

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Doctor Who: Infinity Doctors

Lance Parkin

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About the Book

“Sing about the past again, and sing that same old song. Tell me what you know, so I can tell you that you’re wrong.”

Gallifrey. The Doctor’s home planet. For twenty thousand centuries the Gallifreyans have been the most powerful race in the cosmos. They have circumnavigated infinity and eternity, harnessed science and conquered death. They are the Lords of Time, and have used their powers carefully.

But now a new force has been unleashed, one that is literally capable of anything. It is enough to give even the Time Lords nightmares. More than that: it is enough to destroy them.

It is one of their own.

Waiting for them at the end of the universe.

Featuring the Doctor, this adventure celebrates the thirty-fifth anniversary of Doctor Who.

DOCTOR WHO

THE INFINITY DOCTORS

LANCE PARKIN

BBC

For Cassandra May, always.

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Prologue

The Old Days

Each snowflake melted as it batted into the thick walls of the Citadel, but still they came, like an invading army.

Eighty-five storeys below, everything was black or white. Only the tallest of the ruins were visible now, the snows covered the rest. Not that there had been much to see before the ice had come, merely the ancient temples and amphitheatres, the last evidence of a race that had ruled by the sword and built an empire planet by planet until it had spread across the universe.

When the temples had been built, the future had been an open sea. Gallifrey had been ruled by seers who remembered the future as they remembered the past. Destiny was manifest, the bountiful cargo that filled the holds of a thousand thousand starships. The prophecies had been bound and bound up to be the charts used to circumnavigate infinity. Explorers travelled ever outward, apprised of the marvels they would find, aware of the dangers. Prospectors rushed to the stars, knowing where to look for gold. Heroes took great risks, certain of the outcome. The future had shone as bright as the moon, and had been just as incorruptible.

Those times had gone, swept away in a few short years. The statues and towers had toppled and the fleets had been scuttled. The heroes had died, blind and alone, as all true heroes must. And as the temples and libraries had burned, the Books of Prophecy had been lost to the fire, along with all the other books. Only one fragment had been salvaged from the rubble. Now there were only memories of those

definitive, intricate maps of what was to come. But the memory cheats, it steals, it lies, it tells you what you want to hear.

Today was a day to live in the memory.

The ships were a dream come true, and looked the part. Just from the vivid coloration of their hulls it was obvious that they didn't belong here - they hung like vast tropical fish amongst the half-submerged clock towers and minarets, light like the planet hadn't seen for a generation pouring from their portholes and hatches and into the evening. No wonder that the crowds of Newborn thronged around the observation levels of the quays. The older generation were more sceptical, seeing the whole enterprise as wasteful, potentially catastrophic. The ships hadn't been in the prophecy, they insisted. This was a betrayal, a calculated attempt to sever all links with the future they knew: it hadn't been foretold that the Gallifreyan race would become sterile, there was nothing in the Fragment about Looms, Houses, Cousins, this, that or the other.

Only a handful of the Elders had ventured out here from the shelters, obvious from their stature, let alone their robes of office. Many of them still begrudged the decision that the ships would be crewed by the young, that only a handful of crew members would be over ten years old. But the announcement came as no surprise. Those born since the darkness had fallen were a race apart from their ancestors. The young were eager, enthusiastic and their best days were still ahead of them. They didn't dwell on the glories of the past, they wanted to live in the future, shape it, rather than merely remember. The new order was no longer shocking, indeed it was becoming comfortable, familiar. The Old harboured a new resentment: the New should have been temporary, they had been meant as a substitute while things settled down, a poor substitute at that. But now they were the only future. And with the

wisdom of the ages, some of the Elders knew it would only be a matter of time before the younger generation began to see the past as a dead weight, one holding them back, preventing them from reaching their potential.

Teams of the young were loading the last supplies aboard the ships, passing boxes and modules along in carefully orchestrated lines. In their designated dome, the flight crews would be putting on their uniforms, with the help of the necessary attendants and helpers. A phalanx of the Watch stood guard over proceedings. An army of engineers in protective garments swarmed around and inside the ships, checking every last detail. A small band of musicians had started playing a tune, and the Newborn had taken up the chant.

‘Sing about the past again, and sing that same old song.

Tell me what you know, so I can tell you that you’re wrong.

Just sing about the past, and the past’s where you belong.

