered in blood.'

Anji just shook her head. She became aware of how tired she was. She also had no idea what to do next. Then she remembered Fitz, the Pharaoh's men, waiting for sunset.

To hell with the Doctor, she thought. To hell with saving the universe. I'm going to save my friend. Though she wasn't sure how she was going to do that, with Cheops dead.

She made it halfway to the door: then one of the black-suited men took her arm, gently but firmly, and said, 'I'm sorry, ma'am, but the boss says you should come with us.'

The boss? Anji wanted to argue, but another man took her other arm. Argument might be fatal, and anyway she wanted to know who the boss was – there were two obvious choices, the Doctor or Sabbath. Anji wasn't sure which she least wanted to see at the moment, but she let herself be escorted away

from the throne room, along a carpeted passageway, and down into a conference room trimly decorated in lapis blue and gold. A window looked out on to a courtyard with palm trees and flowers. There was a pale oak table with a smear of blood on its surface. A young man was sitting at it in the uniform of the ceremonial palace guard, handcuffed between two more of the men in black. Facing the young man, with his back to Anji, was a heavy-set man who could only be Sabbath. He didn't turn round, but pushed something that looked like an aspirin across the table to the younger man.

'We need', he said in his deep, growling voice, 'a reliable Pharaoh.'

The young man just laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

'The alternative is –'

More laughter: the man was out of control, and Anji wondered if he was going to get himself killed.

Anji said, 'Why him? Why not me? I expect I could pass for a man. It doesn't look like anything matters any more.'

She wasn't entirely serious, but she wasn't expecting to be ignored. Sabbath didn't give a sign that he had heard.

A hand touched her shoulder. 'I rather think you'll find there's a queue.'

She turned round and saw the Doctor, rather absurd in a cream, floppy-brimmed hat that didn't suit him. He smiled. Anji wanted to ask him why she was still alive, and she wanted to be angry with him, but she felt like hugging him.

'You?' Sabbath had turned round now, was paying them attention. 'That was not our agreement, Doctor.'

'Well, he's not going to be able to do it, is he?'

The man had stopped laughing, but was biting his knuckles, looking at them. 'I can be anyone you want,' he said, then began giggling again. 'Like the girl said, it just doesn't matter.'

Sabbath waved for him to be taken away.

'Don't kill him,' said the Doctor. 'Exile him somewhere. Somewhere nice. But a long way away, in case he feels like coming back.'

The men hesitated, looking from the Doctor to Sabbath and back again. With a creeping feeling, Anji realised that the Doctor was at least as much in charge here as Sabbath. She opened her mouth, began speaking some words, but the Doctor and Sabbath just continued their argument without reference to her.

'I still say that you cannot become Cheops,' said Sabbath. 'It will mean the ruin of all that we have worked towards.'

'All that *you* have worked towards. It hasn't got anything to do with me.'

Anji decided she'd had enough of passive listening. She stepped forward so that she was standing between the Doctor and Sabbath, turned to the Doctor and said, 'I think you should tell me what's going on. What's really going on, not what you told me half an hour ago to get me to do what you wanted.'

The Doctor frowned at her. 'What did I tell you half an hour ago?'

Anji stared at him. Had he *forgotten*?

He was staring back. 'Oh, I see.' His eyes moved slightly, to indicate Sabbath.

Anji made the smallest of nods, to tell him she'd understood. Sabbath mustn't know there were two of her, or at least mustn't know the details. That figured.

She sat down, slowly. Suddenly she felt terribly tired.

'I'm going to Kowaczski, then,' said the Doctor affably. 'I don't think this young man wants to be Pharaoh of anything.'

'I can be Pharaoh of the universe if you like.' The man's voice was still hoarse from laughter. 'It won't make any difference.'

Anji looked at him for the first time. His Ancient Egyptian costume sat uneasily on him: he looked as if he should be wearing a combat jacket and scruffy trousers, with rather grubby trainers on his feet. His face had a look which Anji recognised after a moment: the wary, shocked, belligerent expression of a waster on his way down. She surprised herself by feeling sorry for him.

'What's your name?' she asked.

'Akhenaton,' he said, then blushed, as if angry about something. 'But only my mother calls me that. My friends call me Ak.'

Anji nodded and smiled. 'I have a name that only my parents use, too,' she said. *And if I could get back to my parents, if they could even be made to exist which they probably don't at the moment, then I might hear it again.*

Akhenaton smiled at her, but before either of them could speak again the men guarding him stood up and marched him from the room.

'America would be nice,' said the Doctor, as the door closed behind them. 'The coffee plantations.'

The way he said it, Anji was absolutely sure he had a special reason for that instruction, but she couldn't imagine what it was.

'We could just take the two bodies we already have to Kowaczski,' said Sabbath. 'Two dead Pharaohs should prove something.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'It won't be enough. He knows about that already. He thinks it doesn't matter. He needs to know that it affects everyone. Even the people who control the system.'

'And you think you control it?' Sabbath let the question hang for a second, then when the Doctor didn't answer it shrugged and went on, 'Oh, well. Do

it on your own terms, if you must. I think it's getting too late for persuasion.' Sabbath stood up and left the room, rubbing his hands together. He looked round, once, in the doorway, and seemed to be about to say something else, but didn't.

'Both of who?' asked Anji when he'd gone. 'How many of me are there left?'

The Doctor looked at her solemnly. 'Only one, now. That I know about, that is.'

Anji shivered. 'So one of me did die in –' She gestured back at the scene of the assassination.

The Doctor shrugged. 'How would we know? But I have a job for you. And if you carry out that job, you will survive.'

Anji put her head in her hands. 'Look, Doctor, half an hour ago you were telling me I had to carry out a job, and that I would probably die as a result, and certainly die soon afterwards. Now that Sabbath's out of the way, would you mind stopping the assing about and tell me what you're really doing? My survival may not matter much to you, but it still matters to me.' *I think.*

'I can't.' He gestured towards the door. 'Walls have ears. So do doors, windows.'

'Sabbath?' Anji shook her head. 'Look, you seemed pretty buddy-buddy with him just now.'

'I have to be, Anji. You can see that? If we were on a lifeboat in the middle of the ocean and only two of us could mend the engine, and it was a two man job, we'd have to work together. He might eat babies for breakfast, I'd still have to hand him the spanner when he asked for it.'

Anji nodded. 'OK. I can see that.'

The Doctor looked away.

'And does he eat babies for breakfast?' she asked.

'Of course not. But he's still the enemy, and he knows it, and I know it.' The Doctor's voice was like iron. Then he relaxed, grinned. 'Come on, we've got to see a man about a job.'

Anji had expected to find the TARDIS parked in a storeroom in the Palace, surrounded by old uniforms and empty amphorae. Instead the Doctor led the way through metal doors like those in a goods lift to a room containing half a dozen Good Times time machines, the sort that she and Fitz had used to travel from the 2003 back to Jumpsville when they were supposed to be reps. They weren't the tourist sort: just grey functional satin metal with a plastic saddle and handlebars, like a time-travelling Vespa but less glamorous. A security

guard with a machine gun slung over his shoulder watched them itchily. He asked the Doctor if he had a permit, then asked if he had one for Anji. Anji wondered why she couldn't have her own permit. Not more racial or sexual discrimination, she hoped. But she hadn't noticed any up to now.

The Doctor produced two permits, without a word, or even his usual insouciant smile. They took a machine at the rear of the room which had a double saddle. The Doctor got on the front, and Anji slipped behind him and put her arms around his body.

'This reminds me of something that happened,' said the Doctor, as the machine hummed into life. 'To someone.'

'From your previous life?'

He shook his head. 'A long time ago. Can't remember. It seemed important at the time, but it was nothing compared with this.'

The world became the grey of the vortex, flecked with moving lights. The little machine pitched like the motor scooter it resembled, but not so violently that Anji had any trouble hanging on; the tormented cobwebs and wild turbulence of the vortex visible on the TARDIS scanners seemed to be missing. Anji wondered if she should ask the Doctor why, but before she could the machine had landed with a jolt.

The world around was looking much the same as it had in ancient Egypt – the same parked time machines, the same low neon lights. This time there were two guards. But the air was colder, and it smelled different – dirtier, more artificial. The Doctor produced his permits again, and this time they got more than a cursory glance. The guard asked Anji, 'You're on contract?' He had a grey beard and milky blue eyes.

Anji nodded.

'Not supposed to use the self-drive machines, even with someone else driving. You're not insured unless you work for the company.'

Anji looked at the Doctor, who shrugged. She decided to play ignorant. 'I've done it before,' she said. 'I dunno. Perhaps I've got my own insurance. I'm covered to drive any car.'

'Don't think that makes a difference,' said the guard. 'Still, not my problem, as they say.' He grinned and waved them through.

Anji felt her heart beating hard as they stood in the lift. It was a long, slow ascent, gradually emerging from the building into a glass tube where a view of London, murky with lights, was visible. Anji remembered the surge of relief she'd felt when she'd first seen this view on the TARDIS scanner after the miserable broken world of the Cleansing. She could even see Canary Wharf: she'd

thought she was back home. Even the Doctor's talk of disturbance in the vortex hadn't seemed to matter. He was always on about it. Perhaps it would go away.

Then they'd seen the poster advertising holidays in ancient Rome and the illusion of home had unravelled – fast.

Still, even now, she felt more at home here, in the world of silky steel and light and business and power, than she had for some time in the TARDIS. If only the Doctor could fix things, she was going back. She couldn't avoid the impression that her world was still there – waiting for her, unchanged – even though the build-up of changes seemed to make it increasingly unlikely that it could happen. All timelines were variants of her own – or so it had seemed, until now, and the Doctor had agreed.

Now it just seemed like chaos. Even the Doctor himself was becoming chaotic: half absent, totally absorbed, his plans as shifty as gusts of wind and – so far – futile. She glanced at him, wondering how much longer she could trust him. The flashes of kindness were fading from his eyes. He was staring out at the city now, as if seeing nothing more than a problem. Not a place where people lived and breathed. It occurred to Anji that this was the way businesses saw the world: a resource to be used, a series of threats to be turned into opportunities. That didn't make them evil, or even amoral. But maybe it had more bad effects than she'd thought.

She glanced again at the Doctor, uneasily. This time he noticed, and smiled at her. 'Nearly there.'

'I don't need toddler talk,' snapped Anji. 'I need information.'

The lift stopped and the doors opened, directly into an office furnished with pale carpet tiles and dark leather-effect armchairs. Or perhaps real leather, thought Anji. A bright young man, beardless and with slightly bulging eyes, sat behind a high desk decorated with a vase of star lilies. The sweet scent filled the room: for some reason it made Anji feel slightly sick.

'Dr Smith,' said the Doctor briskly to the young man. 'I have an appointment with Aaron Kowaczski.'

The receptionist didn't page anyone, didn't even glance at the computer screen in front of him, just nodded and waved the Doctor through a door beside his desk, which opened silently of its own accord. Anji started to follow, but the Doctor turned and held out a hand. 'Wait here.' The door closed behind him.

Anji hesitated, then sat down. Of course, she thought disgustedly. More secrets.

The wait turned into a long one. She stared out of the picture window opposite the receptionist's desk at the darkening city, fiddled with the computer screen provided for waiting guests, which let you browse a very limited version of the net. There'd been a terrorist act in the late middle ages in Italy: what were described as 'local Catholic fundamentalists' objected to Protestant and non-Christian visitors.

She glanced up at the man behind the desk. 'What do you make of this Borgia business?'

The man shook his head. 'They don't understand what it'll do to their economy. Nobody's going to visit Renaissance Italy for a while now: we've had –' He glanced at the screen on his desk, shrugged – 'oh, thousands of cancellations. And they're completely dependent on us. Their people will starve if they're not careful.'

'Don't you think its bizarre that your own ancestors are dependent on visits from your friends to keep their economy going?'

He grinned. 'Oh, come on. Not my ancestors, or yours. They're going into a different future.'

'You think so?'

'Of course! You couldn't travel in time if it meant you were going to change your own past – that doesn't make any sense.'

Anji could sense that he thought her rather odd in her ignorance of what was obviously the received wisdom. She grinned at him, trying to make it flirtatious. 'Sorry. I can be a bit dim about time travel sometimes.'

He grinned back. 'Oh, it's easy. Just as long as you remember it's someone else's past, by definition, as soon as you arrive. We're not affected.'

Anji remembered the smooth ride in the time machine, and wondered if the man might be right. Perhaps the structure of time itself was changing: perhaps the Doctor was the anachronistic one, left over from a previous order of things. Perhaps she didn't need him any more, and should just go home. Or stay here and get a job.

'Can I access a phone book from here?' she asked.

But before the young man could reply the door by his desk opened, and the Doctor emerged. 'All right, Ms Kapoor,' he said, 'If you'd like to come in now, we can discuss your issues with Aaron.'

