

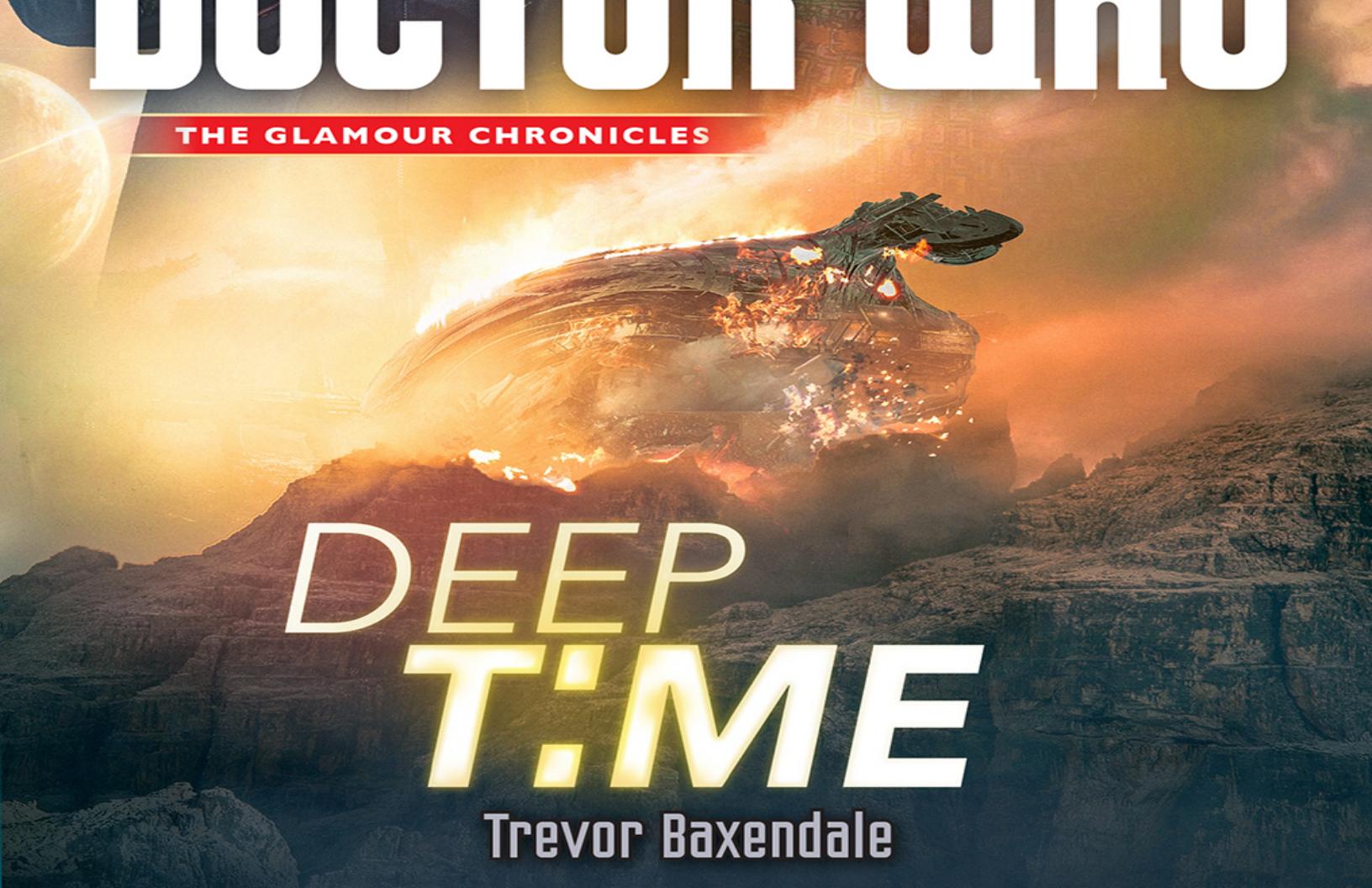


BBC

WHAT LIES BEYOND
DARKNESS..?

DOCTOR WHO

THE GLAMOUR CHRONICLES



DEEP
TIME

Trevor Baxendale

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About the Book

'I do hope you're all ready to be terrified!'

The Phaeron travelled among the stars using roads made from time and space, but left only relics behind when they disappeared over a million years ago. But what actually happened to the Phaeron?