Let’s travel to tomorrow, and learn a brand new song.’

Their voices drifted up on the wind. Two robed figures, a man and a woman, watched proceedings from their own balcony on the highest level of the Citadel. It was open to the elements, but the snows and the winds circled around them, not daring to intrude.

‘They are magnificent,’ Omega declared without needing to speak.

‘A dream come true,’ his wife agreed silently. She was slender, with green eyes. Beneath her fur cloak she wore a close-fitting bodice and leggings.

He towered over her, he seemed to be twice her size at least, an effect only magnified by his immense armour. It

was bronze, studded with aluminium, with a lead breastplate. 'I must go to my ship. We have to embark before nightfall.'

'Good luck,' she said wordlessly.

'We have prophecy, so who needs luck?' he laughed, hugging her.

She nodded, and they parted. He strode away, leaving the woman alone on the observation balcony with her thoughts and memories.

Or so she had thought.

'Who indeed?' the little man said, breaking the silence.

She turned to face him.

'How long have you been here?' He stood in the middle of the tiled floor as though he always had been there.

'Time is relative.' He checked his pocket watch. 'Or at least it might be from lunch time tomorrow.'

'We know from the last line of the Fragment that the expedition will succeed. It is written.' She turned back to face the ships. 'It is what comes afterwards that is uncertain. But soon we will not just know the future, soon we will walk amongst it.'

'The Fragment,' he said, walking over to her, placing his hand easily on her shoulder. 'I thought you must have guessed.'

She knew what he was about to say.

He spoke softly, deep sadness in his voice. 'Rassilon needed to rally his people, he needed to justify his insane plan. You remember what it was like a decade ago, after the Curse. The Elders were looking to the past, they were giving up. All we had was our memory. All those golden ages and legendary adventures, all that infighting over which past glory was the best past glory. Gallifrey had died.'

'Even without Rassilon, we would have lived for many millions of years. We are very difficult to kill.'

‘Oh yes. We’re immortal, barring accidents. But accidents happen, my Lady. We would have died in the end without Rassilon and his plan. Didn’t it ever occur to you how contrived the situation was? A workman clearing away the rubble of some fallen temple just happened to find a page from the Book of Prophecy. A single page, a little charred around the edges. Didn’t you think that was odd? Didn’t you wonder what had happened to the rest of the book? And it was such a useful page – the very one that told of the coming decade, showed the whole of Gallifrey that we would become the first of the Lords of Time. Even Rassilon’s enemies conceded that the future seemed to be quoting word-for-word from Rassilon’s manifesto half the time. An interesting coincidence, wouldn’t you say?’

‘The discovery of the Fragment was the clearest possible indication of our destiny,’ she said firmly. ‘The universe moves in mysterious ways.’

‘The Fragment!’ the little man snorted. ‘Rassilon wrote it himself, placed the paper under a stone during one of his walkabouts. He doesn’t want to see the future, he wants to shape it. The Scrolls are what *might* happen, what he *wants* to happen, not what *will*. Without the Fragment, Rassilon and the Consortium would not have been allowed to continue the time travel experiments, we’d have squandered the planet’s resources just trying to stay alive, rather than investing them.’

And it made sense, but it made the future an abyss.

She shrugged his hand from her shoulder, turned to face him. The little man didn’t speak for a moment. Finally, in that soft voice of his, he said, ‘There are many races across the universe who have never remembered the future.’

She shuddered. ‘It has been bad enough not knowing what would happen this last nine years. To be blind for ever... is that how you want to live?’

‘You would be surprised how easy they find ways to explain away what happens. They have many beliefs that

we would find strange. They talk of “cause and effect”, “quantum mechanics”, “prediction”. Mostly they put their trust in their gods. They believe that the gods can directly influence the mortal sphere, rewarding their followers, punishing the unbelievers. The laws of physics bend to the will of the gods. They call it “divine intervention”.’

She stared at him.

‘A curious notion,’ she said finally.

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘without it, we are forced to create our own miracles.’

He pointed back at the ships and she turned. The sun was behind her, and barely above the horizon. The shadows were long, matt black, beginning to flow together, like droplets of mercury. The ships hung above the ruined Capitol, inviolate. The gangways and docking tubes had withdrawn, the ground crews were retreating back to the safety of the Citadel. The singing had stopped some time ago.

