

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS

The background of the cover features a stylized, grayscale illustration of an open book. The pages are depicted with numerous curved, horizontal lines, suggesting the flow of text. The book is shown from a slightly elevated, angled perspective, with the pages fanning out. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, typical of a digital book cover.

Doctor Who: Father Time

Lance Parkin

About the Book

'I love her.' The Doctor said.

'Of course you do, she's your daughter.'

Earth in the nineteen-eighties is a battleground. Rival alien factions have travelled from the far future to pursue their vendetta.

With UFOs filling the skies, a giant robot stalking the Derbyshire hills, and alien hunters searching for the mysterious Last One, the Doctor is the only man who can protect the innocents caught in the crossfire.

But old scores are being settled, the fate of a Galactic Empire is at stake, and against his will, the Doctor is drawn into a decade-long war that will strike at those he holds most dear.

The Doctor has lost his memory, his friends, his past and his TARDIS.

All he has now is the love of his daughter.

But will even that be taken from him?

DOCTOR WHO: FATHER TIME

Lance Parkin



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Dedicated to child of the eighties, Cassandra May.

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Mark Clapham, Mike Evans, Kate Orman and Jon Blum.*

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Chapter Zero

Planet of Death

It was a planet shrouded in fog.

Thick grey mists clung to the broken, rocky ground. Nothing but the simplest vegetation lived on the surface, although there were ruined walls and cracked roadways, evidence that a civilisation had once prospered on this world. At higher altitudes the fog grew thinner, but also more sulphurous. The sky was yellow, sickly. Even at noon, the sunlight was weak, filtered through layers of haze. Everywhere, the air was stagnant. There were no winds, not even the hint of a breeze.

But life still clung to this planet, dotted around in sealed cities, tunnels and bunkers.

A flying disc broke through the gloom and soundlessly approached the largest of these strongholds.

The palace was a collection of twisted silver spires, like fingers reaching up to grasp the stars. It was vast, the size of a city, with the tips of the tallest spires poking out of the poisonous atmosphere. There were signs of damage, and the metal surface had become tarnished over time, but it was an impressive spectacle, and the lights and air traffic were clear signs that this place was occupied, even vibrant.

The flying disc began slowing, altering its course ever so slightly. It drifted through a gap in the palace walls. As it passed, a transparent dome slid smoothly across, enclosing it.

The room smelled of cinnamon and sandalwood. He could feel the firm stone floor beneath his knee and his feet, and hear the hum of the ventilation ducts. Not even heavy robes could keep out the cold. None of this mattered.

His shoulder was aching again. He had a sharp pain in his stomach. The headache that had prevented him from sleeping hadn't subsided, despite the pills. None of this mattered.

He heard the footsteps, identified their owner while he was still fifty paces away. He didn't rise, but kept his gaze fixed firmly on the knife that sat on the family shrine. He resumed his prayers of dedication, staring into the pitted blade, remembering.

Five paces away, and the footsteps stopped, as he knew they would.

'There is news, Eminence,' the Deputy announced.

He closed his eyes, prayed that after a lifetime this was the end.

'Tell me,' he commanded quietly.

'The Hunters are here. They say they have located the Last One.'

He nodded, gave silent thanks to the gods, and turned to face the Deputy. The old man was in his fatigues, ready for combat, even here. After all this time, the Deputy still relished the fight. This old man had been his rock all these years. There had been times – forgive him – when he had thought of abandoning his mission, renouncing his sacred duty, times when he thought there had already been too much killing, too much blood.

But you cannot escape the past: the great weight of decades of history and memory that shape you, make you what you are. Fate was the inevitable result of genetics and politics. The Deputy shared none of this heritage, at least not by birth, but knew what was important. What sort of man would the Deputy have been without the war? The Deputy wouldn't have the scar, but what about his permanently narrowed eyes or his hunched physique?

Only one more killing, and it would be over. He would have played his role to its conclusion.