Anji walked past the young man at the desk, ignoring his friendly smile. Inside it was dimly lit. Aaron Kowaczski sat behind the desk. His eyes flicked between the Doctor and Anji. 'The Doctor has put a proposal to me: he should take the role of the assassinated Pharaoh, and you should be in charge of the

investigation. I've agreed in principle, but I do need some more information about you.'

Anji opened her mouth to speak, but Aaron hadn't finished.

'And Doctor, I need the approval of Mr Day, as the other advisor.'

'Umm –' began the Doctor. 'That might be a problem.'

There was a faint swishing sound, and suddenly there was another person standing in the room.

Sabbath.

He looked from Aaron, who watched with calculating eyes, to the Doctor, who seemed more surprised by his unassisted appearance than Anji would have expected.

'If you are concerned about my attitude to the Doubling Project, as I believe we should call it, then you need not be. There has been a sequence of events –' He glanced at Anji – 'a longer sequence of events than, in fact, I anticipated. And I have changed my mind. You do what you like. But I will need Anji. I will not harm her.'

'What do you suggest I do?' she said, steadily, looking at the Doctor.

He looked away. 'Go with Sabbath.'

'That's OK with me,' said Aaron. 'I trust you to be the experts on this paradox stuff. Just all of you try to make sure nobody else gets hurt, right?'

Anji met the Doctor's eyes again. He made the tiniest motion of his head, enough to let her know that a lot of people were going to get hurt, and that there was no avoiding it.

Chapter Fourteen

The King is Dead...

Jack was shivering, though it wasn't cold. The two guards had taken Fitz by the arms and walked him to the wall. Another had taken Jack's arms and pinned them behind his back. Jack could see Fitz, kneeling, a spear held level with his chest. The sun had almost set: the last pink light fading from the top of the wall. Iyee's body was still there beneath the window of the tree-hut, her lifeless eyes open, her mouth gaping, her spilled blood grey and congealed around her.

Jack wondered if they'd kill him too. The Pharaoh hadn't told them to, but they might just do it anyway. He couldn't see the man holding him, but the others looked scared. *'People who are scared are more likely to kill you.'* Who'd said that? President Heinlein?

It must be sunset now: the sky was a gunmetal grey, the clouds long and thin –

Wait. That wasn't the sky. The sky was still blue, a thin line of it around the horizon. What was above them was –

Jack gasped.

It was a spaceship. Filling the sky from one side to the other – it must be ten miles across. The lines he'd mistaken for clouds were doors opening in the underside, five long slits letting out floods of electric blue light. Silver dots drifted out of the doors, then began to move towards the ground.

The soldier holding Jack's arms released them: Jack almost fell over, then started to run.

'No! No! Magician's son!' The man had got ahead of him somehow, and now fell to his knees, prostrating himself before Jack. 'I am afraid – please help me!'

'I can't help you, mister,' said Jack. 'I don't know what's going on either.'

The man's eyes hardened. *'People who are scared...'*

Jack added quickly: 'But you'd better let Fitz – er – *magician's son* – 'my dad – you'd better get your friends to let him go. He's the only one who can save us.'

The man ran away towards the soldiers who held Fitz, shouting. Jack could see that Fitz was standing up, pointing at the sky – probably trying to talk his way out of the situation. Jack didn't know if he would be much help. Some of the silver dots descending from the ships were close enough that Jack could see a shape to them: heavy, sharp-edged, like armoured cars. But they seemed to have eyes.

They definitely had guns. A hissing sound filled the air, and zigzags of silver light. The Pharaoh's soldiers began to fall: with a feeling of horror, Jack saw their heads parting from their bodies and rolling away like distorted footballs. The smell of blood and metal choked Jack's throat.

They're really going to kill me, he thought. This can't happen. I'm –

Then he saw the robot dinosaurs.

Iyeeeye held the dagger in her hand, lifted it, felt the weight, the sharpness. If only the hunters had held knives like this, perhaps they could have fought the Others.

Probably not. She believed what she'd told the Doctor, that there was more wrong with the world than seemed so on the surface, and everything she had seen since she had left her world had confirmed it. She trusted the Doctor. He might be simplifying things for her sake, but basically he was telling the truth.

Iyeeeye put the knife away and stepped out of the alcove where the Doctor had left her. She looked around the vast shining cavern where the Pharaoh lived. The Doctor had given her special clothes, grey, ill-fitting, and itchy, and a square of glossy fibre called a 'pass' which he said would get her past the Pharaoh's door. Iyeeeye wondered whether the door was a spirit, like the Stones, or an Other-ish thing. She could see it, golden and huge, like something made by an insane coppersmith, like liquid fire. She stepped forward, shivering, yet feeling sweat prickling under her strange clothes. Some of the people were looking at her.

She began to move quickly, lightly, towards the alien door. The pass in her hand trembled, like a captive bird, and the vast thing swung open. Inside she could see three men, two in blue and gold, standing – and the Doctor, sitting on the throne, in his strange costume that came from a history not Iyeeeye's or his own. He looked up at her and smiled.

'Ah! Iyeeeye! I wondered when you would get here!'

He was mad, she thought, watching his smile. That was the truth of it. Time was broken and everyone and everything inside it was mad: all was madness. There was only one way to end it.

Without allowing herself any more time for thought, she lunged forward with the knife.

Chapter Sixteen

Feels Like Starting Over

Sabbath took Anji to the *Jonah*, which surprised her, since she couldn't see why he needed it any more. Perhaps, she thought, he needed it because she did. It was rocking gently against St Katherine's dock under steely floodlights. At least none of the apes were visible on deck.

'Where are we going?' she asked as they stepped aboard.

In return, he showed her a newspaper clipping of the dead Pharaoh: at least, she thought it was the dead Pharaoh until she saw the Doctor's face.

'To prevent that, then.' She looked at him, suspicious. Had he betrayed the Doctor? But if so, why let her know about it now?

'To prevent it from stopping everything. Didn't he tell you there were two of him?'

Anji jumped. 'Yes, but I didn't think you knew.' And up till now she hadn't realised she'd been talking to both of them. No wonder the Doctor hadn't remembered briefing her. The other Doctor had done it.

'Of course I know,' Sabbath was saying. 'As soon as the Doctor started using the TARDIS as a shelter for stray souls from every known reality, this event was a certainty.' He pressed a lever and the gangway began to fold up with a series of metallic clicks.

'I didn't know that the Doctor –'

'Oh, he doesn't have any choice. It is his nature. But his nature is betraying everything that is. Even he knows it must stop.'

'So one of him has died?'

'Is going to. But you can't prevent it.'

Anji just looked at him. She glanced behind them, saw that ropes had cast themselves off and the *Jonah* was drifting away from the quay. Evidently Sabbath had been investing in the benefits of twenty-first century automation.

'Why can't I prevent it?' Anji asked, though she was fairly sure she knew the answer.

Sabbath shook his head. 'The Doctor organised it himself, Ms Kapoor.'

‘And the other Doctor?’ She had just about grasped this by now, that there were truly two independent entities called the Doctor. Thinking about it, she wondered how he had avoided meeting himself before.

‘He knows about his other self’s plan, I imagine. It would be foolish to go ahead with it if he did not, and the Doctor is not foolish.’

Anji didn’t reply. She was trying to think.

To her surprise, Sabbath reached out and touched her shoulder. ‘I do understand, Ms Kapoor. Believe me.’

But Anji wasn’t sure whether he did.

Iyeeeye found Sabbath waiting in the hotel lobby, where the TARDIS had been. She recognised him from the picture on the TARDIS screen. But missing from the image had been the look of cruelty, the face of the calm killer who does not regret, and may even enjoy, the pain of his victim. She shuddered, but told herself she had to go on.

He took the bloodied knife from her hand and hid it under his cloak, then steered her out of the lobby, along a maze of streets that led down, until they reached the river. Sabbath gestured forward at a thing that floated there. It looked Other-ish, with its curved metal surfaces. True, it floated in water and was not like any Other thing she had seen before, but Iyeeeye couldn’t pretend she wasn’t afraid.

Sabbath saw her doubts, read the revulsion on her face.

‘The world is more complex and difficult than you think,’ he said.

‘No,’ said Iyeeeye. ‘I know that the world is not simple. I just do not know all the ways in which it is not simple. If I am going to live and die in your service and the Doctor’s, I would like to know more.’

‘You will know more,’ said Sabbath. ‘And you will not die any time soon. Not in the way you understand.’

Iyeeeye looked across the dry sand at the strange Other-ish home to which she had bound herself, smelled the Earth and the alien-ness. She wondered how many ways there were of dying.

To her surprise, Sabbath reached out and touched her shoulder. ‘I do understand, young lady. Believe me.’

But Iyeeeye wasn’t sure whether he did.

This was it, thought Fitz. This was the end: chaos in the raw. He watched the Egyptian soldier who had been about to kill him. The man was staring at the

sky. Slowly he fell to his knees, pointing. Fitz looked, saw a roughly sphinx-shaped object the size of a cloud moving into position underneath the flying saucer or whatever the heck it was above them. He'd once seen the *Star Wars* films, all nine in a row: it had seemed odd to be watching films made in the 1970s and 2000s in a cinema in the 2040s (had it been? or had it been on that Lunar Colony?). This thing looked a bit like the Imperial Walkers from those films, only ten times bigger. The legs looked as if they were made of fire: as the machine got closer Fitz began to feel the heat on his skin.

The Egyptians screamed as the wall burst into flames and rubble. The vast machine pitched sideways towards the ground, crushing the tree house and the carefully tended fields. Several of the soldiers vanished beneath it, and Fitz was thrown off his feet by the shock.

He scrambled upright and looked around for Jack. The universe might be coming to an end but he was going to stick with his mates. To his relief he saw Jack running towards him, shrieking. At first Fitz thought Jack was screaming in panic, then he realised he was saying a name.

'Iyeeye! It's Iyeeye!'

Behind him, a tall young woman stood, dressed in silver and surrounded by dancing blue fire.

Jack drew level with him, glanced at the Egyptian soldier, who was having a fit on the ground, his limbs flailing, foam around his lips. 'It is Iyeeye, isn't it, Fitz?'

Fitz stared at the apparition, who stared back at him without recognition.

'It is,' he sighed. 'But not as we know her.'

On board Sabbath's machine, everything echoed. Iyeeye found it easier to cope with than Anji's car, mainly because it didn't move about so much. There was a gentle swaying as it moved away from the riverbank, then no more than vibration through the metal.

Sabbath took her below decks whilst they travelled in time. Iyeeye could feel it, the Time Magic, working through the strange, ratcheted tooling of the *Jonah*. She knew they were travelling a long way.

'Where are we going?' she asked Sabbath.

'We are going to create a passage. A trail through time and space for someone else to follow, back to Egypt.' He must have seen her uncomfortable expression, because he said, 'Don't worry, you'll be going back with them. But you will avoid – certain difficulties that would have happened if you had stayed.'

Iyeeye was still thinking about this when a jolt through the metal deck told her they had arrived.

Sabbath led her back up through the ringing passages that made up the *Jonah*. When they got to the last stairway, Iyeeye smelled the petrol-like smell of Others. She knew it at once, knew that it was different from the smell of human machinery that she had confused it with up to now.

She turned, but Sabbath was behind her.

'You have to go up,' he said.

'No. I won't be betrayed like this' She felt for the knife at her belt, but of course it was gone.

Sabbath folded his arms, implacable. Behind her she heard the scrape of metal on metal. She looked up, saw the hatchway open.

Then she saw what was behind it, and screamed.

Anji was surprised that Jumpsville was still here. The sunshine, the crowded shops, the comfortable tourists seemed utterly alien to the disintegrating world around them.

'They simply don't know, do they?'

Sabbath shook his head. 'With good fortune, they never will.'

'So what happens, when we put things right? They just fade away?'

'They will never have been.'

'That isn't what you were promising us at Iyeeye's oasis.'

'What I am *going* to promise you,' corrected Sabbath.

Anji stared at him. 'What?'

'I have not yet been to Iyeeye's oasis. I assume that is where I will be taking Fitz and Jack.' He gestured ahead to the market square.

'I thought I was taking Fitz.'

'You will be doing that –' He shrugged – 'perhaps yesterday. But I will take him today, with Jack.'

Anji gazed around at the tourists. A tall Indian in full costume winked at her. 'Why – we don't both need to –'

Sabbath grabbed her arm. 'You've seen them at the oasis. And you know they came with me, correct?'

Anji nodded. 'But I've also seen him killed by the time cops. Tomorrow. We know that just about anything can happen now that the Laws of Time have broken down.'

‘Believe me, Anji, when I tell you that neither of those versions of Mr Kreiner is destined to live. If you wish him to survive – assuming, of course, that any of us can survive – then you will need to collect him before today.’

‘This is stupid.’