Without further ceremony, the air filled with an unearthly wheezing, groaning sound and the massive ships faded away like memories. Then there was nothing there except the ruins of the Capitol, the shadows of the past, and a winter’s evening.

‘Shouldn’t you have been with your ship?’ she asked.

But he had gone.

Part One
Intervention

Chapter One

Night Beneath the Dome

He'd never seen the rain, but he'd heard it.

It clattered against the lead and concrete of the Dome, sloshed into the gutters and heaved its way along until it was sucked down the drainpipes or thrown from the spouts. Whenever it was raining there was a hiss that filled the air, and a pulsating, chaotic pattering. It sounded like an animal clawing away at the shell of a tortoise; edging around, testing defences, quickly withdrawing when it found any opposition. You could only hear the rain if you were this close to the Dome, and that meant that you had to be at the highest points of the Citadel, the parts in the East Towers where it reached right to the apex. In fact, here the masonry of the Citadel's roof formed the skin of the Dome, and some of the lofts and attics actually lay between the inner and outer layers of the Dome walls. Although the Time Lords had an infinite amount of energy at their disposal, these areas were kept dark, and weren't heated. Few people ventured this far from the splendour of the main chambers, only the occasional Technician and the semi-regular patrols of Watchmen. A few tafelshrews had lived here once, but they'd long since turned into fossils, and their descendants had probably scurried off, evolved into spacefarers and left Gallifrey altogether.

From time to time, Captain Raimor had wondered what rainfall looked like. He'd never been carried away by this curiosity, never been so moved as to venture to one of the derelict observation attics or to look up the subject in one of the Archive Libraries. He had never had the desire to

accompany one of the maintenance teams that - once a century or so - would go Outside, clambering up the side of the Dome to check the state of the tiles and guttering. Someone had told him once that rain was nothing more than falling droplets of water, and how interesting could they be?

The clock tower in the Old Harbour was tolling Four Point Five Bells, he could hear it even through the Citadel walls. It was the mid-point of the night, traditionally the time when the vampires and the other ghosts of dead immortals walked in the lands of the mortal men.

Over the sound of the rain he could hear footsteps.

'Who goes there?' Raimor intoned wearily.

'It is me, Peltroc,' an eager voice called out. Peltroc was a youngster, not even eighty years old. Raimor envied him his lined face and greying hair. Complications with his last regeneration meant that Raimor's physical form was a great deal younger in appearance than he would have liked. Most members of the Chancellery Watch wore younger bodies than the Gallifreyan norm, but Raimor's new body was barely past puberty. There were promising signs: a receding hairline, the first traces of worry lines developing on his forehead, but it would almost certainly be a century before he'd be comfortable with his appearance. The way you look shouldn't matter, but it did, and no one took him seriously any more. He was wondering whether he could fill the intervening decades before this body matured with a spell in Traffic Control.

Peltroc always joined him at this point. Those who weren't in the Watch might have questioned why it was that some sections of the weekly patrol required one Watchman, yet others required two or three. But each route had its own tradition, and tradition had served Gallifrey well. There had been the Watch long before there had been Time Lords, and there were ten million years' worth of history coded in the traditional routes. Some

reminded of great disasters: the storerooms of the Endless Library were searched every night, ensuring that there would never be another Biblioclasm. The chambers of the High and Supreme Councils were ritually sterilised before each session, even a quarter of a million years after the Blank Plague had been eradicated. Triumphs were remembered, too: ceremonial marches every month retraced the victory parades that had followed the wars against Rigel, Gosolus and the dozen or so other worlds that had launched attacks on Gallifrey since the time of Rassilon and Omega. Then there was the wreath-laying at the tombs, cenotaphs, memorials and monuments all around the Capitol, to remind that the present had not been built without casualties.

As they set off on their patrol Peltroc was full of his boyish enthusiasm, as ever. 'It's raining again.'

Raimor affected a surprised expression. 'Is it? I didn't notice.'

'It's rained a lot recently.'

Raimor saw a whole night of similar banter yawning in front of him. 'And what do you put that down to?' he asked dolefully.

Peltroc considered the question. 'Could be the aliens,' he offered. He wasn't rewarded with a reply, so he spent a couple of seconds refining the answer. 'It didn't rain so much before they came on the scene. Perhaps it's Rassilon's way of telling us to keep ourselves to ourselves, let them sort out their own problems.'