'Where?'

'The planet Earth, in the twentieth century of the Humanian Era.'

'A precise fix?'

'To within ten square kilometres.' The Deputy sounded impressed, despite himself.

'They have done well. Authorise the second payment.'

'Sir . . .'

He laughed. 'I know: you are worried that they'll take the money without finishing the job. Authorise the second payment, but don't let them leave the palace.'

'I am uncertain of their loyalties.'

'You are right to be, they are not part of this. They require someone to keep them in check. We both know who would be best for that role. Commission him.'

'Yes, Eminence.'

He turned to the shrine, took the knife from its reliquary and slotted it into the sheath on his belt.

He took a deep breath. 'It's nearly over, old friend. Soon the last of our enemies will be dead.'

'It will be a new beginning,' the Deputy told him. 'The poison will have been drawn, the empire will flourish, we will prevent anarchy. We will be great again.'

He could barely remember what it had been like before the civil war. He looked around, saw the great cracks in the floor, the patches where the roof and walls had been crudely repaired. At least inside here the air was breathable. It was difficult to believe that they had been on the winning side.

The anger surged within him. He remembered what his enemies had done; he remembered his vow to end their rule, to hunt them down, to exterminate them.

'We will at least have that chance,' he agreed. 'Prepare for departure, prepare the timegate.'

Part One

‘Battle of the Planets’

The Early 1980s

Chapter One

Knights and Castles

It was a planet of darkness, snow and hills.

Or so anyone arriving in Derbyshire that night would have thought.

There comes a time when the fall of snow is no longer the start of a marvellous adventure. There comes a time when it means scraping your windscreen and hoping your car starts. It means aching joints and throbbing sinuses and cold hands and feet. It means taking longer to get to work and spending all day sitting in an office where the heating isn't on. Grey slush and cracked pipes, cancelled trains and influenza, that's what snow means. You'll wake up feeling like that, one day, and it will mean you are grown up. I hope that day doesn't come soon.

This story is set in the last century. In those days, the Prime Minister was a woman, and there were no euros or pound coins, only pound notes. The Lords sat in the House of Lords, coal miners worked in coal mines, and ships were built on the Tyne. There were vinyl long-playing records, not compact discs, the space shuttle was shiny and new, there were only three television stations, and computers – hard to believe, I know – were black-and-white back then.

It begins with a teacher, a primary-school teacher, driving a tan Ford Cortina through a blizzard in the dark.

The teacher's name is Mrs Deborah Castle, and she hated to see the snow falling.

She remembered a story as she drove, and it made her cry . . .

Once upon a time there was a girl called Debbie Gordon who used to love to see snow fall. Debbie Gordon had long, long hair, which was as black as coal. Every winter, as soon as

she saw it was snowing, she would press herself against the cold pane of the dining-room window, watching the flakes drifting down into the back garden, making her eyes go funny. The first snow didn't settle, although she never remembered that. The air was so cold she could see it in front of her when she breathed out, but the ground was still too warm for snow to stick. However much snow fell, it vanished as soon as it hit the grass and paving stones. But despite that the first snow was never a disappointment.

Snow comes early in Greyfrith, high in the Pennines in the Northwest of England. The first snow can be at the end of September, while the rest of England has its first frosts. The children of Greyfrith don't understand the fuss everyone else makes about a white Christmas – every Christmas Day, without fail, there's snow on the ground. Not only does the snow come early, but you can never be sure it's gone. At the train station there's an old black-and-white photograph of a cricket pitch, covered in white. The scoreboard reads SNOW STOPPED PLAY – the only time that's happened to a county cricket match, anywhere in the world. June it was, the woman who runs the café at the railway station will tell you, if you ask – and often even if you don't. She's in that old photograph, but you wouldn't recognise her now, not unless you knew her granddaughter. It's not snowed in June since, but there'll be snow until April, most years.