‘It is also the only way you will save your friend’s life. At the moment, the only causality is the one you make up yourself. Furthermore, you must believe that the circle of causality that I am making by my present actions is one of the few things that is holding the disparate islands of what you and I used to call reality into a fabric. Without that circle, everything is lost.’

‘And without the Doctor –’

‘Without him, yes. But also without me. We are both vital to the survival of reality. So to repeat: I need Fitz and Jack now, you will need him yesterday. I suggest – ah, too late.’

And he strode away, throwing a last comment over his shoulder, ‘Make up your own mind about it, Ms Kapoor. All the world waits.’ At the same time, Anji heard Fitz shouting her name, and saw him standing across the square with Jack.

Now what do I do? she thought.

She found herself walking across the square towards Fitz. She stopped in front of him and glared straight into his bewildered face. ‘Sorry,’ she said. ‘And you are...?’

‘I can explain,’ said Fitz, wondering how he could explain anything right now. He kept expecting the sky to fall in, or the Earth to vanish beneath his feet. Surely it couldn’t be long before that happened.

The alien Iyeeeye looked at him, then looked at her own lifeless body. Did she recognise it? This version of the woman couldn’t be more than twenty, and she looked – different. Only the face was the same. The same alert, intelligent eyes, the same compassion. Even the large steel-rimmed gun she was pointing at Fitz couldn’t really undermine his faith in her integrity. If she’d wanted him dead, her machines could have done it. Face it, they would have done it on their own: she must have stopped them.

‘Explain, then,’ she said softly. ‘We all have a lot to explain.’

And not much time to explain it in, thought Fitz. But he still couldn’t think of anything to say.

‘That’s you, there,’ said Fitz, cautiously, without actually pointing at the body. She nodded. ‘It doesn’t surprise me.’

‘There was a journal.’

A frown.

'A record – a book. Kept by my friend. About what she built here.' *Which you have just smashed up.* He gazed around at the crumpled wall, the crushed wheat fields. The Pharaoh's men had been comparatively harmless.

If she noted Fitz's feelings, the new Iyeeeye was unmoved by them. 'And what else? What are you going to tell me that should make them stop?'

'Them?'

Iyeeeye raised her eyebrows, glanced upwards. 'The Others. They let me live, even though I tried to kill them. They said I was better. They said that humans were foolish and unstable, but that they would give some of us a chance. Me. Maybe you, but you will have to explain yourself.'

Fitz pinched himself, very deliberately. He didn't show any signs of waking up, though he supposed it could still be a very bad dream. Who the hell were the Others? Don't ask. He said slowly, 'How much do you know about time travel?'

She didn't blink. 'Quite a lot.'

'Would you believe me if I told you that I was travelling with one of the few people who can save the universe?'

'Who? The Doctor?'

Fitz felt his heart flip. He nodded.

But Iyeeeye shook her head. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'He is dead. He died more than three years ago.'

Fitz and Jack looked at each other. 'Are you sure?'

An uncomfortable look came into Iyeeeye's eyes, and the flames around her darkened. 'I am sure. I had a knife. I killed him myself.'

Chapter Fifteen

...Long Live the King

This time I'm dead, thought Ak.

He had refused America, when offered the alternative of letting another Pharaoh die and more poppers. Khal (or 'Sabbath', as the Doctor called him) had promised Ak protection, but Ak hadn't really believed it. He hadn't laughed, though; not this time. He'd just taken the poppers.

He hadn't expected a woman, but then neither had anyone else. Nor had there been the drama of the previous assassination, King takes King with much shouting and anger. Just a dark, quick girl and a knife, in and out of the crowd before he knew it. Then, as the Pharaoh slumped, his eyes rolling and his blood spilling on the floor, the girl had vanished. No bright lights. No trumpets. No gunfire. Not slipped away – just gone. The knife, too. The extra guards provided by Good Times had moved, and they'd moved quickly. But not quickly enough.

There was a difference, though: this time Ak's arrest had been real, the kidney punch brutal, the cell lightless and hot with hard, knuckle-bruising walls. Ak waited, sometimes shivering, sometimes giggling, sometimes, as now, placid and cynical. He had no idea how long he had been locked up. A few hours, probably. There would be nothing but darkness, and then they would cut his throat like a pig in the old market. He wondered if Khal would let him have any poppers first.

A sound made him look up. It was as if the cell were breathing: a deep, earthen groaning, getting louder. Warm air tossed about him as if he were sitting next to a campfire. Was this how he was going to die? He began to shake as a blue light filled the cell, pulsing steadily, and the sound rose to a crescendo. Then the floor shook, the light went out, and there was silence.

Ak cautiously took a breath. He was still alive. The cell felt smaller, somehow, though he still couldn't see anything. A small sound just in front of him made him jump and reach out. His hands met a wall that hadn't been there before.

Then the wall opened, revealing a doorway into a strange, blue-and-copper-coloured chamber that was far bigger than his cell. It looked as if it should have belonged to the Pharaoh. He'd heard there were secret passages in the palace... but in the dungeons?

'Ah! Hello! You must be Akhenaton, Ak to your friends?'

Ak stared. The man inside the new room was the twin of the Pharaoh who had died a half hour before. Did Good Times have a supply of them, he wondered?

Just to be on the safe side, Ak fell to his knees.

'All hail to the Great Pharaoh of the Nile!'

'Well – not exactly –' The man was still smiling.

'I know that,' giggled Ak. Then he began to laugh, and laugh, and laugh, and bang his head against the stone wall of the cell, until the new Pharaoh picked him up and took him inside the doorway into the blue and copper room.

'Don't touch anything!' he admonished.

As if it mattered, thought Ak. As if anything mattered any more. He took a few steps inside the room, but then heard a loud bang outside, followed by shouting. He went back to the door and saw the Pharaoh smiling at a posse of guards who had burst into the cell, guns raised. 'You know who I am,' he was saying, 'And Ak here will swear to it –' The Pharaoh swung around and grabbed Ak's arm, dragging him into the light – 'won't you?'

The guards stared at Ak. 'He is the Pharaoh,' said Ak quickly. Suddenly he didn't want to die. Not quite like this. 'He has returned to prove my innocence.' This seemed unlikely, but it was worth the risk – saying it was better than saying nothing.

It worked, or maybe it was the Pharaoh's insouciant smile. The guns were lowered, if not returned to their shoulder holsters. Still smiling, the Pharaoh walked past them and up a sloping ramp of concrete, which changed to old, sand-weathered stone as the daylight grew ahead. Ak glanced at the guards, decided not to chance it, and tottered after him.

A cluster of people stood at the top of the ramp, talking in low voices. They looked up, frowned in astonishment. Ak heard the word Pharaoh, saw people dropping to their knees.

No. Surely they knew it was a sort of trick? Surely they didn't think it was a miracle? But then, Ak himself had thought so, just for a moment. 'If you knew anything about time travel,' Ak muttered under his breath, 'you'd know that this has to be the same man – he's coming back from the dead before he died.'

Ak wanted to say it louder, make it clearer, get the message across that it was all a fraud, but a hubbub of voices was rising, the sound resonating down the stone passageway from the daylight above, as the Pharaoh strode into the daylight, his hair turned into a golden crown by the sun. Ak couldn't say anything now.

'The Pharaoh has returned from the dead!' A man's voice, trumpeting above the rest. 'The Pharaoh! The Pharaoh! The Pharaoh!'

Yes, thought Ak. Now Egypt is safe. Now the old ways will return. Some chance, with the fake resurrection of a fake Pharaoh. But some people will believe anything.

Ak stepped into the light. Black-uniformed men standing around, with guns. Nervous men and women in time-traveller suits – the tourists in their brighter, looser clothes had all gone. Ak hesitated, now not sure whether to stick with the Pharaoh and his miracle, or sneak away while he had a chance. The Pharaoh himself didn't seem sure what to do; he kept glancing at the throne room.

Ak stepped close to him. 'They took the body out. It's OK.'

'No it's not. I need the body. Do you know where they took it?'

Ak shook his head. 'They punched me.' He had forgotten the pain, but now that he mentioned it found it was still there: a pulsing hot discomfort in his lower back.

The Pharaoh looked around him. 'How well do you know this palace?'

Ak stared at him. 'How much don't you know?' he asked quietly.

Their eyes met. 'Never mind that,' said the Pharaoh steadily. 'How much do you know?'

Ak frowned. 'It's been hours. They'll have taken the body away from here.'

'I don't think so. Remember I'm supposed to be a Pharaoh. Immortal, and all that.'

Ak tried to sneer, but found he couldn't. Around them, people were still staring; others had prostrated themselves in the old way, faces to the floor. Outside, the noise of people was growing like a tide. *What if it were true?*

'You are an... immortal?'

The Pharaoh said nothing. He seemed to have forgotten about Ak. He strode out through the crowd. 'I must be reunited with my body,' he called. 'Show me where it lies that I may reclaim my soul for the Kingdom.'

There were mutterings in the crowd, then an old man stepped forward. 'I was a priest for Cheops's father,' he said. 'I know where the Pharaoh's body will lie.'

He led the way through the crowd. Ak followed, not sure what else he could do. An air of safety surrounded the person of the Pharaoh, and Ak wanted to be part of that safety.

They moved through the smooth marble passageways of the modern, air-conditioned palace, out through a wooden door into a small, hot courtyard. Beyond that, the pillars and rough stone of an older palace – right in the middle of the modern building. Ak had known it was there, had seen it in his training days. It was off-limits to the tourists: until now, he'd never wondered about the significance of that.

The priest walked right towards the doorway, ignoring the guards in their black uniforms. They called out, saw the Pharaoh, saw Ak. Guns were raised again, but the Pharaoh told them to stand aside, and they did. Inside the palace, it was dark and dingy, with a smell of dust and old resin. There was another door, and a priest in robes stood guard.

'Servant of Amun.' The Pharaoh inclined his head.

The priest stared, white-faced. 'You have – you are –'

'I am alive, yes. And I've come to claim my body.'

'But you can't!'

'He can.' The other priest was speaking: seeing the shock on the guardian priest's face, Ak looked at the two of them and saw that, though the clothes they wore were different, they were the same man.

'And how many of me are there around?' wondered Ak aloud.

'Quite a few, I should think,' muttered the Doctor.

They exchanged a glance. Ak wanted to ask more, but the guardian priest had stood aside and the other version of him was ushering them into the inner sanctum. He could still hear shouting outside, and the clatter of feet on the courtyard.

'Great Pharaoh! We beseech –'

Then very loud gunshots, and screams.

The Pharaoh swung round, his face twisted in anguish. The gunfire had stopped, someone was shouting orders. Ak could see a man lying in the bright dust outside the door, his robes soaked with blood, an arm still stretched out, trembling, imploring. The doors opened, men rushed in. Ak jumped towards the Pharaoh, pushing them both away from the door as shots rang out. Ahead he could see two more priests, their heads bowed low over a dark body resting on a marble sarcophagus. They had not moved, did not move even as the men with guns rushed inside.

They stopped, as the Pharaoh turned to face them, with his own body lifted over his shoulders.

‘Enough of this,’ he said. ‘Put your guns down.’

To Ak’s amazement, they did.

‘Now guard me. I need to get back to the old dungeons, where my friend here was being held.’

The men glanced at each other. ‘We can take you to the boss,’ said one. ‘That’s it.’

‘I am the boss,’ said the Doctor quietly.

‘No you’re not,’ said the spokesman. He looked sharp, weary. ‘He was.’ He gestured at the body. ‘Put him down and come on.’

‘I think you’ll find that the people out there think I am the boss.’

‘Most of the people out there are dead. And anyone else who thinks the wrong way will end up dead too. You know that, Doctor whoever-you-are.’

‘What, all four million of them? How many people do you think you’re going to have to kill to make your version of the world real?’

‘As many as it takes, I suppose.’ The man seemed genuinely unconcerned. ‘We have to survive.’

‘Yes, but is it really about survival? Or is it just greed?’

The man stepped forward, jabbed his gun into the Doctor’s ribs. ‘Do you think I care? I have a job to do, and I do it. I don’t answer to you, to Mr Kowaczski, or to anybody’s travel company. I answer to my commanding officer and he answers to Her Majesty’s Government. Right?’

‘And who would Her Majesty be?’ asked the Doctor, with a slight smile.

‘Queen Wilhelma the Fourth of Greater Holland. And if you were born under a different queen I’ll kill you where you stand.’

‘I wasn’t born under any queen. I’m not English. Or Dutch.’

‘Why doesn’t that surprise me?’

The Doctor lowered the body to the floor, looked into the grey dead face that was his own. ‘Sorry about this old chap,’ he muttered. ‘But I don’t think our plan is going to work.’

Then the Doctor seemed to notice something. He reached down, ignoring a warning from the guard, and pulled the dead fist from a pocket. The arm moved stiffly, like a robot: for a moment Ak wondered if the dead Pharaoh had been a machine, built in imitation of a man. . . . but no. That face had the pain of death on it.