The boy wasn't right, Raimor knew that, but his theory certainly had its attractions.

'Rassilon's Rain,' he snorted. 'I like the thought of that. Just think, Peltroc, up there are two battlefleets, heading this way. A hundred warships on each side. It's madness. It's sure to lead to trouble. There's the paperwork more than anything else.'

'I heard that there's a fair few on the High Council that would agree with that. You talk to a Time Lord, he'll tell you that he's not happy.' Peltroc sniffed.

'The President used his casting vote, though. So the alien fleet will arrive at dawn.'

'But the aliens themselves won't be on Gallifrey until tomorrow night, will they?'

'Didn't you read the briefing? The aliens arrive at dusk. Nine Bells precisely. They'll spend the day before that in orbit sorting out some last-minute details.'

Raimor held up his lantern. The guard light probed the darkness, creeping into the nooks and crannies, but there was nothing there and the light quickly shuffled back into its cage. It was quiet here, and this part of the Capitol was always kept cooler than the occupied quarters. He knew every inch of it, and nothing ever changed, no one ever came here. Night after night he would go about this beat, pacing his way from the Watch quarters, through the Archives, to the edge of the Dome. He'd follow the dome around for three or four hundred yards, weaving through the honeycomb of cell-like rooms and long-deserted galleries until he found himself here. Then together with his partner they would trudge back to their dormitories.

Their wrist communicators chirped.

Peltroc was looking as shocked as Raimor felt.

They had never chirped before.

Raimor held it up, angling his wrist experimentally, wondering what do to next.

It chirped again, and a text message flashed across its face.

FOUR POINT SIX BELLS. BREAK-IN AT ARCHIVE CHAMBER FOUR ZERO THREE. INVESTIGATE AND ADVISE.

Raimor frowned.

'So what do we do?' Peltroc asked.

'Investigate and advise, I suppose.'

He had been past Archive Chamber 403 just a few minutes ago. Idly, as they made their way back there, Raimor wondered if he had managed to trip the alarm himself. Some of the security systems dated back to the Old Times, but whatever their pedigree, they were notoriously sensitive.

Notoriously erratic, too. As Raimor and Peltroc arrived at Chamber 403, they saw that at least one thing hadn't worked. Iron security shutters were meant to have slammed down when the alarm was activated, sealing the chamber until the guards arrived.

Raimor hesitated at the open archway into the chamber. He couldn't hear anything or anyone in there. He realised that he was resting his hand on the butt of his staser. It was a peculiar instinct, and - rather ashamed that Peltroc might notice - he withdrew it, placing his arm back at his side.

Peltroc stepped in first, and Raimor was happy to let him.

The room, like many in this part of the Capitol, was filled with dusty display cases and ancient lacquered cabinets. Raimor knew that this was part of the Citadel that dated back to the time of Rassilon. It was still possible to see that from the angle of the roof, the quality of the masonry, the shape of the room. The brickwork and panelling along one wall was recent, a partition perhaps only ten millennia old, but it couldn't hide the room's heritage: in former times this had been an open balcony which had overlooked the old starharbour. Since then this room must have been a hundred things, from the office of a high-ranking Ordinal to student lodgings. Nowadays no one ever came here, except the patrol.

Peltroc and Raimor crossed the room, light from their lanterns nervously scouting the way.

There was a giant stuffed bird in one case, trapped aloft in a suspensor field along with a millennium's worth of dust. It glared down at the two guards, three of its wings drawn back as if ready to lash out at them. A pile of oily cogwheels lay next to it - presumably they were discarded components of a giant clock mechanism. A battered wardrobe sat at an angle to the rest of the room. One corner was dominated by a vast suit of armour. A rusty plaque informed anyone who read it that it had once belonged to Tegorak, although the name meant nothing to Captain Raimor. Vast cupboards loomed along the walls, not giving away anything about their contents.

One of the clear-fronted cabinets lining the back wall had been disturbed. Glass lay in shards over the tiled floor. There had been a simple lock on the case, but the thief had bludgeoned it off. Raimor glanced around, and found the remains of the scanner alongside the brick that had been used to smash first it, then the glass. Rather a clumsy way to go about things.

Peltroc was occupying himself with the cabinet door, so Raimor began a quick search of the room.