Mrs Castle lived in Greyfrith, so it was a shame she hated it to snow.

Debbie Gordon and Deborah Castle sound like completely different people, and in some ways they are. Debbie Gordon had a big doll's house in her bedroom, a little cat, and a love of falling snow. Mrs Castle had none of the things that Debbie Gordon had, not any more, except the puppy fat. Once upon a time, not even twenty years ago, she did because – as you've already guessed – Debbie Gordon is what Mrs Castle was called before she became a grown-up. She got a new name on her wedding day. Gordon was a

funny name, because 'Gordon' is usually a man's first name, but Castle was an even stranger name to have, and it made her think of medieval fortresses. For months afterwards she kept signing her old name by mistake - annoying her husband every time she did so.

Five years after her wedding day, when our story starts, she was used to being Mrs Castle, it didn't seem odd at all. Her pupils stood up and chanted the name every morning when she came into the classroom, it appeared on her pay-slips and phone bills. She'd forgotten what it was like to be Debbie Gordon; she'd all but forgotten that she once loved the snow.

Mrs Castle ignored the tears in her eyes, and tried to concentrate on the road in front of her instead of listening to her own silly stories. Past the windscreen wipers and their battle with the snow, a mushy orange glow peeking over the hilltops marked her way. Those were the Greyfrith street lights. The road ahead was empty and unlit, all the way home. Mrs Castle's car radio was tuned to long wave and pop music was playing. Mrs Castle knew the people singing were a group called Adam and the Ants, because it was a new song all her pupils were talking about.

A red light appeared on the dashboard.

Mrs Castle tried to ignore it, tried to press on - even in this weather it would take less than ten minutes to drive the three miles to her house. She knew that her husband could sort out whatever was wrong with the car in the morning; it would be his problem, not hers. There was no other choice - she couldn't see any phone boxes, and this was many years before anyone but a millionaire had a telephone in their car. Mrs Castle didn't know if Adam Ant could drive, but if he could, and he had a car, she knew it would have a telephone in it. But no one in Greyfrith did, except perhaps the manager of the factory that made spark plugs, or Lord Wallis, who owned Wallis House.

Mrs Castle could hear every rattle her husband's car made now. She was acutely aware of every change in engine note. Nine minutes. Nine minutes away from home.

Not far away, a man called Arnold Knight lowered his binoculars, disappointed. Arnold Knight was a UFO spotter – or would have been, if he had ever seen one.

Snow falling from a thick grey sky. This was not at all what he wanted. On the hillside, as Arnold was, the clouds weren't quite close enough to touch, but they looked it. For the last few days, with almost total cloud coverage, Arnold had convinced himself that the night's sky might be full of strange lights, there could be fleets of saucers flying in formation, all tantalisingly just a couple of hundred feet above his head, all swerving to avoid the occasional break in the cloud.

Arnold wasn't as fanatical as some of his fellow UFO spotters. Some of the men and women who'd congregated in Greyfrith after the initial reports of a flap thought they'd got it all worked out. They told stories about RAF planes chasing flying saucers, official cover-ups, a whole menagerie of plant men, robot men and spaghetti men from outer space, not forgetting the turtle men who lived under the sea. Arnold didn't believe any of that. As the famous scientist Carl Sagan said, extraordinary claims required extraordinary proof. Arnold hoped he could provide some extraordinary proof. There were some interesting things happening in the sky. That seemed beyond dispute – lights, glowing balls, crosses . . . They'd all been seen over the years, by all sorts of reliable people. He was a good photographer – he made some money from it, doing portraits and work for the local paper. So, get a few decent photos of UFOs, done by a professional, and people might start to investigate the phenomenon seriously. That was why he'd travelled halfway across the country; that was what he was here for.

But that wasn't going to happen tonight, not with this weather.

It was dark, very cold, and it was still snowing, even though the weather forecast had said the cold spell was over. He knew how to stay warm, but the best way of all was not to go out on a winter's night in the first place. He found a fallen tree, checked it wasn't too wet and sat down.