There was a faint hissing sound, and Ak’s vision blurred.

‘Sorry,’ said the Doctor, as Ak crumpled to his knees. Somewhere, there was a single gunshot. It seemed to echo for ever, and over it he heard the Doctor’s voice: ‘Yes, I would have done it too. Just in case I changed my mind. But I’m glad you didn’t. Still, it came in useful.’

Then there was silence.

Chapter Seventeen

Not the End, Not Even the Beginning of the End...

Anji rubbed her eyes and gazed at the pop-up message on her screen.

I am here and so is the Pharaoh. We need to meet with Kowaczski straight away. Please advise him and clear the way.

Was this it? Was the Doctor really here this time? Underneath and around the message she could see the words of the report she'd been writing. How long? Six weeks? She glanced up at Fitz's desk, but he still wasn't back from his fag break. 'Come on,' she muttered. Not that it was much use. Six weeks in Good Times HQ hadn't convinced Fitz. Not the same way Anji was convinced, after seeing Jack and Fitz dead outside the TARDIS, and then seeing them alive again.

Birgit looked up from her desk in the corner, wiped a loose straggle of mouse-coloured hair away from her round glasses. 'You OK, Anji?'

'Just waiting for this damn thing to download.'

'Looked like you'd seen a ghost.'

I've seen several, thought Anji. She remembered the shock when she'd seen the news report about Queen Wilhelma's visit to London. Up till then she hadn't realised she lived in Greater Holland. A quick browse on the Internet had established that Greater Holland, the German Union, and the Franco-Spanish Alliance (which included Italy and the Balkans), together with Louisiana and the Northern States, constituted the Great Powers of the world she was in.

More worrying, a week later it had been different. Great Britain was back, but included large parts of France. The rest of Europe seemed to be Spanish, or German. The United States included Central and South America and, bizarrely, a part of Africa. The people working in her office changed, from Daniel to Juliana to Marie and Sandy, and now to Birgit. The phone book changed. One day there were five Kapoors in her road, the next there were none, the next her road didn't exist. Once she'd called a likely number and heard at the other end

a young woman's voice that could have been her own, with a child crying in the background. She'd hung up and she hadn't tried again. She'd had a creepy feeling – what if she rang the number and Dave answered?

Fitz remained constant, protected no doubt in the same way she was. But she sometimes wondered if his memories corresponded with her own any more. She didn't dare ask, in case the very act of asking destabilised the sliver of reality they seemed to be resting on.

Certainly no one else noticed any changes. Anji's initial feeling of panic had given way to a careful, documentary approach: the contents of her report file didn't seem to change whatever happened to the rest of the world, and she was able to download clips from the Internet and Encarta (or whatever equivalent existed in the present version of reality) and attach them to the document as proof.

In the last couple of days, geography itself had started to shift. Mediterranean islands melted into each other, swirled around the sea around like little flotillas of cruise ships. The English channel narrowed, until the Dover Straits became a river, with two bridges. The North Sea was a lake, then a sea again. Antarctica shifted uncomfortably, sea levels rose and fell. Anji gazed at the data in her report, fought down the sense of panic it always engendered. OK, it proved the point. But surely it was too late? OK, Good Times as an entity, with its technological backup, remained, but that was more likely to be a function of Anji and her report writing (and perhaps the TARDIS), than any indication of general stability. How could there be any hope of restoring a 'correct' reality from this lot?

The familiar squeak of the door opening made Anji look up: it was Fitz. He looked hangdog and untidy as usual, his suit rumpled, his tie – not exactly askew, but not quite right either. His hair was greasy, and Anji found herself wondering when he'd last washed it.

She gestured at the screen, unwilling to mention the Doctor's message in front of Birgit. Fitz came over and looked, nodded. 'I'll speak to Bill in the guards' office.'

'I thought that was Darryl.'

Fitz raised his eyebrows, lowered his voice. 'It was Darryl yesterday. But Bill knows me.'

Anji shook her head. 'This is appalling.'

Birgit looked up, raised her round glasses to her forehead. 'It is a shambles, this place, you know? I'm supposed to be doing the accounts report today and the end of period was last week. I mean, why didn't they tell me they'd changed

it? How can you do accounts if nothing stays constant?’

Fitz and Anji looked at each other. ‘Probably another version of reality,’ muttered Fitz.

Birgit must have heard him, because she grinned and said, ‘Myself, I think they’re all on another planet.’

Anji stood up. ‘Come on,’ she said to Fitz. ‘We’ve got a job to do.’

She looked across at Birgit. ‘I... umm...’ How do you say goodbye to someone whose reality is going to cease to exist because of something you’re about to do, and who only started to coexist with you yesterday? She knew nothing about Birgit and never would. Yet she was real, breathing, smiling up at Anji. A likeable woman. She looked like she did great parties. ‘See you later,’ said Anji lamely.

‘See you,’ said Birgit.

Outside, Fitz grabbed her arm. ‘She doesn’t know?’

‘How the hell can she know?’ Working with Fitz for six weeks had made Anji like him less and respect him less. OK, so he wasn’t cut out for office life, but that didn’t excuse the negative attitude, the jokes, and worst of all the fact that he only took any interest in life when one of their increasingly temporary colleagues was young, pretty and female.

‘Go and speak to Bill,’ she said wearily. ‘I’ll barge in on Kowaczski.’

Aaron Kowaczski’s office wasn’t palatial. The furniture was leather, the desk wooden, the computer modern with a flat screen. There was a security code on the door, but it was open, and Aaron was behind his desk, talking on the Internet.

‘We can’t sell Ancient Egypt any more since the business at the Palace – yes I know – we can wipe and rewrite so it never happened, but people here will still remember.’

No they won’t, thought Anji.

Aaron glanced up. He looked like his son, just bigger, broader, older, his face lined with anxiety and ambition. But the storybook attitude to the world was still there, the radiant innocence that pretended things could just go on – must do, somehow, if only you believed enough in what you were doing, and put in enough work. It was worse because Anji knew she had used to think that way herself.

‘I’ll have to go now,’ Aaron was saying to the person on the other end of the connection. ‘Something’s just cropped up.’ He ended the call with a movement of his hand and looked up. ‘Ms Kapoor – a pleasure to see you. I take it...?’

Anji nodded. 'The Doctor is here. And the report shows –' She gestured at his screen.

'Yes, I was looking at it this morning. I'm still not aware of any of these changes, but I know you haven't been faking this stuff, Anji. Don't think I'm not taking it seriously, because I am.'

'And you'll see the Doctor?'

'Of course I'll see him! He's an old friend, besides everything else.'

Yesterday you'd never heard of him, thought Anji. But she said nothing, just thanked her lucky stars.

The phone on the desk burred quietly. Aaron picked it up, listened for a moment, nodded. 'He wants us to go down to the Transit Room.'

'I know about that,' said Anji. 'There's something –'

'– he needs to show us. Yes.' Aaron rubbed his hands together and grinned. Anji realised that he was enjoying the situation. What did he think this was, a school picnic?

'This is extremely serious, Aaron,' she said, then wished she hadn't.

He glanced at her, and his face hardened as he made the predictable response. 'Everything's serious, Anji. But we can't go out of business just because of a bit of trouble about history. You know that.'

I know that's what we tell the media, thought Anji. But she said nothing. Leave that to the Doctor and his grisly proof.

They went down in the lift, and Anji looked at London. The lights seemed so familiar in the November gloom. She thought, just as she had the first time she'd come up in this lift, as she did every morning, *This is home. This is normal. I go to work, I have a desk and a computer and a tax reference. Surely there can't be that much danger?* Then she remembered the changing geography, the changing names in the phone book and the history books. They seemed further away from reality each day, as if she was seeing something that only existed on the Internet, a fantasy. Reality would be resumed as soon as Anji turned her eyes away.

She glanced at Aaron, who only had her word that anything was happening at all. He wasn't a bad man, but how could he be expected to take it seriously? He saw himself living in one world, the real world. In that world, discontinuity was something that always happened to somebody else: a somebody Aaron only heard about at second hand, a somebody who lived in a world that never touched Aaron's. Anji could understand why the Doctor's shock tactics were necessary. She could only hope they were going to work.

There was shouting in the basement when they got there. As they rounded the corner Anji saw a tall man in a commissioner's uniform, gesturing wildly. 'Of course I'm bloody calling the police! You can't bring a dead body in here and expect me to ignore it. You're crazy!'

Another man stood facing him, calm, silent, his face still. Anji recognised the Doctor, but there was something changed about him. Was it the stillness? Or was he, too, affected by the changes in reality? If so, Anji knew that she must be affected as well, that the constancy of her world was as much an illusion as everyone else's. Which meant –

'OK, Bill, I'll take care of this,' said Aaron.

The uniformed man looked over his shoulder, shook his head. 'I'm calling the police.' He lifted a mobile phone from his pocket and began dialling.

'Let him,' said the Doctor. 'He's had a shock.' A pause. 'So have I.'

He gestured at his feet, where stiff, lifeless, like a gruesome waxwork, his own corpse lay in the blue and gold costume of the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Chapter Eighteen

...But the End of the Beginning

‘The question is, what are we going to do about it?’

Anji watched the faces of the circle of men and women around the glass table. There were ten altogether: the senior directors of the Good Times company. Grey suits, white suits, a man in a grey roll-top sweater who looked as if he’d been dragged in from a shopping trip. Anji couldn’t quite restrain the uncomfortable feeling that she herself shouldn’t be here, that she was too junior an employee to be at a meeting like this. Only the Doctor’s presence, white-faced and dishevelled, gave any reality to the proceedings. The corpse had been spirited away: Anji wasn’t expecting to see it again. Fitz was outside the circle, too junior to be there in any capacity but official recorder, and then only at the Doctor’s insistence. He was taking the job seriously, panning the handi-cam she’d bought him in Jumpsville around from one board member to another.

The silence in the room dragged on. Aaron had been the one asking the question, and after perhaps half a minute he seemed ready to answer it himself. ‘I think we should consider a number of choices. First –’

‘You don’t have any choices,’ said the Doctor.

‘Of course we have choices,’ said the man in the sweater. ‘There are always choices. That’s why we have meetings, that’s why we communicate.’

A woman in a white suit, thin-faced, with spectacles, spoke. ‘I don’t think we should react too quickly to this. It’s shocking, I know, but we can’t afford to be sentimental about –’

‘You can’t afford to do nothing!’ snapped the Doctor.

‘That may be your opinion,’ said the woman, in a tone of voice that was accustomed to being obeyed. ‘But you are not a member of this board. You were making an expert presentation. You’ve done that very well, and I can assure you we appreciate your expertise in this field. Now I suggest you let us make the decisions we’re paid to make.’

Anji glanced at the speaker, and realised that she was now wearing the grey roll-top sweater, was younger, fitter, with paler skin. A pale thin man sat next to her, old, with shadows under his eyes.

‘Doctor –’ she whispered.

‘I know. It’s very close now.’

Anji wondered what it would feel like to cease to exist, to become a random flux of temporal variations. Not a lot different from dying, she supposed. The stupid thing was, she felt OK at the moment.

‘Look,’ Aaron was saying. ‘I know the dangers, Doctor. My son Jack died as a result of time travel. I invented this business to make it safe. To make sure it was regulated, and that any money we made out of it we made in an honest way. You can’t quarrel with that.’

‘I can if it doesn’t work,’ said the Doctor.

‘Aaron, we do have to temper our idealism with reality.’ The speaker was a young blond man in an advert-smart suit, who Anji was quite sure hadn’t been there a second before. ‘We’ve discussed this before.’ The man was now a woman, with a passing resemblance to Nicole Kidman. There hadn’t been a change, not a flicker of the frame, no cinematic morphing. One version had simply replaced the other, at no specified time, and Anji found that she could remember both.

Outside the windows, towers were exchanging places, growing and shrinking in a bizarre dance. The faces around the table shifted like shadows, voices rose and fell and mixed, the words a bizarre mixed salad of business-speak clichés. Only the Doctor, Aaron and herself remained constant. And Fitz, she noticed with relief, still videoing carefully, his face tight with concentration.

Which means, Anji realised with a shock, that we’re the only ones that matter, here, in this room, and possibly in the whole of time and space. The Doctor (of course), who’s doing his best, Aaron who isn’t convinced, Fitz who’s busy, and me.

Me. I’m the one who has to do something.

‘Aaron,’ she said, letting her voice cut across the hubbub. Most versions of the conversation died down. ‘How long have you known Janice Elsmore?’ Anji was reading a name tag on the desk top. She was almost surprised it didn’t change before she had a chance to finish the question, then saw the Doctor watching them both, and realised: Ms Elsmore would stay real, *as long as Anji kept her the centre of attention*. As long as they were thinking about her, Janice Elsmore existed.

‘Janice?’ Aaron sounded bewildered. Janice was looking at them, also puzzled. A long face with good bones; stylish spectacles; grey pin-stripe suit. Aaron frowned at her. ‘When did you join, Janice? Two years ago?’