Raimor grimaced. 'What's in there?'

Peltroc peered into the gloomy cupboard and shrugged. 'Just boxes. Nothing special.' He pulled out one of the caskets and waved it around by way of demonstration.

'Some mischief-makers from Low Town.'

'They don't usually come up this far.'

'There's not much farther up for them to go unless they fancy a stint walking around on the Dome.'

'Could be the aliens.'

Raimor nodded thoughtfully. 'Aliens might not realise that there's nothing important in this room. Either way, we need to report this. Remember? "Investigate and Advise". We've investigated.'

Peltroc held up the casket. 'Who do we advise about all this, then?'

Raimor looked around, as if the answer to the question might emerge from the gloom. 'This part of the building is owned by Prydon College. We need to tell a senior Prydonian.'

Peltroc grinned. '*He's* a Prydonian, isn't he?'

'He consorts with aliens, too. He practically *is* an alien. That settles it. Bring the box and the brick.'

The cloaked figure heard the two guards leaving the room, heard their footsteps receding.

Alone once again, he edged around the cabinet, found the hole he had made. He reached in, carefully, to avoid the jagged glass. His hands ran across the tops of the caskets, sitting in their rows, letters and numbers embossed on them.

The one casket he was looking for wasn't there.

His hand probed the gap on the shelf where it should have been.

He remembered the Watchman saying that he would take a casket with him.

'No,' he hissed. 'No!'

The red eyes were upon him, staring at him, not saying a word or needing to.

Raimor and Peltroc made their way to the elevators and down fifty storeys.

This time of night, the Citadel was virtually deserted. There were a couple of other patrols on duty, a handful of Time Lords in Temporal Monitoring and the night porters at the Colleges, but that was it. Tonight, they passed about half a dozen Time Lords. More than usual, probably preparing for the arrival of the aliens.

As a member of the High Council, *his* rooms were right at the heart of the Citadel. Although it was a little distance from the Council chambers, they had to cut across one of the galleries that overlooked the Panopticon to get there.

There was no chance of hearing the rain this far under the Dome.

Few Time Lords ever saw the public areas of the Citadel at night. The fountains still ran, there was still the ever-present humming of machinery, but the lighting was lower, shadows were cast from every transept and alcove. Everything became unfamiliar.

Perhaps the best example was the Panopticon itself, the enormous hexagonal hall that occupied the entire central area of the Citadel. During the day, even on a minor feast day like Harrenenmas, colourful banners would be waving from every column. The centre of the floor was inlaid with the omniscate, the Seal of Rassilon, an ancient, swirling, circular design that symbolised infinity and eternity. Far, far, beneath there was the Eye of Harmony, the black hole that the ancient Time Lords had harnessed. The power from that was infinite, to all intents and purposes, providing every erg of Gallifrey's energy, and plenty to spare. Around this focal point would be a couple of dozen Time Lords in their robes, along with their attendants and pupils. A choir might be singing, there would certainly be music or chanting of some kind. One group would be making an offering, there would be ten serious philosophical discussions underway and twice as many games of chess. By any right, the Gallifreyans should have been dwarfed by the architecture, but instead they filled the vast space. The Panopticon would be alive.

By night, the Panopticon was the largest tomb in the universe. Silence hung like cobwebs, the slightest scrape or clatter echoing guiltily around forever. The same places that seemed gay and airy at day seemed murky and stagnant by night. The floor, an expanse of marble large enough to land aircraft on, was the colour of bone. A vast statue of one of the Gallifreyan Founders stood in each corner of the Panopticon. At night they looked like giant

ghosts, frozen in time. Raimor found it difficult to walk past them without paying his respects.

Raimor always took a minute to stare down at the Panopticon at night. He could hear Peltroc shuffling impatiently at his side. The lad would have to wait.

A Time Lord in a violet robe was walking down the gallery, his head bowed. He almost collided with the two Watchmen.

'I'm sorry, my Lord,' they both muttered.

'I couldn't sleep,' the Time Lord said, almost apologetically. 'I say, Captain, there isn't anything the matter, is there?' The Time Lord automatically addressed Peltroc, because Peltroc looked the right age. Raimor recognised the man as Lord Wratfac, an expert on cosmic radiation who'd been lecturing at Patrex College since the decoupling era. He was probably taking a short cut on his way to one of the Infinity Chambers.