It was very quiet tonight, and the low clouds were like a roof. It made everything seem unreal, somehow. It was calm. Civilisation wasn't far away – the outskirts of Greyfrith were only over the next hill, but it felt wild out here, as though there were things that *people* didn't know about. The hills themselves were dark. There were local legends that the hills and mountains were giants, curled up where they fell under some enchantment. Arnold could see where that had come from – the curves and undulations did make them look like fat people, fast asleep.

Arnold glanced over his shoulder and saw there was a giant standing behind him. Ten feet tall at least, and wearing angular armour. Two lights shone down, like the headlamps of a car, but they were the giant's eyes.

It was a machine, or a very tall man in a suit of armour – there was no way of telling which. Sensible thoughts crossed Arnold's mind: that this was a prank, a puppet or special effect of some kind. He'd spent enough time in the pubs of Greyfrith in the last week to know that the local lads regarded the UFO spotters with suspicion and derision.

But Arnold could tell that this wasn't some lashed-together farm machinery. It was dark, but he could see that it was elegantly designed, that its movements were fluid.

It was coming towards him.

Arnold screamed, and started to run.

Mrs Castle wasn't far away, and she heard the scream over the sound of the car radio.

It startled her for a moment, but only for a moment. She quickly told herself that it was nothing to worry about, just a noise like you often hear in the middle of the night. A sound like the cry of a fierce animal, or a strange aircraft. Perhaps just a bang or a thud.

Maybe you've heard a scream. When children play, it often sounds as if they are screaming. From a little way off, a playground can sound like a battleground. If children playing sounds like screaming, then, Mrs Castle thought, perhaps a field full of screaming children will sound as if they are playing.

It was a fox, she told herself. Or some sort of bird – a hawk or an owl. Or perhaps just something on the Kate Bush record that was playing now on the radio. Mrs Castle turned the radio up and tried to think of other things.

She concentrated on what was waiting for her at home. At first she thought of the nasty things. The washing-up, the hoovering, the mouldy grouting in the bathroom. Barry, Mr Castle, would be there, sitting in front of the television, telling her the commentators on *Rugby Special* were useless, and that he also had a low opinion of Paul Daniels, and that the licence fee was a waste of good money. But there would be nice things at home, too: a bath, a hot, soapy bath. A book – *Sense and Sensibility*, about a young woman who was out in the rain and was rescued by a handsome man on horseback. A fairy story. There was a Paul Newman film on later, and Mrs Castle knew not even Barry could spoil that for her.

There were now three red lights on the dashboard. Mrs Castle knew she wouldn't get home. Now she was looking for a phone box. She'd driven down this road hundreds of times, but because she'd never needed a phone box, she didn't know if there was one or not. And if there wasn't, then she'd have to hope that another car came by.

She could hear hissing. The engine was making a noise like a kettle. She pictured it, bubbling and churning. She

imagined her husband shouting at her, telling her she only needed to stop to put some oil and water in it, but instead she left it running, she'd damaged the engine, it was going to take him all weekend to fix and it would cost them hundreds of pounds. She knew she had to stop the car as soon as she could.

And because she was looking at the dashboard, she didn't see the man run out in front of her: she saw only his terrified expression, bleached by the headlights, as he turned to face her.

She slammed down hard on the brakes, without needing to think that she had to, but already knowing it would do no good. The road had been gritted, but it was still very wet, and the tyres barely gripped it.

The car hardly slowed before it hit him, sending him tumbling over the bonnet, rolling up the windscreen and over the roof. As the car stopped, he fell back on to the road.

For a moment, Mrs Castle just sat, clutching the steering wheel. Everything outside the car seemed so much slower – the snow, her windscreen wipers.

After a moment, her mind and the world outside it caught up with each other. Mrs Castle turned the ignition key, which shut off the engine and silenced the radio. The warm air from the heater died away, the boiling from the engine settled down. She took a deep breath and got out of the car.

