



BBC
**DOCTOR
WHO**

SHAKEDOWN

TERRANCE DICKS

Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also in the Series

Title Page

Dedication

Introduction

Prologue

Book One: Beginnings

Chapter 1: Ripper

Chapter 2: Chief

Chapter 3: Sentarion

Chapter 4: Blasphemer

Chapter 5: Meetings

Chapter 6: Trackdown

Chapter 7: Slaughter

Chapter 8: Discovery

Chapter 9: Crisis

Chapter 10: Takeover

Book Two: Shakedown

Chapter 11: Attack

Chapter 12: Prisoners

Chapter 13: Deal

Chapter 14: The Hunt

Chapter 15: Showdown

Book Three: Aftermath

Chapter 16: Breakout

Chapter 17: Flight

Chapter 18: Revival

Chapter 19: Sanctuary

Chapter 20: Revelation

Chapter 21: Assault
Chapter 22: Payback

Copyright

About the Book

For thousands of years the Sontarans and the Rutans have fought a brutal war across the galaxy. Now the Sontarans have a secret plan to destroy the Rutan race - a secret plan the Doctor is racing against time to uncover.

Only one Rutan spy knows the Sontarans' plan. As he is chased through the galaxy in a desperate bid for his life, he reaches the planet Sentarion - where Professor Bernice Summerfield's research into the history of the Sontaran - Rutan war is turning into an explosive reality....

An adventure featuring the Seventh Doctor as played by Sylvester McCoy.

About the Author

Terrance Dicks worked on scripts for *The Avengers* as well as other series before becoming Assistant and later full Script Editor of *Doctor Who* from 1968. Dicks worked on the entirety of the Jon Pertwee Third Doctor era of the programme, and then turned to writing for the show, scripting Tom Baker's first story as the Fourth Doctor. Terrance has written many original *Doctor Who* novels for BBC Books.

The Doctor Who Monster Collection

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Shakedown
Terrance Dicks

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BBC

DOCTOR
WHO

SHAKEDOWN

TERRANCE DICKS

BBC
BOOKS

To:

*Gary Leigh, Mark Ayres, Jason Haigh-Ellery
and Kevin Davies*

*Jan Chappell, Brian Croucher,
Carole Anne Ford, Sophie Aldred,
Rory O'Donnell, Toby Aspin, Tom Finnis
and
Michael Wisher,
Dave Hicks, Helly McGrother, Paige Bell
and
Ian Scoones*

*and to everyone who worked so incredibly hard in making
Shakedown - The Return of the Sontarans*

*'The merely difficult we do at once -
the impossible takes a little longer!'*

INTRODUCTION

I was very pleased to be asked to write an introduction to *Shakedown*, if only because *Shakedown* is a very unusual *Doctor Who* book.

Way back in the 1990s, I was approached by a group of *Doctor Who* fans with a mad scheme. You'll find them all credited in the lengthy dedication. They'd somehow got hold of the copyright to make use of the Sontarans - the brutal, potato-headed alien warriors from my time on *Who*. The Sontarans, or rather just a single Sontaran, first appeared in Bob Holmes's *The Time Warrior*, which was also Liz Sladen's first show.

These fans' mad scheme was to make and market a 50-minute video. Not a *Doctor Who* video, of course. They'd only got the rights to the alien monsters, the Sontarans - and heaven forbid they should infringe the BBC's sacred *Doctor Who* copyright. But, let's say, a *Who*-type video. They'd even got a basic plot idea - a space yacht on its shakedown cruise is taken over by the Sontarans for their own no doubt evil purposes.

That was all they'd got - Sontarans and the nub of a story. They wanted me to provide the rest and write the script.

Now it was, as I've said, a mad scheme. In my days on *Who*, we were always short of two things - Time and Money. This lot had even less of both. Their budget was totally inadequate, I had about two weeks to write the script, and the fee offered was a fraction of the television norm. Moreover, I had plenty of other work on hand.

The only sensible thing would have been to turn the whole thing down. But they were a likeable, enthusiastic bunch, particularly the proposed director, Kevin Davies, and the whole thing looked like fun. I found myself saying yes.