In the far future, humans discover the last Phaeron road – and the Doctor and Clara join the mission to see where it leads. Each member of the team knows exactly what they're looking for – but only the Doctor knows exactly what they'll find.

Because only the Doctor knows the true secret of the Phaeron: a secret so terrible and powerful that it must be buried in the deepest grave imaginable ...

THE GLAMOUR CHRONICLES

This trilogy of adventures across time and space follows the Doctor's search for The Glamour, the most desirable – and dangerous – artefact in the universe.

About the Author

Trevor Baxendale has written both *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood* novels for BBC Books, including *Eater of Wasps*, *The Undertaker's Gift* and the award-winning *Prisoner of the Daleks*. His novel *Fear of the Dark* was reprinted in 2013 as part of *Doctor Who*'s 50th Anniversary celebrations. He has also written scripts for Big Finish's *Doctor Who*, *Robin Hood* and *Highlander* audio plays, and most recently the full cast audio drama *Blake's 7: Scimitar*. His *Blake's 7* novel, *Criminal Intent*, was published in November 2014. He has also written various adaptations for schools in Pearson's *Bugclub* range. *Deep Time* is his 10th novel. Follow him on Twitter [@trevorbaxendale](https://twitter.com/trevorbaxendale)

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

Deep Time

Trevor Baxendale

BBC
BOOKS

*For Martine, Luke and Konnie
- with love and thanks for all the time*

Prologue

The ship gleamed in the starlight, a gold and amber dream of a ship, with tailfins splayed like the wings of a dove preparing for flight. It was waiting patiently, sitting on three short, inclined landing supports, boarding ramp down, ion thrusters glowing.

Raymond Balfour crossed the wide concourse leading to the space dock and decided it was the most beautiful ship he'd ever seen. He had owned many before this one - some had been gifts, others he had bought, and they were all special - but this one was unique.

For one thing, it had been made to order. It was expensive; all spacecraft were expensive, but more so when they were custom built in the private shipyards of Far Station. Secondly, it had been built for a particular purpose; this was no pleasure cruiser, although anyone could be forgiven if at first glance they believed it was a rich man's luxury yacht or spar. Thirdly, the purpose was a mission; a journey of exploration that promised the discovery and crossing of new frontiers.

Balfour paused when he reached the edge of the space dock platform. The ship rose above him, glittering and eager for flight. Etched in silver letters across the golden bows was the name: *Alexandria*. Balfour had chosen the name himself; it meant smart, daring and fearful of nothing.

It was perfect.

Beyond the *Alexandria* was a brilliant star field streaked with the scarlet blaze of an ancient supernova. And beyond that, the edge of the galaxy. Beyond that ... the unknown.

Balfour trembled with excitement.

'Excuse me, sir,' said a large, angular service robot politely. It towered over Balfour, even when bowing respectfully.

'What is it, Trugg?'

'The research team are all assembled, sir. The ship is ready for departure.'

Balfour nodded. 'I know, Trugg. I know. I just want to savour the moment.'

Trugg straightened patiently. 'Very good, sir.'

Balfour stood and drank in the sight before him, allowing his eyes to roam the long, amber lines and smooth golden hull. 'Tell me, Trugg. When you look at the *Alexandria* - what do you see?'

'A spacecraft, sir.'

'Do you know what I see?'

'A spacecraft, sir?'

'I see adventure!'

'Very good sir,' Trugg replied. 'May I suggest that we join the boarding party? Professor Vent is very keen to leave.'

'You're late,' said Professor Tabitha Vent. 'We were due to leave an hour ago.'

Raymond Balfour strolled up the *Alexandria*'s boarding ramp wearing his billionaire's smile. 'Relax, Professor! Or may I call you Tabitha?'

'Nearly everyone calls me Tibby, as a matter of fact,' she replied. 'Seems like less of a mouthful.' She was as tall as Balfour, and around the same age, perhaps a little older. It was hard to tell, because Balfour was rich enough to afford all the latest rejuvenation techniques. Tibby guessed he probably had shares in Spectrox, but then she wasn't feeling in a very generous mood. She was suddenly conscious of wearing week-old space fatigues with her hair tied up in a rough ponytail. She had come straight from a

dig on Ursa Minor. Balfour looked like he'd come straight from the salon.

Balfour waved cheerfully at the small group of researchers and scientists standing behind Tibby. 'Hello there. Everyone ready?'

Everyone said they were.