She locked the car door without thinking what she was doing.

It was so quiet. It wasn't as cold as she thought it would be, despite the snow. There was nothing else moving here, of course, and it was too cold for animals and their predators to be out. The streams and brooks were frozen silent, the earth was solid as metal underfoot. The cold, snow-filled air seemed to dampen out any other sounds there may have been. There were gaps in the thick grey clouds, and through those gaps the night sky was the colour

of Quink. The stars were sharp pinpricks. It was beautiful. It was just like being in outer space.

A broken body lay on the road.

Mrs Castle went over to it, knelt down. But before she had even touched the man's face, she realised he was still alive. Unconscious, but it was cold enough to see the man's breath coming from his mouth. Shallow breath.

He didn't seem to be bleeding, although he was wearing a thick parka and waterproof trousers, so it was difficult to tell. Mrs Castle had been given some first-aid training, so knew that he could be bleeding internally, and that plenty of serious injuries didn't lead to bleeding.

The man groaned, and tried to move.

Normally, she knew you weren't meant to move someone if they'd been knocked down by a car – they may have broken their spine, and moving them could permanently damage it. Here she didn't have a choice: the pedestrian was in the middle of the road, and if another car came past it would hit him. So, as gently as she could, Mrs Castle helped to move him to the verge at the side of the road. He couldn't put any weight on his right leg – it looked like he may have broken it.

She asked him his name, he mumbled a reply, but she couldn't hear.

'Arnold Knight,' he repeated, straining to get up.

'Don't move,' she told him.

'We're in terrible danger!' he cried suddenly. 'It's after me. If it sees you . . .'

A part of Mrs Castle's brain, a small, primitive part at the back, right at the top of her spine, told her to get away from here.

She looked up into the darkness, up the hill in the direction this man had come from.

There was nothing there. Nothing she could see.

But whatever Arnold had seen, he'd preferred to run into the path of a moving car than to face it.

‘What is after you?’

‘A –’

‘Animal? A person?’

‘A monster,’ Arnold told her. ‘A giant metal monster.’

Mrs Castle smiled. ‘You had a bump on the head,’ she reassured him. Either that or he was drunk, or had been sniffing glue. He didn’t look dangerous, she decided.

‘I –’ Arnold winced, unable to speak.

‘Does it hurt?’ Mrs Castle asked, knowing it was a stupid question.

‘Can you get me away from here? If you can’t, then at least you can get away. Tell people.’

‘You shouldn’t try to move unless you have to.’

He clutched her sleeve. ‘We have to. It’s after me.’

A car was coming. She could see the headlights and hear the faint sound of the engine.

‘I’ll get them to phone for an ambulance,’ she suggested.

‘Wait!’ Arnold warned. ‘You’re in terrible danger!’ His voice was almost comical – he was terrified, but nothing could be as bad as *that*, could it?

‘It’s *them*,’ Arnold insisted.

The car was getting nearer, and so she began waving her arms. The circular headlights were getting bigger and brighter. At first she thought the driver hadn’t seen her, or that he wasn’t going to stop, or even that it was the monster that Arnold thought had been chasing him, but the car came to a halt alongside her.

Mrs Castle found herself sighing with relief. It was a perfectly ordinary Volkswagen Beetle. It was matt black, almost invisible on such a dark night.

The window whirred down, smoothly – it must have been electric. Mr Castle was always talking about getting electric windows, but they were too expensive.

There were two people in the car. A man in the driving seat, a woman passenger nearer to the open window. They were in their early twenties, and they looked more like a

twin brother and sister than husband and wife. They were both pale, with piercing blue eyes, and they wore identical plastic mackintoshes. They looked at her in a way that made Mrs Castle feel small.

‘Good evening,’ she said.

The two looked at each other.

‘Good evening to you,’ the woman said, her voice deeper than Mrs Castle had expected.