'Don't worry, my Lord, it's nothing we can't handle.'

Lord Wratfac had bushy eyebrows and a rasping voice. 'It's not something to do with the aliens, is it?'

'That's what we are trying to establish,' Raimor said.

'You're going to see *him*, are you? The troublemaker?'

'That's right, my Lord.'

'It's very late, he'll probably be asleep.' But before Raimor could respond, Wratfac gave a cackling laugh. He jabbed a finger into Raimor's chest. 'Serve the young fool right! Carry on the good work.' He walked off, still chuckling to himself.

* * *

A short walk later, they had reached their destination.

Raimor rapped at the door. There was no reply. He tapped his foot.

'His servant's a bit slow,' Raimor remarked.

‘Doesn’t have one,’ Peltroc sniffed. ‘Doesn’t believe in them.’

‘Doing some poor bloke out a job, then, isn’t he? Not that anyone would work for him.’

The door still hadn’t opened.

‘He’s asleep,’ Peltroc said. ‘We should leave our cards and wait till morning.’

‘We’ll do no such thing,’ Raimor replied stubbornly. ‘You heard what Old Ratface said.’

He knocked again. This time, the door unbolted itself.

Warily, trying to show the appropriate respect, they stepped into the anteroom. The door closed itself behind them. They made their way through into the main part of the lodgings, all too conscious of their boots squeaking against the varnished floor. It was a rare privilege for ordinary Gallifreyans to be allowed into the chambers of a Council member. In nine centuries’ service, Captain Raimor had only been in such a place three times. From the look on Peltroc’s face, this was the first time he’d had such an honour, but it was clear that he had been expecting something elaborate: peristyles and fountains. But this room was only a little larger than a guard’s berth. All six walls were lined with bookcases, making it seem even smaller. A staircase led up to the upper level.

Raimor stepped past a large wooden globe. He didn’t recognise the planet it represented, and the globe itself looked like the product of a non-Gallifreyan civilisation. It was typical of this particular Councillor that he would have a map of an alien planet as such a prominent feature of his room. An odd world, too, with the landmasses broken up into colourful jigsaw pieces.

‘He’s not here,’ Raimor snorted, careful not to raise his voice. He turned back to his companion. ‘Look at this place. It’s all wrong.’

Peltroc was examining himself in an ornately framed mirror. ‘How do you mean, Captain?’

Raimor fished for the right words. 'A room like this... it should strive for *mathematical simplicity*.'

Peltroc frowned at his own reflection. 'I never got the hang of maths,' he said softly. 'All that adding and subtracting. Never got the hang of it. Maths is anything but simple in my book.'

'What it means,' Raimor sighed, 'is that a room such as this should have clean, straight lines. It should look like it was designed by a computer. If there absolutely has to be a curve it ought to be a parabola, or an arc. There's no excuse whatsoever for *colour*. This room is gloomy, it's cluttered.'

'I see what you mean now,' Peltroc whispered. He'd turned his attention away from the mirror and towards the shelves. 'Does this bloke really need so many books?'

'I'd remind you, son, that this "bloke", whatever we might think of him, is still a member of the High Council. Show some respect.'

To his credit, Peltroc straightened. 'Sir.'

There was a large fireplace on one wall, the light from it filled half the room. Two pictures in heavy frames hung above the mantel. The smaller painting was of a couple: the man was powerfully built with rugged features, a weathered face with dark eyes; the woman was a redhead, a little plump. Pride of place, though, was a large informal portrait of a beautiful lady with short black hair and a straight golden gown. Her shoulders were bare, she wore a necklace with a blue gem pendant and held a scroll in her hand. Facing the fire - and the pictures - was a large, high-backed chair.

'Who?' Peltroc grunted, gazing across at the pictures.

Raimor nudged Peltroc and indicated the chair. 'Never mind that,' he whispered. 'I think we've tracked him down.'

Raimor stepped across the room and over to the fireside. It was warmer over here, comfortable. Next to the chair was an occasional table. On it rested a wooden tray, and on

that was a neatly arranged collection of silver jugs and pots. There were also three bone china cups.

'My Lord?' Raimor asked, bending over the chair. A rather bemused grey cat stared up at him. It blinked and stretched, in a calculated effort to appear unconcerned, even bored, with the guard.

A second later Raimor was upright again.