‘Three years last fall.’ She looked at Anji, a measuring look. ‘Why do you need to know?’

‘Look out there!’ said the Doctor, pointing at the shifting cityscape outside. He winked at Anji.

Aaron looked. The city froze. ‘What am I looking at, Doctor?’

‘Janice Elsmore,’ said Anji, quickly.

‘Who?’

The Doctor walked around the room and whipped the handycam out of Fitz’s hand with a triumphant smile. Everyone in the room stared (the faces and bodies still shifting) as he played it back. The picture was too small to see, but Aaron’s voice issued from the tiny speaker, ‘*When did you join, Janice?*’

The woman’s reply was clearly audible.

There was no Janice Elsmore in the room. No women at all, in fact, apart from Anji. Just a collection of men in old, dark, business suits. Wood panelling had replaced the glass. The windows had leaded panes.

‘Now look here –’ began one of the men.

‘No,’ said Aaron. His accent was stronger than usual. ‘No, Herbert, that was my voice. And that woman –’ He was staring at the LCD screen. ‘Say, we don’t have things like this in –’

Steel began to creep into the walls. It didn’t fade in, like two films merging, it didn’t run like quicksilver over the wood. It replaced. Slowly it became reality, and the wood and the leaded panes became a memory. There was no joining point.

Janice Elsmore was sitting there, glasses, pin-stripe suit, telling everyone they should get on with the meeting.

Aaron nodded very slowly, and closed his eyes.

‘You’re right, Doctor,’ he said. ‘I believe you.’

The Doctor nodded, grinned. ‘Well done. Sorry about this.’

He jumped into the air, clear over the tables, grabbed Anji with one arm and Fitz with the other. They ran out of the door into the wood-panelled and also steel and glass and also several other things lobby. Behind them, Aaron was shouting, ‘I’m gonna close it down, Doctor. We can’t control it this way. We’re not controlling –’

Then he turned into someone – no something – a bird, reptile, maybe a fish flew past and there was a red light and they were pounding down the stairs

and the escalator and the lift and also falling, falling, and Anji hit the ground and knew she was dying just as the lift stopped and opened into a marble and brick and empty and full lobby where she felt a bolt of pain as a shard of glass stabbed her heart and the Doctor said 'Come on,' and Fitz was still on his other arm, yelling something about beer, and he was falling, his face burned to a cinder, and in front of them there was a stone monolith and a subway station and a pyramid and the TARDIS –

'hold that thought'

Had the Doctor said that? Strange little robots, like pepper pots, were drifting in empty space, their single stalked eyes watching her, and there was pure raw fire and Anji was dying –

'no you're not'

– more fire and silver men and a vast exploding (spaceship, sun?) and she couldn't breathe she was dying –

'no I won't allow it'

and blue screaming nothing and

NOT AGAIN

and the TARDIS

– the TARDIS –

Yes! They were inside the TARDIS console room, and Anji was shaking and so was Fitz, and the Doctor was attacking the console like an insane thing, shrieking at it, 'Go! Go! Go!', and the floor lurched like a rowing boat in a hurricane but *she was still alive* and there were lightning bolts flying out of the door of the library and the main doors were open showing threads of light so bright they hurt, like a spider's web.

Then the doors closed, slowly, leaving Anji with afterimages dancing on her eyes. She was breathing hard, sweating, but every breath felt good. Fitz was beside her, scrambling to his feet, shaking his head slowly. 'What happened?'

Anji looked at the Doctor, but he was still utterly intent on the console and the screens above it.

'I think time and space just fell apart.'

'Oh.' Fitz looked around. The TARDIS was quiet, and normal, apart from an upturned chair and a faint acrid smell. 'Are you sure?' He had the handcam in his hand, the record light still glowing. He gazed at it, frowning, then turned it off and slowly pushed it into his suit pocket.

'No.' She got up, slowly, was surprised to find that nothing felt broken, bruised, burned, or even grazed. 'I'm not sure of anything much. Do you have any better ideas or explanations right now?'

‘No.’

They both looked at the Doctor, but he was still silent.

‘If you’re right, what do we do next?’

‘I haven’t the foggiest.’ She turned to him, put her hands on her hips. ‘Fitz, you can be very irritating. From time to time.’

The Doctor spoke. ‘It’s like trying to catch bubbles in an aquarium. It’s difficult to catch the one you want, and when you do it breaks up and disappears in your hands.’

‘Bubbles of what?’

‘Reality.’ The Doctor made a snatching movement at the console, shook his head. ‘The only stable one will be –’ Another snatching movement – ‘wherever Sabbath is. Assuming he’s really part of it, of course, and not just pretending. But I don’t see how he can be, how he could have –’ Another flurry of movement. ‘Ah!’

Anji and Fitz looked at each other. ‘How he could have – what?’ asked Anji.

The TARDIS lurched, and the central column on the console froze.

‘Sabbath is the only reality there is,’ commented the Doctor, as if he were giving traffic directions.

Anji walked up to the console. ‘You’re not serious?’

‘Maybe not on his own,’ said the Doctor. He was watching the screens: Anji looked, saw a dark landscape, half ruined, which she recognised with a shock as the place in Egypt where she’d left Fitz waiting to die at sunset. The *other* Fitz. If he wasn’t dead yet she could still save him. She raced to the console, looked around to see if she could spot him, but saw something worse.

Another TARDIS.

Another Anji, talking earnestly to the heavy figure of Sabbath, whilst another Doctor watched from the doorway of a third TARDIS.

Fitz had seen it too: she could tell from the tension in his voice as he spoke: ‘Doctor –’

‘I know.’

Anji hit the door control.

‘Anji, I’m not sure if –’

But she was at the door, looking outside.

At not just one or two, but a dozen or more TARDISes. And the Doctor, three of them, talking to each other. An Anji and a Fitz, arguing. Two boy Jacks, staring at each other.

And in the sky, on the ground, the continuous roar of materialisation, like the sea, but louder, and louder, and louder.

A hand touched her shoulder: the Doctor, her Doctor.
'I'm getting too good at protecting my friends,' he said.
'There must be thousands of them,' said Fitz.

The boy, Jack, looking dishevelled and frightened, came running up to them and grabbed Anji's arm. She could see a Fitz on his other arm, looking bewildered. A dishevelled Fitz, a Fitz who had not just been in an office. Therefore the Fitz whom Sabbath must have kidnapped when she'd denied him, there in the square in Jumpsville, and therefore –

A Fitz who needed to be saved.

Anji stepped out of the TARDIS. Above the roar of the thousands of other TARDISES she could just hear Jack's voice, shrieking, '– need both of you – Sabbath says it has to be –'

Has to be the end, she thought, looking around her. The sky was dark with a vast grey spaceship, encrusted with TARDISES. She looked over the shoulder at the TARDIS, but she'd taken too many steps forward: she couldn't tell which of several TARDISES was hers. She saw a Fitz arguing with another Anji, a Doctor staring at her, another Jack running about. It would have been funny if it hadn't been chaos.

She looked at the dishevelled Fitz and tried to grin, but her face muscles refused to move. Ahead she could see Sabbath, carrying a body in his arms.

Carrying *her* body. The same pin-striped suit, the same midnight blue shirt, blood and mush where the face should be.

Anji closed her eyes, staggered, opened them again.

The body was still there.

'Ah! We have another one!' shouted Sabbath. 'Good work, Jack.'

'It's like trying to catch bubbles in an aquarium. It's difficult to catch the one you want, and when you do it breaks up and disappears in your hands.'

'Bubbles of what?'

'Reality.' The Doctor made a snatching movement at the console, shook his head. 'The only stable one will be –' Another snatching movement – 'wherever Sabbath is. Assuming he's really part of it, of course, and not just pretending. But I don't see how he can be, how he could have –' Another flurry of movement. 'Ah!'

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Another Anji, talking earnestly to the heavy figure of Sabbath, whilst another Doctor watched from the doorway.

Fitz had seen it too: she could tell from the tension in his voice as he spoke: 'Doctor –'

'I know.'

Anji hit the door control.

'Anji, I'm not sure if –'

But she was at the door, looking outside.

At not just one, but a dozen or more TARDISes. The Doctor, shouting at Sabbath, who had a dead body in his arms. Fitz, another Anji – and was the body hers, as well? She began to feel sick. In the sky, on the ground, she could hear the continuous roar of materialisation, like the sea, but louder, and louder, and louder.

A hand touched her shoulder: the Doctor, her Doctor.

'I'm getting too good at protecting my friends,' he said.

'There must be thousands of them,' said Fitz.

Anji looked at Sabbath, who stared back at her like a reptile. Suddenly she was absolutely certain. 'Doctor, we have to leave here. Now.'

'I know.'

The Doctor pulled Anji gently back from the door, walked her to the console. The door closed.

'What now?' said Anji, although she knew. There could only be one answer. She only hoped Fitz knew, too, and would be able to accept it.

The Doctor's voice was steady. 'There's no choice about this at all. You can see what's happening out there. Fitz – Anji –' He shook his head slowly. 'I'm very sorry, but we all have to die.'

Chapter Nineteen

It's Not Better Than Anything

Was it King John who'd died of a surfeit of lampreys? It had always struck Fitz as ridiculous, dying of eating too much. Drinking too much – yes, he could understand that all right. Running too fast – flying too high – but dying from good food, something that was supposed to keep you alive – was just like –

Dying of too many rescue attempts. He'd given up trying to count the number of TARDISEs that had appeared since Iyeeye had made her dramatic claim of Doctricide. At first it had been funny – she'd dared to think she'd really *killed* him? The Doctor would show her! But after the seventieth or so materialisation Fitz had begun to cotton on, and the worried expressions on the faces of the various suited Fitzes, smartly dressed Anjis and angry Doctors emerging from the materialising machines showed that they were becoming aware of it too. Some of them ran back in, and the machines disappeared, but more kept coming. The sky was black with them now. They were encrusted like barnacles on the giant spaceship, piled up high like driftwood on the ground. And they were still coming: it was impossible to talk, almost impossible to think, over the roar of the constant comings and goings.

Jack – *his* Jack, Fitz was fairly sure from the dishevelled appearance – was in front of him, shouting wildly. Fitz just shook his head, because he couldn't hear a word and didn't have the faintest idea what to do anyway. Then Jack grabbed his arm, bawled in his ear, *'THIS WAY!'*

To what? But Fitz let himself be led, dodging several TARDISEs and a bewildered Anji who also started shouting at him. Jack grabbed her arm too.

‘ – both of you – has to be – ’

Fitz glanced at Anji, who seemed to be the same old Anji, the same as about a hundred others dotted around. Her lips framed a question, but Fitz couldn't make out the word. He looked at Jack but the kid just kept running. What did he think he was doing? Recreating the nuclear family? Had he been watching too many movies?

Then he saw Sabbath. Or rather, he saw another Anji, in a big man's arms, then realised the big man was Sabbath, then realised that the Anji was dead, a mass of blood where her face should be.

'Ah! We have another one! Good work, Jack!' Sabbath's foghorn voice was clearly audible over the racket. He dropped the obviously dead Anji, and Fitz saw Iyeye standing behind, still screened by the blue fire.

If it was the same Iyeye. If it was the same blue fire.

'And the Doctor. . . ?' Sabbath asked. He was looking at Fitz, who shrugged.

The TARDIS materialised behind them, and after a moment the door opened. Fitz saw himself looking out, and waved. The Doctor rushed forward, from somewhere behind him, shouting, 'You have to leave now!'

'You'll do,' said Sabbath, grabbing the new Doctor by the arm.

The Doctor stared at him, then looked round at Fitz, Anji, Jack, Iyeye, and the dead Anji.

He nodded. 'I see – but I can't –'

The TARDIS behind them had dematerialised, taking the new Fitz with it.

'I can't be the one!' bawled the Doctor. 'My friends –'

'– are right here.' Sabbath smiled.

Fitz crouched down so that he could make himself heard to Jack over the racket of TARDISEs. 'I still don't get it, Jack. What's going on?'

'He has to have all of us.' Jack nodded at Sabbath. 'Then we can find a solution. It's the only chance.'

'Why isn't the Doctor organising it?'

'Because there's millions of Doctors now but only one Sabbath. He's the unique cipher.'

'The what?'

'It's math. I'll tell you later.'

A heavy hand fell on Fitz's shoulder. He looked up, expecting to see Sabbath's face, instead saw the Doctor. 'I hate to say it,' he said, 'but I think Sabbath's right. I've made a terrible mistake. My worst ever, I think.'

From behind him, Sabbath's voice: 'Very well, Miss Iyeye. Perhaps you could lead the way.'

Behind them, a ladder spiralled down from the dark bulk of the spaceship that still blotted out the sky. Fitz noticed that the Doctor had tears in his eyes as they ran for the ladder. When they got there, Fitz stopped and gestured for Anji to go up first. She shook her head. 'I'm not going.'