'You were supposed to be here an hour ago,' said Tibby. Although she was nominally at the head of the research team, she hardly knew some of the people standing behind her. Nevertheless she felt compelled to speak for them all. 'My team have been kept waiting. The crew have been kept waiting. *I've been kept waiting!*'

Balfour smiled the smile of a man for whom timekeeping and schedules had never meant much, if anything.

His large servitor robot clambered up the spaceship boarding ramp and stooped to pass through the airlock. The robot was carrying a lot of expensive luggage.

'Take that straight through to my cabin, Trugg,' said Balfour.

'Very good, sir,' answered the robot, lumbering slowly forward. 'Excuse me, madam.'

Tibby was forced to move out of the robot's way. 'Is there really any need for all that luggage?' she sighed. 'We're supposed to be travelling light. This is a scientific expedition, not a holiday.'

'I'm well aware of that, Professor. I am paying for the expedition, after all.'

Balfour was smiling, but Tibby got the point. 'Yes, well, of course we all owe a great deal to you, Mr Balfour. It's just that we've been waiting such a long time to mount an expedition like this and we're impatient to begin.'

'There's really no need to worry,' Balfour said. 'I spoke to the spaceport master. He agreed to give us a little longer in dock before we have to leave.'

'My research team are all here. You are here. The crew is on board and the ship is ready to leave. Must we delay any

longer?’

Balfour glanced back down the *Alexandria*'s boarding ramp as if he was expecting someone else to walk in at any moment. ‘Just a minute or two more, if you please. I’m waiting for the last members of our team to arrive.’

‘The team is here!’ Tibby said, exasperated. ‘There *is* no one else!’

At that moment two people came hurrying up the boarding ramp and burst onto the deck.

‘Sorry we’re late!’ said a very pretty young woman as she came to a halt. She was a little out of breath, as if she had been running.

‘Who the devil are you?’

‘I’m Clara,’ the woman said. ‘And this is the Doctor.’

A very tall, rather gaunt man with an unruly shock of grey hair stepped forward. ‘Right,’ he said, his piercingly cold eyes sweeping around the cabin. ‘Now I’m here we can begin. I do hope you’re all ready to be terrified!’

Chapter

1

Half an hour earlier Clara Oswald had been finished for the day. She had a banging headache after a double lesson with the most recalcitrant Year 10 group she had ever taught but she still welcomed the extra-loud jangle of the final school bell.

The prospect of an evening spent marking GCSE comprehension exercises was a relief in itself. At least her flat was quiet. No interruptions, no banter, no yelling, no school bell ... Just a mug of tea, a pile of books, and then maybe a glass of Prosecco at the end of it.

But then a familiar wheezing and groaning noise heralded the arrival of an old blue police box out of thin air and she knew any plans she had could, as her gran might say, 'Go to pot!'

The Doctor stuck his head out of the TARDIS. 'Psst! Fancy a quick trip to another galaxy?'

It was the kind of invitation that Clara never wanted to turn down. Not any more. The Doctor's time machine could have her back at her flat before she'd even left Coal Hill School and there would be time enough for marking.

Now Clara was in the far future, standing on the deck of a spaceship as it blasted off from a docking station a hundred thousand light years from Earth. Sometimes it was hard to get your bearings.

'Where are we again?' she asked. 'Exactly?'

‘The deep-space private research vessel *Alexandria*. All mod cons. We’re on a mission to find a lost wormhole in space.’

‘We are?’

The Doctor glanced crossly at her. ‘I thought I told you all this in the TARDIS. Weren’t you listening?’

Clara opened her mouth to reply but it was too late. The Doctor was already talking again. ‘Small crew, team of research scientists, I’ve managed to wangle an invite. Let me do all the talking.’

‘As if I had a choice.’

‘Just smile and try to look intelligent.’

Clara pursed her lips. ‘Try?’

‘Just do your best.’

The giant servitor robot that had carried Raymond Balfour’s luggage on board clanked back through the doorway leading to the rest of the ship. It had to stoop again, servomotors whirring quietly and efficiently.

‘Excuse me, sir,’ the robot said, addressing Balfour. ‘But there appears to be something untoward in the main cargo hold.’

Balfour frowned. ‘What kind of something?’

‘A police box, sir,’ Trugg said. ‘At least, that’s what it says on the sign.’

‘That’ll be mine,’ said the Doctor, stepping forward. ‘Very important scientific equipment, vital to my work. Just leave it alone and it’ll be fine.’