'He's not here.'

At the other end of the room, Peltroc tried to help by checking behind a tapestry, but all he found was the alcove containing the food machine. Tutting to himself, Raimor turned his attention back to the table. Steam was rising from the spout of the tallest jug. He could only have been gone a moment or so.

'Good evening, gentlemen. How can I help you?'

Raimor started, and turned.

He was standing between them, square in the middle of the room. He wore a thick cotton night-gown. His long face was oval, with an aristocratic nose and a full mouth. He had a high forehead, emphasised by his close-cropped hair. He had sad blue eyes, and he was clutching an old book.

The Doctor.

'Sorry to wake you, sir.'

The Doctor was staring at him as he walked over. Raimor could almost feel him looking into his soul, but all the old Watchman could think was that the Doctor wasn't as tall as he looked. He stopped inches away from Raimor.

Then he smiled. 'No, no, no, you didn't disturb me. I was finding it difficult to sleep. I was just reading. The *Iliad*. Have you ever read it?'

'No, sir.' Peltroc had made his way to Raimor's side.

'You should, you should.' An wave of realisation passed over his face. 'Here,' he said, pressing the book into the Captain's hand. 'Take it. I've not finished it, but I can work out how it ends. And take a seat. Shoo, Wycliff.'

The Doctor carefully placed the cat in his box and took his place in the chair. As it dragged itself around to face the room rather than the fire, the Captain made a show of examining his gift. This edition was recent, perhaps a millennia old. From the crest on the spine it was clear that it had been commissioned by one of the minor college libraries. If he had been addressing anyone other than a member of the High Council, the Captain might well have asked how it had ended up in private hands. Instead he merely thanked the Doctor.

'It's Captain Raimor and Constable Peltroc, isn't it?' the Doctor asked softly. Peltroc had found a rather rickety wooden chair, and it quickly transpired that this was the only other seat. Raimor declined the Doctor's suggestion that he sit on the rocking horse, choosing to remain standing.

'Tea?' the Doctor offered.

The two Watchmen nodded, although neither was sure what they had just been asked. As they took their places, the Doctor leant over the table, selecting the smaller of the two jugs. Deftly he splashed a little white liquid - nothing more exotic than milk, by the look of it - into each china cup. Pausing to smile up at his guests, he replaced the small jug with the larger one, filling each cup almost to the brim. Finally, he took a spoon and swirled the contents of each cup in turn. The operation complete, the Doctor passed a cup over to both of the guards, taking the third for himself.

Raimor took his cup, and almost immediately he'd managed to slop a little of the drink into the saucer. The liquid was brown, grey vapour was drifting up from it. Raimor sniffed it and took a swig. It was bitter, almost acidic, but that was counterpointed by the milk. Probably a plant extract of some kind. Pleasant enough.

'A display cabinet was smashed open in the Archives,' he explained. 'We don't know why.'

The Doctor sipped at his tea. 'Who says there has to be a reason?'

'Well, sir, that's what we thought: it was probably just vandals.'

The Doctor smiled. 'You misunderstand me.' He pointed at the pocket watch that nestled between the teapot and milk jug. 'How did that get there?'

Raimor hadn't noticed the watch on the table before. 'You must have just put it there,' he concluded.

'Must I?'

'It doesn't have to have been you,' Peltroc offered. 'It could have been someone else.'

'Why?'

'Things don't just happen,' Peltroc explained. 'If I find a coin in the street, then that's because someone has dropped it.'

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. 'And that's the only possible explanation?'

Peltroc screwed his face up. 'The owner of the coin... might... have put it there deliberately.'

'But this watch wasn't here a moment ago, and now it is.' He paused. 'What if there were two watches?'

The Doctor glanced down, and feigned amazement at the two identical watches he saw there. 'Two watches. Or perhaps the same watch, twice over. Time and space are elegantly inter-related, you know. Time is relative, as they say.'

'A trick, my Lord,' Raimor said, a little impatiently. 'You are trying to make a philosophical point, sir, using the watch.'

The Doctor grinned. 'And now both the watches have vanished, anyway.'

'My Lord, if we could return to the crime.'

'What has it got to do with me?' The Doctor scowled. His face fell. 'I'm not a suspect, am I, Captain?'