‘Good evening,’ the man echoed, with a voice that sounded almost like a woman’s.

‘There’s been an accident,’ she said. ‘Could you telephone for help? This man will die if you don’t.’

‘Die?’ the man said, peering over to take a look.

‘Yes. He’s already delirious. Talking about monsters chasing him.’

‘And you don’t believe that?’ the woman asked hurriedly.

‘Well . . . no.’

‘Good,’ the man concluded.

‘You have to get help,’ Mrs Castle insisted.

The two looked at each other again, and it was clear they found something about her amusing.

‘We *could* . . .’ the woman said.

‘. . . could, but shan’t,’ the man finished quickly.

The car sped off, the electric window sliding smoothly up, and Mrs Castle could hear the man and woman laughing together as it went, the man’s laugh sounding like a woman giggling and the woman’s laugh like the deep guffaw of an old man.

She slumped her shoulders. There was a little nugget of cold in her stomach. She didn’t understand why those two people would want to be so cruel. She knew there wasn’t a reason, not really, they were just ‘having a laff’, as her pupils would have called it. That was what the children who pushed other children over in the playground said; that was what Greg had said when she’d caught him writing his name on his desk with a marker pen. That was what Barry said

when he'd told everyone at her birthday party that her Purdey cut made her look like Velma from *Scooby-Doo*. 'Just having a laff.'

Mrs Castle felt like crying, but knew she had to be brave for Arnold Knight.

She went back to the injured man. He was cowering behind her car.

'You mustn't move,' she told him sternly.

'They didn't see me,' he said.

'I don't think so.'

'Were they the ones who were chasing you?'

'No . . . no, it was a -' He clamped his mouth shut.

'A what?' Mrs Castle scowled.

Arnold tried to sit up. 'It doesn't matter. It's gone.'

'Stay still.'

'It can't be doing me any good sitting down here,' he replied. 'I'll get frostbite.'

'You said someone was after you,' Mrs Castle said sternly. 'Who?'

Arnold looked down at his legs. 'They'd have caught up with me by now. I must have got away from them. You saved me. Thanks.'

Mrs Castle was grateful that he didn't blame her for running him over, but she found it hard to believe that she'd done him any favours. 'What were you doing out here?' she said.

Arnold chuckled. 'Looking for UFOs.'

Mrs Castle laughed. 'Did you see any little green men? Was it them chasing you?'

He didn't answer. Instead he asked, 'Can I get into the car? Please?'

She helped him into the car, keeping the weight off his feet, and told him to stay put while she went to get help. She told him that whatever her husband's faults, he would have made sure there were blankets in the boot, there would even be a shovel if she needed to dig them out of a

snowdrift. Arnold would be safe. She put on her emergency lights and got out of the car, assuring Arnold that she'd be as quick as she could. Arnold ducked down, saying it was safest if he stayed out of sight.

Outside the car it was quiet. No wind. Calm.

Mrs Castle wondered if Arnold was all right in the head.

She looked up at the night's sky, and she thought it looked like a window. A window to a better place. Perhaps the UFO spotters were right: perhaps she would see something else up there tonight. The regulars at the Dragon thought the UFO spotters were nutters – and they did look like nutters. They talked like them, too – they told their stories with such authority, comparing notes, exchanging blurry photographs that could be of anything. But for the last few weeks they had congregated in Greyfrith, drawn there by tales of mysterious lights and even traces – they said – that the saucers had landed.

Mrs Castle knew what the UFO spotters wanted – they wanted there to be a better place. They wanted the world to be like it had been when they were children, when they had storybooks instead of *this*, when they'd welcomed the fall of snow. They wanted to fly, they wanted to travel to faraway places, they wanted there to be more to life than the human race had made of it. They wanted someone, anyone, to come to their rescue, and take them to a better life where cars didn't break down, where there weren't strikes and power cuts. Somewhere wives didn't hate their husbands so much they dreaded going home. Mrs Castle felt the same. She wanted to be swept up by the wind, or by a man on a white horse, or by the UFOs. She never wanted to go home: she wanted to go and live in outer space, or at least in London.