'You have to.' Fitz had worked that one out by now. 'We're the ones who have to do this. Now.'

‘What about her?’ She pointed at another Anji, standing bewildered, hands on hips, watching them. ‘Or him?’ A version of Fitz, frowning, then jumping in comic terror as the Doctor – another Doctor – grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

‘They’re not going.’

‘They’re still people.’

‘And we’re the people who are going with Sabbath.’

Iyeye was at the top of the ladder by now, Jack clambering up a few rungs behind her, Sabbath halfway up, the Doctor close behind.

‘I’ve just seen myself dead!’ screamed Anji. ‘I can’t do it!’

Fitz grabbed both her arms, above the elbow, and squeezed them hard enough to make it hurt. ‘You’ve bloody well got to, Anji! One set of us has to survive –’

‘Without me, then.’ Her knee went up, towards his crotch: he jumped back instinctively, but kept his hold on her. They fell to the ground, wrestling, skidding.

Then strong arms, amazingly strong like a machine, pulled them apart.

It was the Doctor.

A Doctor: looking up the ladder, Fitz saw ‘their’ Doctor watching helplessly.

‘You have to go, said the Doctor. ‘Please. It’s more important than who lives or who dies. You must know that by now.’

Anji ducked out of his arm, but then began to climb. Fitz glanced at her, glanced at the two versions of the Doctor, who both nodded. He grabbed the steel rungs and began to climb behind her. The ladder was swaying now: glancing across, Fitz saw that the spaceship was tilting to one side, one edge weighed down by an enormous encrustation of TARDISes hanging from the base like a wasps’ nest – a blue wasps’ nest as big as an office block. As Fitz watched, mesmerised, individual machines materialised and dematerialised, blue lights flashing, but the overall mass continued to get bigger.

‘Come on, Fitz!’ Anji’s voice: she’d reached the black hollow where the ladder joined the body of the alien ship, fifty feet above. Fitz scrambled up to her, but the whole structure was shuddering now. He could see streams of blue fire rushing out of the belly of the ship, heard a roar even louder than the persistent sound of the TARDISes. For a moment Fitz thought the ship was going to explode, but then realised that thrusters were working, trying to compensate for the bizarre counterweight. He scrambled up, hand over hand, missing rungs, his feet slipping. Waves of heat from the thrusters rushed over him. The ship tipped back and forth – he saw whole blocks of TARDISes falling past him.

Ahead, Anji's face with a shadowy figure behind her, and her arm reaching down. Fitz scrambled up, reached out to grab her hand, missed his grip on the ladder –

'Fitz!'

A heavy blow to the head sent him spinning. For a moment he thought it was OK, his feet were still on the ladder, but then he was falling, the world spinning around him. He had a glimpse of one of the Pharaoh's soldiers below, saw an Anji rugby-tackle the man, then he was looking at the sky again, then the ground hit him like a pile of hammers. For a second he could see nothing, then a steel bar was in front of him, dripping with blood. With a shock, Fitz saw that the metal was surrounded by pieces of broken bone and flesh and a sticky river of blood, and that it was protruding from his chest.

He stared at it for a couple of seconds, then died.

Anji looked down at Fitz's broken body, and knew there was no hope. Still –

'I'm going down,' she said.

'You can't,' said the Doctor.

'I should never have come in the first place. I should have made you go, Doctor.' But she realised as she said it that the Doctor she was speaking to hadn't been in her TARDIS, and hadn't lived through that experience.

'We can find another Fitz,' said Sabbath, gesturing illustratively at the complex heap of TARDISes behind them. Two Anjis were standing, cross-armed, staring at each other. They looked like mirror images, or a pair of life-size waxworks.

'Well use one of them too.' And she was gone, over the edge, away from staying alive.

A powerful hand grabbed her arm, yanked her painfully back on to the cold metal deck. She found herself looking up at Sabbath's face, flat, meaty, frightening. *'You have no choice.'*

Then she was being dragged behind him, protesting, trying to find something to hold on to. She could hear the kid, Jack, piping up, *'You shouldn't do that to the lady, mister,'* but he was silenced by the Doctor: *'No, Sabbath's right. It's better this way. It's better if she doesn't want to come.'* His face appeared in front of Anji's. *'I'm sorry. One of us has to stay –'* He shrugged – *'human, I suppose.'*

Anji stopped resisting, but made no effort to walk, though Sabbath's dragging was making her shoulder hurt like hell. She watched as they made their way through a series of white-lit passageways, standard-issue spaceship stuff, pale

plastic walls and a dark rubbery flooring. The light was at floor level, shining upwards. Ahead, Iyeeeye – this new Iyeeeye who wore a metal suit and a was shielded by blue flames – strode along, clearly familiar with the place.

‘Do I need to know what’s going on? I mean, here, wherever that is?’

She’d asked the Doctor, but it was Iyeeeye who replied. ‘Sabbath betrayed me to the Others.’

‘I didn’t intend it as a betrayal,’ said Sabbath impatiently. ‘Surely you can see that now.’

‘I see people who are trying to survive – as I am trying to survive,’ said Iyeeeye. ‘The Doctor and his friends, you, this boy – all of us. The Others are just the same. Trying to survive.’

The ship lurched underneath them, almost throwing Anji off her feet. They turned a corner, saw the TARDIS – no, *a* TARDIS – in front of them. The Doctor got out, and Anji saw her own face behind him.

‘Ah,’ said the new Doctor, staring at himself. The other Anji got out of the TARDIS and stared.

‘We have the solution,’ said Sabbath, barging past them.

‘There are thousands of us,’ said Anji’s Doctor simply. ‘Perhaps millions. Bubbles in an aquarium.’

‘Oh,’ said the new Doctor. ‘I see. Come on, Anji.’

‘What?’

Anji dived forward, pushed past her other self. ‘Change places,’ she snapped at the newcomer. ‘Get out there.’

‘What...?’

She could see the Fitz who went with this Anji in front of her, his jaw hanging open. She grabbed his arm, noticed that he was wearing a business suit again.

Oh, hang on, he would be, wouldn’t he?

‘Get out there,’ she said. ‘With Anji.’

‘What?’

She met his eyes. ‘I’ve just watched you die. Please, just do it.’

Fitz’s face filled with a panicky realisation. ‘You mean I’m the –’

She physically shoved him out, saw the Doctor coming in – she wasn’t sure which one. They both raced for the console and pressed the door control together.

They looked at each other as the doors closed.

‘You know what you’ve just done.’

Anji shivered. She couldn’t help it. ‘Of course I do,’ she said. ‘You think I’m stupid?’

‘Sorry,’ said the Doctor.

Anji shrugged. ‘My choice.’

The Doctor hit the dematerialisation control. Anji didn’t ask where they were going.

As the TARDIS dematerialised, Anji stared at her companions. There was the Doctor, but he had a scratch on his cheek and blood on his jacket. So not her Doctor? Where was he? And Jack, looking dishevelled and excited. ‘Where are we?’ she asked.

‘Alien spaceship,’ said Jack. ‘No time to explain.’

She saw Iyeeeye, an unfamiliar Iyeeeye, wearing metal armour and surrounded by what looked like blue flames. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘I have told you.’

‘Not her.’ Anji jumped at the gravelly voice, noticed Sabbath for the first time – he must have been standing behind the TARDIS. ‘We’re on a ship belonging to the Others, the aliens that enslaved Iyeeeye’s people. It seemed that there might be less interruptions here than outside. Even so –’ He gestured along the passageway, and Anji saw the TARDIS – no, two TARDISes.

Oh.

She looked at Fitz, who was standing beside her, clearly as confused as she was. ‘I think we’re the ones that are meant to survive,’ he whispered.

Another Anji was emerging from one of the TARDISes, followed by the Doctor.

‘So what happens to them?’

An arm around her shoulders. It was the Doctor – her Doctor – no, not her Doctor, the Doctor with the scratched face who must have got out from another TARDIS.

‘I can’t –’ she began.

‘You have to, Anji,’ he said gently. ‘We’ve already been through this twice. We haven’t got time to do any more swapping around.’

As if to prove his point, the lights went out. There was a moment of free-fall, then the ship jolted like a plane in a thunderstorm, before settling at a slant. Dim lights came on and a petrol-like smell filled the passageway.

Another TARDIS materialised.

‘Thousands of us have just died!’ the Doctor yelled at it. ‘Bubbles in an aquarium, my friend!’

Anji could guess what was happening inside, the Doctor telling another her and another Fitz what must happen. She closed her eyes, fighting a pain in her skull that went deeper than the bone.

'This can't happen!' For a moment Anji thought it was another Anji who had called out; then she tasted the bile in her throat and knew she'd shouted the words herself.

'It is happening,' said Sabbath. 'What we have to do is stop it.'

'I'm not sure we can,' said the Doctor.

'We must be able to. If we are still alive, if we still remember our pasts and act as our spirits direct us to, then the logic of causality is still working, whatever else has failed us. All we have to do is break all the links that lead here.'

'All the thousands of them? The millions?'

Sabbath smiled. 'And how many of you are there, Doctor? Here? Thousands – possibly millions, soon. And how many more could there be if you travel in time again?'

There was a pause. Somewhere in the distance a machine was clicking, coming closer. Anji wondered what it was.

'Oh,' said Fitz after a while. 'Does Sabbath mean we have to – that there will be millions more of me and the Doctor and Anji?'

'They stay here,' the Doctor said, shaking his head. 'And you protect them.'

'Just these two? Or the whole township's worth?' A TARDIS dematerialised further along the passageway. Anji tried not to scream at the fading shape.

The Doctor swallowed. 'Just these two. And Jack. And Iyeeeye.'

Sabbath spoke. 'You know there's nothing I can do to help Jack and Iyeeeye. They belong to the versions of the world that cannot be real. Anyway, I too must travel. There are things I will do that you will not.'

The Doctor and Sabbath stared at each other.

'Furthermore, Doctor, this place will cease to exist.'

'The Others won't allow that,' said Iyeeeye. 'It is theirs.'

Both the Doctor and Sabbath ignored her.

The clicking sound was getting closer. Anji could see movement. This wasn't anything to do with her, the Doctor, or Fitz, which meant it must be the aliens, the Others. She wondered if they were any threat, and if it mattered.

'How many of you are there, Sabbath?' asked Fitz.

Anji realised they'd been thinking along the same lines.

Sabbath ignored him, but the Doctor said, 'One. And he is crucial for that reason.'

‘Then I suggest we move,’ said Anji. ‘Now. We don’t want Sabbath getting killed –’

‘Don’t worry,’ growled Sabbath. ‘They will find it difficult to kill me.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Because you can travel in time at will. But you can only do that, my friend, because time is falling apart and the normal rules of the vortex don’t apply. So if you leave here now, on your own, you’ll lose control completely. And there will be no hope at all.’

‘I will tell them not to kill you, then,’ said Iyeye. She seemed amused. Anji remembered the young, bemused, sensible girl who had helped her find the TARDIS again in Jumpsville.

A gentle, metallic sound from behind them made them all look round. Anji stared at the small, green-and-red-coloured being that stared at her from silver geodesic eyes. These were ravening killers of humans? It didn’t look like it.

‘Sio’phut!’ said Jack.

‘Not quite; my name is Mran’ofet. Jack, it is good to see you again.’

‘Again? I don’t remember a Martian called Mran’ofet.’

‘What’s going on?’ asked Fitz.

‘The Others are Martians –’ began Jack, but Mran’ofet interrupted.

‘In some ways, we are. But we are of Earth descent. Jack, even in this terrible circumstance, with our world ending as we knew it must, it is good to be able to tell you the Great Story one more time.’

‘Tell me?’

Anji noticed that Sabbath was smiling, as if this was a good story and he’d heard it before. ‘Have we got time for this?’ she said. No one took any notice of her.

‘Mars is not a habitable world by nature,’ the Martian was saying. ‘You made it so, Jack. Impressed by the dignity of your father’s servant Sio’phut, many, many millions of versions of you travelled to the ancient past of Mars, to warn us of the coming of the Earth men. Some went so far back that there was no life, and died at once; but the millions of human bodies, with their water and nutrients, gently changed the balance of our world, giving Mars a thin atmosphere and liberating some of the native water, so that there could be life. And life bloomed: your life. Jack, we are descendants of the bacteria in your gut, who were tougher than you.’

‘Then, when we had evolved to a civilisation, still you came, hundreds of Jacks all with the same story, the same warning. So we prepared ourselves, used our limited resources carefully, over thousands of years, to build up a fleet of spaceships. We sent them to Earth to harvest and cull the early humans, so

that they would never develop to a level that could threaten us. We could have wiped them out, of course, but we felt that would be wrong. Every so often we would take one, like Iyeye, who was better, and make her one of our own. In that way human civilisation was not entirely lost, but was added to ours. It was a good plan, and has led to much happiness.'