Raimor chuckled politely. 'No, sir. The room is owned by the Prydonian College and as the most senior member of the chapter -'

'Apart from the Magistrate,' the Doctor pointed out.

'Well, yes, sir...'

'We thought it might be the aliens, my Lord,' Peltroc stammered from his seat.

The Doctor cocked his head to one side. 'Why do you think that?'

'No Gallifreyan would do that sort of thing.'

'But the aliens don't actually arrive here until tomorrow night, do they?'

The two guards looked at each other. That hadn't occurred to them.

'They did it with this brick,' Peltroc said helpfully, holding out the offending article.

The Doctor smiled forgivingly as he examined it. 'I don't suppose you brought the lock up?'

'Er, no, sir.'

'What sort of lock was it?'

'Retinal.'

The Doctor pursed his lips. 'Why smash it open? They are straightforward enough to bypass.'

'If you've got Gallifreyan eyes,' Peltroc murmured to himself.

'Even if you haven't, it's still quite easy,' the Doctor assured him.

Raimor continued his story. 'The alarm went off, but the iron shutters and bell were both jammed somehow.'

'It would only take a couple of blocks of wood and a cushion or two,' the Doctor mused to himself. 'Was it the nearest cabinet to the door?'

Raimor tried to remember. 'No, there was a stuffed bird and... the smashed cabinet was right at the back of the room.'

The Doctor smiled. 'So what was taken?'

'Taken?' they said simultaneously.

'We don't think anything was taken,' Peltroc explained. 'Just vandalised.'

The Doctor rolled his eyes. 'Someone walked into a room, disabled the alarm, walked up to the back wall, smashed off a lock and broke into a single case, leaving everything else intact. Hardly the actions of a mindless vandal.' He narrowed his eyes. 'Although he's clever, he's not very well informed. He managed to pick the only day of the week that your patrol is up there. He's lucky you didn't walk straight in on him.'

'We don't know if anything was stolen, sir,' Peltroc piped up. 'You might be able to tell us.'

'Me? Which chamber was it?'

'403.'

The Doctor pursed his lips and shook his head. 'Off the beaten path. Despite that, I don't ever recall going there. Not for centuries, anyway.'

'I brought you this casket,' Peltroc said smugly. 'It came from the cabinet.'

The Doctor eagerly set about opening it and examining the contents.

'There wasn't anything special in there,' Raimor observed.

'Well no. If there had been anything special in there it wouldn't have been in there, would it? Now, the key to the mystery must be in here somewhere.' The Doctor opened the box, fished out what he found, laying everything on the table beside him. 'Interspatial protractors. The last time I saw one of these was at school.' He turned one over and over in his hand, rotating it through its five dimensions. Next he found a couple of translucent discs.

'Are those data cards?' Raimor asked.

'Yes,' the Doctor sighed. 'But you can tell just by looking at them that they've been corrupted for centuries. Only a

hard burst of radiation could do that. Which means they were wiped *before* they were put away in this box.'

Right at the bottom of the casket was the hilt of a knife.

'Careful with that,' Raimor warned.

'What is it?' the Doctor asked. Peltroc looked equally blank.

'A force knife. Works on the same principle as a forcefield, creates a blade.'

The Doctor flicked it on. The blade shimmered into existence, solid as metal. The Doctor examined it. 'Why not just use a proper knife?'

'Try it,' Raimor suggested.

The Doctor weighed the knife in his hand and then stabbed it down at the table. He was clearly surprised when it went straight through the tray and the tabletop. It had slid through the silver and wood as if they weren't there, right up to the hilt. Now it looked as though it had always been there, and no force in the galaxy could remove it.

'That's a sharp knife,' Peltroc observed.

'The blade can be anything from a quark to a metre long. It adjusts itself so it can cut through anything, even at the molecular level. If you've got a death wish, you can split an atom with it. It was designed as an all-purpose tool.'

The Doctor glanced down at it. 'I'll stick with the sonic screwdriver, I think. It's more my style.'

He rummaged around in the box for a minute, producing a bunch of keys, a handful of treazants and a couple of cracked exitonic circuits before he looked up sadly. 'It's all junk. Nothing valuable. There's no reason why we couldn't have just thrown it all out millennia ago. There are no clues here. I...' his voice tailed off, as he had just found a slip of paper, one that was brown with age and folded in half.

There was a single word on the paper, hand-written, in capitals.