Deborah Castle looked down over the valley, and saw the air full of snow, and realised how much better life had been when she had been Debbie Gordon, and she cried.

You may feel like that, one day. I just hope that day doesn't come soon.

Chapter Two

The Doctor

Mrs Castle knew three miles was too far to walk in the dark, in this weather, on her own. There may be a late bus – in the early 1980s such things existed in England – but she couldn't depend on it. So that meant she knew she had to find someone nearby with a phone.

It didn't take her long to see a farmhouse in the valley below, a single light on downstairs, and smoke coming from one of the chimneys. It was about two hundred yards away, nestled among some dark trees. The path down wasn't obvious, but neither did it seem hazardous. She turned back to her car to tell Arnold that she would go down there and ask the owner if she could use his phone. Arnold agreed to stay put, and warned her to be on her guard.

Mrs Castle climbed over the locked iron gate. The snow had started to settle, it was quite a steep slope, and the ground was icy. Mrs Castle had lived in Greyfrith for most of her life, though, and she was more than capable of getting down to the farmhouse without injury.

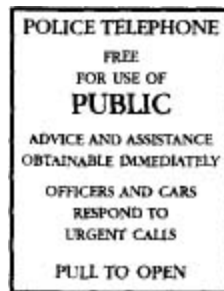
From the road, the building had looked like every other farmhouse around here – a solid box with a high vaulted roof. There was a small barn to one side, but there didn't seem to be any sign of farming activity – no tractors or bales of hay. This was a house, not a working farm, and the barn was probably a garage now, or perhaps an artist's studio.

Between the barn and the house was an odd thing – a shed or . . . some kind of telephone box. It was dark blue, probably (it was difficult to say in this light, it could have been green or grey). It was a hut, with a stacked roof and little windows.

The sign over the doors said it was a police box.

What on earth was a police box?

There was a notice on one of the door panels:



This was just what she needed! It was a dream come true.

Mrs Castle pulled the handle, as the sign told her to, but the panel didn't budge. She could see that it was meant to. This was meant to be a little door, and behind it there would be a telephone and she'd pick it up and a policeman would come and sort everything out. He'd get Arnold to a hospital and take her home and arrange for the car to be towed to her house and everything would be all right.

But the little hatch didn't open, it was jammed shut. She tried pulling and pushing at the big door, trying to get inside, but that didn't budge either.

She put her head against the door and began crying again.

Mrs Castle didn't cry very often. Mrs Castle was brave, resourceful and intelligent: she knew that the problems in life weren't solved by men on white horses, or being swept away by the wind, or with a quick phone call. She knew she would have to solve her problems for herself. But knowing that isn't the same as having the solution. Knowing there was a way out, somewhere, only made her failure to find it more frustrating, and so sometimes, when no one else was looking, when it all got too much, she cried.

It was cold, and crying wouldn't change that. Mrs Castle pulled herself up and wiped her eyes. There was almost certainly a telephone in the house - that was why she had come down here. Now she looked, she couldn't see a

telephone line leading down into the farmhouse. But they were bound to have one, living so far out here. She would knock on the door and ask to use the phone.

She walked up to the front door of the farmhouse and knocked on it. It was eight on a Saturday night, so she knew they may be out. She began thinking about what she would say: first, she would have to apologise for disturbing the house owners, most probably. But surely they would let her use their telephone? It was an emergency, after all.

There was no answer. The snow was falling faster now, it was even beginning to drift up against the side of the police box. Despite her scarf and gloves, Mrs Castle was starting to get a little cold. More importantly, she knew Arnold could be seriously injured, and that she had to get help to him.