'But –' began the Doctor.

'Yes, we know,' said Mran'ofet. 'It was always impossible. We knew that our entire civilisation was based on a pyramid of impossibilities; we knew that the energy for that impossibility must have been stolen from somewhere. But we could not do anything about it. We are not surprised that you wish to, and we will not stand in your way.'

The Doctor bowed his head. Anji glanced at him, then bowed hers too.

'What about me?' asked Jack.

'A question that humans always seem to ask,' said Mran'ofet. He turned to the Doctor. 'You should hurry. One of your TARDISEs has interfered with the engines of this ship. The air is becoming poisoned.'

'He means radioactive, I think,' said the Doctor swiftly.

No. Not the Doctor. Another Doctor, standing outside the door of a TARDIS. There were another two materialising further down the passageway, in slightly different places to the ones that had recently vanished.

'Quickly – inside. All of you.' The new Doctor hustled the other Doctor towards the door. Sabbath went after him, almost dragging Anji and Fitz. They looked at each other, shrugged.

'What happened to your Anji and Fitz?' Anji heard her Doctor ask.

'I arrived without them.' A flat, empty voice. 'Not all of us managed to pull it off, I suppose. You take over. I'll keep an eye on the Martians in case they change their minds.'

The TARDIS doors closed, with Jack and Iyeye just inside. The blue flames around Iyeye's armour faded. She frowned, touched a control, shrugged. Jack was staring across the console room: Anji followed his gaze and quickly realised why. There was another Jack sitting in one of the chairs, watching them all with interest.

'What are you going to do with them?' said Sabbath, waving at the strangers.

'Never mind the causality problems,' said the Doctor. 'They'll be safe enough in here.'

'Oh, I can believe that, Doctor.' Sabbath was looking around the console room, his arms folded, in an almost proprietorial way. It made Anji shudder.

'What about the Fitz you brought here?' she asked Sabbath.

‘He died,’ said the Doctor quietly. ‘An accident.’

‘Then why did you insist on bringing him? Why did you make me pretend not to know him so that you could –’

‘Why does anything happen, Anji?’ said Sabbath. ‘Not every action has meaning, not every death. You know that well enough. The important thing was to maintain some form of causality, some certainty. The content was irrelevant.’

Anji felt her body begin to shake. ‘But you said that there wasn’t any choice! You said –’

‘I said it was your choice.’

‘You didn’t say he was going to die!’

‘I’m sorry, but I’m very much afraid that I did tell you that.’

Anji closed her eyes, took a deep breath. It was horrible, but she knew he was right.

‘Excuse me, mister.’ It was the Jack sitting in the armchair. ‘I think we’d better get out of here.’ He was pointing at the screens, which were a glaring white. The TARDIS shuddered.

The Doctor ran to the console, punched a sequence of switches. The TARDIS lurched slightly and the screens went dark.

‘What happened?’ asked Jack.

‘Either the Others’ ship exploded,’ said Sabbath. ‘Or possibly the TARDISes around it reached the critical mass and became a new sun.’

Anji wasn’t sure if he was joking. She decided there wasn’t time to think about it. Nor about the thousands or millions of other Fitzes and other Anjis who would not survive, for whatever reason.

‘To return to my question,’ said Sabbath, refolding his arms, ‘what about the two young men and Iyeeey? You know what we have to do. What will they think about it?’

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor, in a tone that told Anji it was far from over yet. ‘I do know what we have to do.’

Chapter Two

Happy Days are Here [Yet Again]

Jack felt the fourth switch under his hand. It was the red one. The final amplification stage. So far he'd travelled back in time about two and a half seconds – long enough for him to know it was working, but not long enough to be very interesting. The final circuit provided the real power, boosted the interval to fifty years. *Fifty years*. Thirty-six years before he was born. Perhaps he would be able to find a way of warning the Martians about the invasion. He owed Sio'phut one, just for keeping quiet. He looked at the new, final-stage valve, the bright solder on the mounting gleaming, barely cold.

Jack took a deep breath. He knew it was risky. If anything failed, there was no way back. His finger pushed down the switch, and with a slight popping sound the world rippled into darkness.

Into light.

Darkness – light – dark – light – darklightdarklight –

Grey. He thought he could see flecks of black moving inside it, like soot in smoke. He peered at them, leaning forward against the straps in an effort to see better. Some of them seemed to have shapes, like crystals – he wished he'd thought to bring his dad's field glasses. He hadn't thought there'd be anything to see whilst he was actually travelling.

Then the light changed, and there was a slight jolt as if the chair had dropped to a slightly lower floor. A hissing sound behind Jack made him look over his shoulder. He saw a man standing over a bicycle, pump in his hand. The man was staring at Jack. 'What the hell...?' He had on a striped suit and hat. He looked about right for 1950. The garage was the same building, but different: newer, cleaner, less cluttered.

It had *worked*!

'What year is this, mister?' asked Jack.

'Who *are* you, kid?'

'I'm a time traveller. I just invented the time machine.'

‘Oh *shit*.’ The swear word made Jack jump. The man turned and ran, out of the garage door which was open on to a sunlit drive – concrete, not blacktop. Jack could see a tall tree that wasn’t there in his day.

‘Hilda! Hilda! He’s here! They got the wrong day!’

Jack frowned. They were *expecting* him? But if they were in the past they couldn’t possibly know!

A woman was shouting something outside, and the man dodged back and slammed the garage door, leaving Jack in dankness. He pulled his pocket flashlight out, glad he’d remembered to bring that at least. The garage was empty, apart from the bicycle, the pump which the man had dropped on the floor, and what looked like a couple of bags of cement. He pushed at the door, but it wouldn’t open. He banged on it, but there was no response. Next to the door he found a light and switched it on, but nothing happened: examining the roof, he saw that there was no bulb in the socket.

Enough, he decided. He’d seen more than enough to know that it worked. Now he needed to get back, to make sure Jimmy was safe, to ask Sio’phut’s advice once more. He needed to tell someone else about this. He sat back in his armchair, strapped himself in, flicked the polarity switch over so that he would travel forward in time instead of back.

There was a howling of sirens outside, the screech of tyres as cars pulled up. Jack hesitated with his hand over the first of the power switches. Boots clattered on the drive outside, and the door was flung open, leaving Jack blinking in the sunlight. He could see the policemen, their uniforms framed with gold light.

‘Jack Kowaczski?’

‘That’s me.’ Jack wondered if he should stand up.

‘Under the Statute of Time Travel Prevention ratified unanimously by Congress in 1943, it is my duty to inform you that you are in breach of Section Four and therefore notwithstanding your rights under the Constitution as a possible American citizen –’ The cop was speaking real fast, as if he’d said it a thousand times before, but Jack spotted the weird bit just the same.

‘What do you mean, *possible* American? I am American. My mum and dad were both Americans –’

‘– like I said, your rights under the Constitution as a possible American citizen. Nevertheless it is my duty to now enforce the penalty therein described, that is the death penalty. You understand?’

‘Death penalty?’

There was a click, and Jack saw the guns, long-barrelled machine guns ready in the hands of the cops on either side of the one who had spoken. He saw them just before he was flung back into his father's old armchair by a series of jackhammer blows. He heard the crash of gunfire, tried to reach for the switches, but his arms wouldn't move and there was blood pouring from his chest.

This can't happen to me, he thought, I'm an American.
And died.

Chapter Twenty

There is No Alternative

Aaron Kowaczski stood over his son's workbench and tried to figure it out.

Three days. Three days since Jack had disappeared. And all that time that bastard Sio'phut had said nothing, just grinned away to himself and polished the furniture.

'I made a promise that I would not tell you.' Aaron would give him a promise. A promise of a broken neck if Jack wasn't found. Bastard dumb Martian.

He scrambled amongst the neat rows of tools and diagrams, struggling to find a clue. He knew that he should be methodical, that he shouldn't disturb the order imposed on the work by his meticulous son: but at the same time he knew that he couldn't wait long enough to find –

Ah.

He read, 'TIME MACHINE – CIRCUIT DIAGRAM'. Big bold letters. Aaron smiled. Trust Jack to be smart enough to work out that it was safe to call it a time machine, because nobody would take such a label seriously.

Aaron examined the circuit. It looked like a straightforward amplifier, though the specifications for the valves were something he'd never heard of outside the field of robotics. QX No.4? He'd have to check the catalogue.

No. Better idea. Why go to the catalogue when you went to college with the guy who runs the sales department? Aaron picked up the diagram and went to the phone in the hall.

It rang a few times, and a man's voice answered.

'Bill? It's Aaron Kowaczski. Have you got a minute?'

A slight pause. 'Oh, God, Aaron. I read about Jack in the paper. I've been meaning to call you.'

'That's OK. Look, I'll be straight with you – I think I need your help. It's something Jack was building in that workshop of his, you know, the old garage? It's weird, but – have you got an hour tonight?'

'You home from work?'

'Yeah, I couldn't just leave Mary to cope with this.'

'Look, Aaron, if I can help I'll be right over. I can take some time off here.'

Aaron felt an almost physical relief in his chest. The police would never believe it, but there was just a chance that Bill Player would.

'A time machine? Are you crazy?'

'That's what the Martian says.'

'Hell, they're all mad as hatters.'

'Not Sio'phut. Anyway, take a look at the circuit and tell me what you think.'

Bill looked. As he looked, his frown deepened, then vanished, replaced by slack-jawed astonishment. He picked up a burned-out valve from the work top, gazed at it speculatively. 'We can get four of these,' he said. 'We could rig something up this afternoon. I'm not saying it'll work, but there's a chance of it. At least we'll know.'

Aaron felt a crazy excitement, and for a moment he knew how his son must have felt. It gave him an obscure pride.

'We'll need to test it, Aaron. I mean test it by remote control, so we can see what it really does without endangering anyone.'

Aaron nodded mutely. 'Of course we do,' he murmured. 'You don't think Jack's been hurt?'

Bill looked at his friend. 'I don't know,' he said quietly.

Aaron looked down at his shoes. He decided not to tell Mary about it. Not just yet.

An hour later, the two men were standing in the echoing warehouse space of Hanson-Player Electrical. The rig in front of them was crude. A couple of relays had removed the need for anyone to sit in the machine. Once the circuit was powered up, it stayed powered up, even if it lost its connections to the outside world, until the battery ran down.

Bill glanced at him. 'Ready?'

Aaron nodded, and Bill pressed home the switches.

One – two – three –

Something odd *was* happening. The machine had blurred, as if he were looking at it through out-of-focus field glasses. But the rest of the room was just as usual. Some of the men further down, working on other circuits, were staring at the thing.

Bill's hand was on the fourth switch when there was a loud metallic crash from above them, and the sound of shattering glass.

'What the –'

‘Put your hands up!’

Bill stared at Aaron. ‘What have we –’

‘This is Sergeant Jim Lamar of the Time Police. Under the Statute of Time Travel Prevention ratified unanimously by Congress in 1943, it is my duty to inform you that you are in breach of Section Four and therefore notwithstanding your rights under the Constitution –’

Bill was still gaping like a stranded fish, but Aaron had got it. This was what had happened to his son.

Well it wasn’t going to happen to him. And he was going to find his son, wherever these ‘Time Police’ had put him, and get him out.

He made a dive for the workbench where the time circuit was, landed awkwardly on the bare wood next to the machine. A curious vibration filled his body. ‘Bill!’ he shouted. ‘Close the switch!’

He twisted his head, saw Bill pitched forward, clutching his stomach. At the same time he felt the punch of an impact on his own body, saw blood spurting from his chest.

‘No!’ he shouted, but the blood choked his throat. The time machine exploded into fragments as the bullets reached it.

‘Jack –’ he said weakly, and died.

Chapter Twenty

No Alternative

'A time machine? Are you crazy?'

'That's what the Martian says.'

'Hell, Aaron, you can trust the greenies about as far as you can pitch them at baseball.'

'Not Sio'phut. Anyway, take a look at the circuit and tell me what you think.'

Tony looked. As he looked, his frown deepened, then vanished, replaced by slack-jawed astonishment. He picked up a burned-out valve from the work top, gazed at it speculatively. 'We can get four of these, easy,' he said. 'We could rig something up this afternoon. I'm not saying it'll work, but there's a chance of it.'

Aaron felt a crazy excitement, and for a moment he knew how his son must have felt. It gave him an obscure pride.

'We'll need to test it, Aaron. I mean test it with a Martian or something, so we can see what it really does without endangering anyone.'

Aaron nodded mutely. 'Of course we do,' he murmured. 'You don't think Jack's been hurt?'

Tony looked at his friend. 'I don't know yet,' he said quietly.

Aaron looked down at his shoes. He decided not to tell Sue about it. Not just yet.

An hour later, the two men were standing in the echoing warehouse space of Hanson Brothers Electrical. The rig in front of them was crude, and there was no Martian nor anyone else strapped to it. A couple of relays had removed the need for that. Once the circuit was powered up, it stayed powered up, even if it lost its connections to the outside world, until the battery ran down.