‘How did you get it on board?’ asked Balfour.

‘Never mind about police boxes,’ interrupted Tibby Vent. She pointed to the Doctor. ‘Who is this man, exactly?’

‘This is the Doctor,’ explained Balfour. ‘He’s an expert on space-time travel.’

‘Among other things,’ added the Doctor.

‘I’ve just signed him on to your team,’ Balfour added.

‘I don’t need anyone else on my team,’ Tibby said.

‘Certainly not an “expert” in space-time travel!’

‘Are you sure?’ asked the Doctor. Tibby Vent stiffened visibly, clearly unused to being challenged. ‘Come on now, Professor. You may have stumbled on the location of the oldest wormhole in existence but do you actually know how it works?’

‘Don’t be ridiculous.’

‘I thought not.’

‘I meant don’t be ridiculous, I know full well how a wormhole works. It is a perfectly natural phenomenon.’

‘There is nothing natural about this particular phenomenon,’ the Doctor said.

By now everyone on deck was listening intently. Tibby Vent was completely irritated. ‘What on earth are you talking about?’

‘Nothing on Earth, I can assure you. There is nothing at all on that tiny little world that can possibly prepare you for what you will soon encounter.’ The Doctor’s cold gaze bored into her. ‘That wormhole leads to the unknown, Professor. The absolute *unknown*.’

‘I am a scientist, Doctor. It is my job to explore the unknown!’

‘And it’s my job to protect you from it.’

Raymond Balfour stepped forward with a smile. ‘Perhaps it would be better if we continued this discussion later? Professor, Trugg can help you and your team find their cabins. I’ll introduce the Doctor and Miss Oswald to the captain.’

It was a skilful bit of diplomacy, Clara thought, but it didn’t stop Tabitha Vent eyeing the Doctor with obvious suspicion as Balfour led them away. Clara saw the robot, Trugg, introducing himself to the professor and then they disappeared from sight as they turned a corner.

‘Professor Vent has rather a forthright personality,’ Balfour explained. ‘She’s the best at what she does, but sometimes lacks the human touch.’

'I know the problem,' said Clara. 'Believe me.'

'She's heading up the research team, but we'll do the full introductions later,' Balfour said. 'I think you'll want to see around the *Alexandria* first. It's been designed and built to order, specifically for this mission.'

'Based on a *Heracles*-class Starcruiser, if I'm not mistaken,' said the Doctor.

'That's right, although we've added a few improvements. The ion thrusters have a forty-astron hyperdrive capacity. The hold is divided into state-of-the-art labs and research facilities with entoptic hologram displays. The living quarters and cabins are fully appointed with artificial gravity tuned to absolute Earth-normal throughout. Hull shielding has been upgraded to withstand five times the normal cosmic ray bombardment and heavy radiation ...'

'It's beautiful,' Clara said.

'It must have cost a packet,' said the Doctor.

Balfour shrugged. 'The *Alexandria* is the most expensive deep-space private research vessel ever built - but I think she's worth it. We're ready for just about anything.'

'We'll see,' said the Doctor.

The *Alexandria* entered its natural habitat, the cold vacuum of space, like an eagle riding the warmest of thermals. Glittering under the arc lights of the docking port, the ship eased away from Far Station, away from the vast galaxy of stars behind it, and headed for deep space.

Clara could feel the faint hum of the engines through the soles of her shoes as they walked through the interior of the ship. Only thirty minutes earlier, she'd been standing on the old wooden floorboards of a classroom in Shoreditch, waiting to go home. Now she was hurtling through outer space, destined for ... what?

She nudged the Doctor as they walked. 'Wormholes?'

‘Conduits through time and space, linking one part of the universe to another.’

‘Like a tunnel?’

The Doctor winced. ‘No! Well, if you want to call a complex space-time event compressing billions of light years into a near singularity “a tunnel”, then yes. I suppose so.’

‘And what’s so special about this wormhole, then?’

‘It’s very, very old. And like any tunnel that is very, very old, it’s not necessarily safe to use.’

‘And this lot are about to try and use it, are they?’

‘I’m very much afraid so, Clara.’

‘Then it’s up to us to stop them, right? That’s what we’re here for?’

‘No,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’re here to help them.’

‘This is the flight deck,’ Balfour said as he led the Doctor and Clara through a wide bulkhead door. ‘Captain Laker should have something rather special to show you.’