She tried the door handle, and was surprised when the door opened – she had expected it to be locked. The door was solid oak, and very heavy, but it opened silently and reassuringly. With a nervous look around, Mrs Castle stepped inside, out of the wind and the snow.

The hallway was dark. Some people have a telephone in the hall, but Mrs Castle was disappointed to discover that the owners of this house didn't. She stepped, ever so carefully, further along the long hallway. She felt very guilty, walking around someone else's house. Whatever the circumstances, it didn't feel right.

'Hello?' she called out, but there was no reply.

The carpet was thick, and quite old by the look of it. But the tables and picture frames were good quality. Mrs Castle wondered if she should take her boots off – she'd wiped her feet outside, but there would still be slush on them. She told herself off for being so silly – she was breaking and entering, after all. The owners wouldn't mind the dirty footprints – they'd mind the person who made them.

The front door closed behind her, the latch clicking.

Mrs Castle was worried that the owners of the house would find her. Out in the country, people had shotguns. She

was an intruder, and the people here could be old, or scared of burglars. If they were in the habit of leaving their door unlocked in the night, then she wouldn't be surprised if there had been burglars here in the past.

'Hello?' she called again.

There was a long, carpeted staircase leading upstairs, and the hallway led through to a gloomy kitchen. There was one other door, down here, and as Mrs Castle approached she realised there was a light on.

She knocked on the door.

'Excuse me,' she said, as politely as she could manage.

No one answered. Mrs Castle was beginning to think the owners were out. When she went out she sometimes left a light on to fool burglars. Of course, if the people who lived here were that worried about burglars, she would have advised them to lock their front door.

She went into the room. The remains of a log fire were glowing in the fireplace at one end, and candlesticks were dotted about, casting warmth and shadowy light around the room.

The room was cluttered with old furniture, heavy-framed paintings of people and places, chunks of machinery and bits of scientific apparatus. There was an old microscope, and a very modern-looking telescope.

Next to a huge armchair in the middle of the room was a pile of books – all sorts of books: leather-bound hardbacks, cheap paperbacks, big textbooks, even a couple of *Blue Peter* annuals. All of them had bookmarks, and on top of the pile was a travel chess set, quite an old, battered one. There was a game in progress, and Mrs Castle (who was something of an expert) guessed that it had been under way for some time. Despite herself, Mrs Castle bent over to get a better look at the game.

It was then that she saw there was a man, fast asleep in the armchair.

He didn't look like a farmer – he looked like a poet. Mrs Castle knew, of course, that farmers didn't always look like farmers, and so some of them might look like poets. She knew a few poets from a local writing group, and they were scruffy enough to be farmers. But she knew what she meant.

He was not an old man, but not really a young man, either – he looked older than she was, but she was only twenty-six. His long face was oval, with an aristocratic nose and a full mouth. He had a high forehead, framed with long light-brown hair. He looked warm and peaceful, and his skin was milky pale. He wore a long, dark, velvet coat that spilled over the arms of his chair. He looked like a New Romantic, which was the fashion according to all the magazines, although living in Greyfrith Mrs Castle had never seen one in the flesh before, and it was like meeting a man from another world.

The man's eyes snapped open. Blue eyes, with traces of crows' feet around them.

'I'm sorry,' she found herself saying. 'The door was open. I've been in a car accident. My name's Deborah Castle.'

'I'm the Doctor,' he said, clearly a little bemused.

It wasn't a name at all, not a proper one, but for some reason Mrs Castle didn't think that, she just accepted it.

'I ran someone over. A UFO spotter.'

The Doctor frowned. 'Why?'

'Not deliberately,' she added hurriedly. 'He ran out in front of me. He's in my car at the moment. He's hurt his leg and can't walk.'

The Doctor showed her to the phone, hidden behind a pile of yellowing scientific journals in one corner of the room. Once she'd called an ambulance, the Doctor insisted on going back to her car with her. She didn't want to impose, and they didn't speak as they made their way back up the hill.