Tony glanced at him. 'Ready?'

Aaron nodded, and Tony pressed home the switches.

One – two – three –

Something odd *was* happening. The machine had blurred, as if he were looking at it through out-of-focus field glasses. But the rest of the room was just as usual. Some of the men further down, working on other circuits, were staring at the thing.

Tony's hand was on the fourth switch when there was a loud metallic crash from above them, and the sound of shattering glass.

'What the –'

'Put your hands up!'

Tony stared at Aaron. 'What have we –'

'This is Sergeant Jenny Flynn of the Time Police. Under the Statute of Time Travel Prevention ratified unanimously by Congress in 1943, it is my duty to inform you that you are in breach –'

Tony said, 'Jesus! This must be what happened to Jack!'

Aaron stared at him for a second, then nodded.

'– notwithstanding your rights under the Constitution –'

This *was* what had happened to his son.

Well it wasn't going to happen to him. And he was going to find his son, wherever these 'Time Police' had put him, and get him out. He made a dive for the workbench where the time circuit was, landed awkwardly on the bare wood next to the machine. A curious vibration filled his body. 'Tony!' he shouted. 'Close the switch!'

The room faded, dark light dark light darklightdarklight –

Grey.

He scrabbled across the bench to the circuit. From the way the light had changed, it had obviously gone back several weeks already – more than enough to find Jack and stop him before it ever started, which ought to be easier than rescuing him. Then Tony wouldn't be in danger either and they could burn the circuit diagrams and forget the whole damn thing.

Even as he thought about it, Aaron found the four relays that Tony had closed and, one by one, broke them. There was a sliding, lurching sensation: Aaron realised the bench was falling.

Hell, he'd gone back further than he thought. This must be before the warehouse was built. And they'd been on the second floor. . .

The impact threw Aaron off the bench into a bunch of ferns. Wet, prickly, but enough to break his fall and leave him no more than winded. He picked himself up, scrambled up towards the light.

Then he saw a man standing in front of him.

A huge man, with a butcher's face and a gun in his hand.

‘Wait – I can explain.’

The gunshot pushed him back into the ferns. He struggled to get up, to turn, but his body wouldn’t obey him. All he could do was watch the blood running out of his chest, like water from a drainpipe.

‘There was no need for that,’ said a voice.

‘What did you think the Time Police were going to do to this man? Invite him to a theatrical entertainment?’

‘He was on his own. We could have –’

‘Saved him? How many more refugees can you fit into the TARDIS? How many more little pieces of discontinuous causality can reality survive, Doctor? I told you that this entire adventure was your own fault. If you travel in time, without your so-called Laws to protect the world, then clearing up afterwards is a necessity, not a luxury.’

‘I think –’ But the Doctor was not allowed to speak.

‘Furthermore we are not going to be able to clear it up like this – there are too many of them. We need to go back to the source. We need to stop Jack before he even thinks that there might be such things as time machines. Before he even thinks at all. And we need to kill him ourselves.’

Aaron knew then how terrible was the price of his son’s innocent desire to be a great inventor. He felt tears welling up, and tried to say his son’s name, but his throat only filled with blood.

He heard one more word before the roaring in his ears drowned everything, and that word gave Aaron Kowaczski’s dying heart a tiny bit of hope.

Chapter Twenty-one

No

Nu'hira heard the sound when she was walking to the river with her clothes to wash. A whimpering, a rustle of movement. At first she thought it was an animal, hiding in the clump of bulrushes by the side of the path. She hesitated, wondering if it was safe to pass. There were no more lions here, not since the tourists and their machines came, but even an antelope could be dangerous if it was hurt.

Then she heard the unmistakable cry of a human baby.

Nu'hira put down the clothes, not caring if they were muddied on the path, and ran to the bulrushes. She pulled back the long stems, saw a space in the middle. A baby, a boy-baby with huge blue eyes, stared up at her from the folds of a white blanket.

She leaned down, saw the papyrus scroll next to the child, unravelled it. She couldn't read the writing, but the two gold coins that fell out said enough. They said: here is more money than you ever dreamed of, if you will please look after this child.

As if I wouldn't have looked after it anyway, thought Nu'hira, or at least found someone who would.

Still – two pieces of gold would more than buy her one of those tourist machines that washed clothes and got them truly clean. Perhaps (she began thinking quickly) she would be able to rent the upstairs rooms, if she negotiated with the old landlord carefully and didn't let him see the coins.

As to what people would think – well, let them think. A child was a child. And a child without a man was easier, if there was money. Nu'hira had wondered, sometimes, if she would ever get a man, in this new world, where the future women had everything. Now –

It might not matter. Though she'd better get someone to read the scroll, just in case.

Nu'hira smiled at the child and lifted it up in her arms. 'I wonder if you've got a name?' she murmured. She lifted him up to see the morning sun. 'I will

give you a name, my name for you, whatever it says in that scroll,' she said. 'I will name you after the God of the Sun, who has blessed me this morning.' She held the child against her body. 'Yes. If I am to keep you, your name will be Akhenaton.'

Epilogue

Goin' Back

Iyeeye watched as the others crowded around the TARDIS console.

'That seems to have done it,' said the Doctor. 'And no more killing.'

'Are you sure about that?' It was Anji. Always the doubter, Iyeeye noted. 'Where's Sabbath?'

'I don't know. I lost him somewhere in a fallen-off loop of the twentieth century. But he'll have done his part.'

'And more.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor sadly. 'Probably more. But I needed his help; I had no choice but to agree to some of his terms. Anyway, I could hardly keep him a prisoner in the TARDIS.'

'Why not?' Anji again. The question didn't seem to have an answer, or anyway, no one answered it.

'What about this bit?' One of the Jacks was pointing at the screen.

The other Jack looked too. 'I reckon that's the bit we came from. You want to go back?' He looked up at the Doctor. 'Is that still possible?'

'Not really,' said the Doctor. 'It's still there but it isn't linked to the "real" universe any more. We could go there but – well, I can't say what would happen to you if you got out of the TARDIS.'

'Where did the energy come from to make all the cut-off pieces?'

'Where do you think? You've just lost three billion years of history, Jack. Never mind, the heat death of the universe is going to happen some time anyway.'

'We all die in the end.' That was Fitz's contribution. Typically morbid and cynical, Iyeeye noted.

I don't want to stay with these people, she thought. They all looked so self-satisfied. As if they'd just built a hut, and decorated it with fruit and flowers, and cooked a lovely meal, instead of destroying everything she had ever known.

Iyeeye turned and walked away, down the passageway between the anonymous walls that led to 'her' room. *After three years with the Others I should be*

used to this. But that had been different. There had been a plan. There had been art, there had been history, there had been an enormous sense of purpose amongst the ancient race.

Now all that was gone too.

'I want to go home,' she murmured, then she bawled it aloud, letting the tears stream from her eyes, *'I want to go home.'*

'I might be able to help you there,' said a half-familiar voice.

Iyeeeye felt the stranger's hand on her shoulder, and sprang awake at once. Tee-Ex put a finger to her lips, led Iyeeeye to the console room.

'All gone to bed,' she whispered.

Iyeeeye still didn't like her. The evasiveness hadn't changed. She still felt slightly threatened by this woman, who wore tall shoes and whose eyes danced with irony and mischief. But she wasn't about to run away this time. Not if there was the slightest chance of getting home.

She had dreamed about it, on the Others' world and on their ship. They had not let her rest: there had been much to learn, much to read, much to discover about the human culture that they allowed to flower, one individual at a time, in safe isolation. The Doctor had already promised her something more than that, a world to go to, some friends of his she could meet.

She'd nodded and smiled, but she hadn't wanted his world. She'd wanted her own. And Tee-Ex had promised her a way to get there. She watched the other woman carefully as she flicked switches on the console. It wouldn't pay to trust her too much. She probably had her own motives for doing this, though as usual she'd been evasive when asked.

The TARDIS emerged from flight, and Iyeeeye watched the screens as the pictures formed of the world outside. It looked like home, but...

'Let me smell it,' she said.

Tee-Ex smiled her insincere smile and pushed a switch.

The door opened, and Iyeeeye could smell home. The dry grass, the soil, the night air, the smell of people and food. She stood in the doorway, savouring it.

'Are you going?' asked Tee-Ex, sounding anxious. 'The Doctor doesn't sleep, you know. He might come along any minute. I don't particularly want to be here when he does.'

Iyeeeye nodded and stepped outside. She had swapped her silver armour for more modern human clothes from Tee-Ex's wardrobe: they didn't feel right, but Iyeeeye knew they would scare her family a lot less than Other-ish armour.

She had kept the skin-fitting silver shoes, though. Her feet were no longer used to crossing open country.

She glanced over her shoulder once more, saw Tee-Ex watching and –
– *the Doctor* –

The Doctor, watching Iyeeeye, frowning slightly. He was behind Tee-Ex. Did she know he was there? She'd said –

No matter. Whatever she'd said, whatever time-traveller games these two were playing, Iyeeeye had seen enough. She was going home. She turned her face to the wind and loped towards the village.

After a few minutes she could hear it, the gentle wooden *cluck* of spoons stirring supper, see it, smoke rising from the fires, smell the food cooking. She topped the low rise –

– and the village was there, and her people were alive. Her heart felt as if it had taken flight, her legs were running of their own accord. She saw one of the hunters stand – was it Hartak? Yes! He looked older – she hadn't asked Tee-Ex how many years had passed, hadn't dared, but the woman had known that three years of her own life had gone by, and it looked about the same here. She could see young hunters who must have been boys when she left but –

– *no one was dead no one was dead no one no one no one was dead* –
'Hartak!' she called. 'It's me! Iyeeeye!'

Hartak stared at her. Some of the others were staring too. And there was a young woman –

Iyeeeye stopped. Stopped dead on the edge of the bare earth, her feet in her Other-ish boots quite still. Because the young woman looking at her should have been in a mirror. A young hunter was with the woman, a hand on her shoulder. They were both staring at Iyeeeye in confusion.

'I – I am –' she began. Then realised she wasn't anyone any more. 'I am sorry,' she said. 'I am a stranger to this village, and I should not be here without the hunters' permission. I will leave now.'

'No!' called the young hunter.

'No! Stay!' called the woman who was herself, who had not run away, who had not seen her village die, lived with future people, travelled between worlds with the Others.

'I can't stay,' said Iyeeeye, through tears. She turned and ran away, back towards the TARDIS and the world she had now become a part of. She hoped the Doctor was still waiting.

He wasn't, of course. The TARDIS was gone, no more than an imprint in the

long grass. She could hear sounds of pursuit from the village, too, so she began to lope across the country, noting that it was late in the day. If she ran fast, she should reach the Stones by dark.

They were her last chance. If they were there.

She knew the Stones were gone, even as the dusk gathered around the beginning of the uplands where they lay. Even the land was different from how she remembered it: open woodland, tall white trees, their bark glossy with sunset. An antelope skittered away in front of her, and she could see a pool of water, and above it a sloping rock. Yes. That was where the Stones should have been. The rock had been there before, but not the pool or the trees.

Iyeeeye looked behind the rock, walked a little further into the forest, then returned to the pool and drank. She had to admit there was nothing here: no Stones, and no sense of the Time Magic, either. The Doctor's plan had worked, then. She looked over her shoulder, but the hunters must have given up tracking her. They would come in the morning: she decided she'd meet them half way, negotiate a place in the village. There must be a way she could make her life useful again. There would have to be. She felt sad, but told herself not to be ungrateful. She had seen much. She had seen thousands – millions – of Anji and the Doctor and Fitz sacrifice themselves in a greater cause, and she had been spared.

Any life was good.

A sound from behind the great rock made her jump. A big animal moving. No – a man. She could hear him muttering something. One of the hunters? Surely he wouldn't be so careless, unless –

'Are you hurt?' she called.

'No.' A young man walked out from behind the rock. Just answering the call of nature.' He frowned at her. 'I think I know you. You don't belong here either, do you?'

She took in his linen clothes, the pale, slightly sunburned face. Definitely not a hunter. 'No. I don't,' she said. 'I did once, but –'

'No need to explain!' He stepped forward. 'My name's Ak, by the way.'

'Iyeeeye.'

He bowed to her, then winked. 'I suppose you want to get out of here?'

She shrugged. 'I had hoped –' She looked back at the village, then back at Ak, a wild hope in her eyes.

He grinned, and nodded.

Iyeeye began laughing wildly. So much for the Doctor's plan. It was never going to end – it couldn't. 'Yes,' she stuttered. 'Yes, please, just get me out of here.'

'You know,' he said, 'You're in luck. Because I just happen to have a time machine behind this rock.'

He turned away, began walking. Iyeeye followed.

Over his shoulder, Ak said, 'Just don't ask where I got it from.'