The flight deck was just like the rest of the *Alexandria* - sleek and humming with perfectly suppressed power. Ergonomic control consoles lined the sides and front of the deck, which was dominated by a panoramic hologram showing the way ahead.

In front of this, at the centre of the flight deck, was the captain’s chair. The man sitting in it stood up as they came in and flashed what Clara considered a very nice smile. He wore what looked like a genuine leather jacket, which, with his good looks and short-back-and-sides, lent him a charmingly old-fashioned and rather heroic look.

Balfour introduced them and then departed, saying that he had to prepare for the mission briefing due to take place in the ‘common room’, which sounded a bit too much like a school staff room for Clara. She shook the memory of Coal Hill out of her head and concentrated on the here and now.

Captain Laker jerked a thumb at the hologram. 'You're just in time,' he said. 'We're about to leave the Milky Way.'

The hologram showed a shimmering field of purple-blue space, dotted with stars. It floated in the air like a bubble of space and looked so real that Clara wanted to reach out and touch it. 'It's so beautiful,' she said.

'The colours you can see are the remains of a star - a cloud of superheated gas, radiating outwards from a stellar explosion that took place millions of years ago. We're flying straight through it.'

The cloud changed from blue to lilac and then a deep mauve as the *Alexandria* sped onwards. Gradually it shifted to a startling red, then a darker crimson, bathing the occupants of the flight deck in the colour of blood.

'The very edge of the galaxy,' said the Doctor said quietly. 'This is all that's left of the last star before the void.'

The scarlet light suddenly faded and was replaced by a deep, impenetrable blackness. There was not a single star to be seen.

'We've left the galaxy,' Laker confirmed. 'It's quite a sight, isn't it?'

'I can't see anything,' said Clara, shivering a little. 'Just ... darkness.'

'No more stars,' explained the Doctor. 'Not until the next galaxy, which is Andromeda. If Captain Laker increases the scanner magnification, we could see it from here, and many other galaxies too.'

Laker nodded. 'Yeah, I could, but where would the romance be in that?'

'Romance?' repeated Clara.

Laker gestured to the holoviewer again. 'Endless night. Nothing more romantic than that.'

'Or terrifying,' said the Doctor. 'How long until we reach the wormhole?'

'Well, we should reach maximum speed very soon. The approximate location is about fifty light years outside the

galactic rim, so at a rough guess we could be there in another couple of hours.'

'How do you plan to find it?' the Doctor asked. 'You said the location is approximate.'

'That's where Jem comes in,' said Laker. He gestured towards the front of the flight deck.

Positioned almost beneath the hologram viewer was a long, low seat - almost a couch - surrounded by a cluster of instruments. Lights flickered across control panels and a profusion of wires led from the top of the couch to a transparent dome. Sitting under this, like a woman in an old-fashioned hair salon, was the most delicate-looking person Clara had ever seen. She had milky-smooth skin and elfin features and was dressed in a close-fitting overall with a high collar. Her large, almond-shaped eyes were wide open and completely white. Despite this, Clara got the distinct impression that they saw more than most human eyes.

'Our astrogator,' said Laker. He spoke softly, as if he didn't want to disturb her concentration.

'An augmented clone?' The Doctor didn't look too happy.

'Hello,' said the occupant of the couch. Her voice was quiet but musical. 'You must be the Doctor. And you are ... Clara. I'm Jem 428. Pleased to meet you.'

'Hi,' said Clara, a little surprised. She didn't recall being introduced.

'I read your minds,' Jem explained with a smile. 'Don't worry - I'm only a very low-level telepath. Surface details only - no big secrets.'

'Well ... that's good.'

'Jem's a clone, genetically engineered to be ultra-sensitive to the space-time continuum,' said the Doctor. 'They can hear what the universe has to say. At least, that's what they claim.'

'And she's also right here,' said Clara pointedly.

The Doctor frowned and then realised what she meant. He knelt down suddenly so that he was level with Jem 428's head. 'I'm so sorry. Hello, Jem. Tell me: what can you hear?'

Jem's perfectly white eyes stared straight ahead into the darkness of the holoviewer. 'I can hear the song of the stars and the distant whispers of the furthest galaxies ...'

The Doctor glanced back up at Clara. 'She means she can sense the minute fluctuations in the gravitational field that exists between dark matter.'

'OK,' said Clara, taking a deep breath. 'While we're at it: dark matter?'

'It's invisible and makes up most of the universe, along with dark energy,' explained the Doctor. 'It's really only detectable by its gravitational effect on other matter. An astrogation clone can seek out the axion strings and nodes that exist only in dark matter and make it into a sort of mental map.'

'I think I prefer "the song of the stars",' said Clara.

'Suit yourself.'

'I can hear the call of the Phaeron Roads,' Jem breathed, still staring into the void. Clara noticed that her eyes never seemed to blink.

The Doctor frowned deeply. 'Can you, indeed?'

'Fairy what?' asked Clara.

'Phaeron Roads,' repeated the Doctor, standing up. He looked at the view screen, his eyes boring into the depthless night. 'It's an old term. The name for a vast network of ancient wormholes that stretch across the entire universe.'

'You mean like the one we're heading for?'

'Exactly.' He looked thoughtful, his eyebrows knitting together. His long, craggy face was drawn, and Clara thought it would be easy to mistake his expression for anxiety if it weren't for the gleam of intense curiosity in his eyes.

'It might be best if Jem was left alone for a while,' said Laker. Clara had almost forgotten he was there. 'She finds it easier to work in the peace and quiet.'

The Doctor flashed the pilot a look that Clara couldn't quite understand. Was it discomfort? Disappointment?

'I think Mr Balfour wants everyone in the common room,' Laker said evenly. He held his hand out towards the exit. 'One deck down. You can't miss it.'

The Doctor looked again at Jem 428, lying prone in her couch beneath the transparent dome. 'All right,' he said, turning to leave with Clara. 'But we'll have words later, Captain.'

As the Doctor stalked off the flight deck, Clara glanced back at Laker. For someone in charge of the best and most expensive spaceship ever built, he looked distinctly troubled.

Chapter

2

The *Alexandria*'s common room was a circular chamber located near the centre of the ship. Clara thought it looked more like a posh hotel lounge than the common room of a scientific expedition.

Raymond Balfour was standing at the front with his robot, Trugg, waiting placidly nearby.

Professor Vent sat on a low settee, sipping a hot drink from a mug. Opposite her sat a young man with thin, swept-back hair and a rather supercilious expression. He put both feet up on a low coffee table and winked at the professor.

There were two other people sitting in the room; a younger woman with glossy black hair and matching jumpsuit, and a pale-looking, rather nervous man with a computer tablet clutched to his chest.

'Right,' announced Balfour. 'Now we're all here, it's time I introduced everyone properly.'

Clara sat down in an armchair next to the nervous-looking man with the tablet, but the Doctor stayed on his feet at the back of the room, where he could see everyone, leaning against the wall with his arms folded. Professor Vent muttered about what a waste of time all this was when she had important work to do. The man with his feet up smirked at her.

'You all know me ...' Balfour began.

Clara hadn't met him until a half an hour ago but she knew his type; young-looking, if not actually young, smartly dressed and extremely wealthy. He wasn't bad-looking, in fact he was almost too good-looking, and she suspected plastic surgery or some futuristic equivalent. His teeth were perfect, his eyes were bright blue and he had a thatch of artfully tousled blond hair.

'My full name is Raymond Rueun Balfour the Third. But you can call me Ray. Welcome to the *Alexandria*. Hopefully you've had time to dump your stuff and get used to the layout. It's pretty straightforward. If you can't find anything, just ask. I'd like to think we're all friends here, or at least we soon will be. We're going to be spending a lot of time together over the next few weeks, after all.' He smiled happily, but his only reply was silence.

Not quite enough ice broken yet, Clara thought.

'I've got mission datapads for you all,' Balfour continued, and Trugg dutifully handed out a small tablet computer to each of them. 'It contains the full *Alexandria* specs, the mission parameters and, perhaps most importantly, a research team and ship's crew list and relevant biogs.'

Clara touched the screen of her tablet and a holographic display lit up. Icons floated in the air. She touched one, which turned out to be a list of the people on board:

FUNDING:

RAYMOND BALFOUR

RESEARCH TEAM:

<i>TABITHA VENT</i>	- <i>research team leader</i>
<i>MARCO SPRITT</i>	- <i>archaeology</i>
<i>TANYA FLEXX</i>	- <i>medic / exobiology</i>
<i>LUIS CRANMER</i>	- <i>astrophysics</i>

CREW:

<i>DAN LAKER</i>	- <i>pilot</i>
<i>JEM 428</i>	- <i>astrogator</i>