In the following weeks, we all worked like lunatics – well, I said it was a mad scheme. Somehow I delivered the script, and the show was eventually filmed on HMS *Belfast* – parts of which were disguised as the *Shakedown* space yacht, *Tiger Moth*. This time nobody could say the sets wobbled – the walls were made of three-foot thick steel! However, we hadn't realised that if moored battleships don't wobble they do bob up and down, and shooting was often delayed by various marine noises.

But we, or rather they, Kev and the others, did it! Thanks to a stalwart crew and a brilliant cast – including Jan Chappell, Brian Croucher, and old *Who* hands Michael Wisher, Carole Ann Ford and Sophie Aldred. Even the two leading Sontarans were real characters!

The show was eventually edited and sent out into the world – where it did amazingly well. There were good reviews, good sales and eventually, to my amazement, I received some modest royalties.

So much for *Shakedown* the video. What about the book? Don't worry, I'm coming to it...

Some time later – I really can't remember how long – I got a call from my editor at Virgin Books, then publishers of original *Doctor Who* novels. (By this time all the available *Doctor Who* scripts had been novelised, mostly by me!)

'We've seen *Shakedown*,' she said. 'It's very good. We want you to turn it into a *Doctor Who* novel.'

Now, I had then – still have, for that matter – the freelance mentality: never turn down a job.

'OK, fine,' I said. Then something struck me. 'There is one minor problem...'

'What?'

‘The Doctor isn’t in it!’

‘So put him in it,’ she said briskly and put down the phone.

So now I had a job – and a problem.

I could, I supposed, rewrite *Shakedown* and make the Doctor a major protagonist. But it would be a hell of a job. And, I realised, I didn’t really want to do it. I liked *Shakedown* as it was – a good tight little story that worked well in its own terms.

So I had to come up with a cunning plan. If *Shakedown* was to stay unchanged, the Doctor couldn’t be on the space yacht, not at this point. But if he, like the Sontarans, was in pursuit of a Rutan spy with a tremendous secret – don’t worry, it’s all explained in the book – he could be desperately trying to board *Tiger Moth* – and just miss it! Then, since he knew its supposed destination, he could try to meet it on arrival...

So far, so good.

First, I did a straightforward novelisation of *Shakedown* – a pleasant and not unfamiliar exercise. Then I had to come up with the before and after sections.

Quite a lot more has to happen.

Kurt, tough ex-smuggler hero of *Shakedown*, meets the Doctor at a moment of supreme danger. Roz Forrester and Chris Cwej, two of the Doctor’s companions at that stage in the universe of *Doctor Who* novels, pursue the shape-shifting, serial-killing Rutan spy through corrupt Megacity. (They encounter one of my favourites amongst my own characters, Garshak the suave, sophisticated Ogron.) They are reunited with the Doctor – just too late to board *Tiger Moth*. And Bernice Summerfield – the Doctor’s other prose companion – pursues dangerous investigations on the Academic planet Sentarion.

It’s all in the book! I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

And it all started with *Shakedown* - a little group of
Doctor Who fans with an impossible dream...

Terrance Dicks
October 2013

PROLOGUE

Kurt was on the run.

He'd shaken off the customs-guards over by the landing bays. Now, almost invisible in black coveralls, he was slipping through the shadows, keeping to the darkness at the edge of the field.

The spaceport, such as it was, consisted of a flattened rock-plain, bordered by a high perimeter fence of rusting razor-wire. A group of low stone buildings huddled together at its centre. By night it was a bleak, unfriendly place. Black clouds obscured the planet's twin moons, and a cold wind howled between straggling rows of grounded space-freighters.

Kurt had been unlucky this trip, caught with a faked cargo manifest and a hold full of forbidden jekkarta weed. The newly colonised frontier planet was largely agricultural, and the ever-spreading jekkarta plant had long been the bane of its farmers.

Then some enterprising visitor discovered that, dried and smoked, jekkarta was a mild euphoric with almost no side-effects. The back-country farmers were astonished at the amount that off-planet traders would pay in good credits for the weeds they'd been raking out and burning at every harvest.

It surprised the Colony government too - but they soon recovered, slapped a massive duty on jekkarta weed and limited its export. Prices rose, the government, not the farmers, grew rich, and the smugglers moved in.

Most of them were small-timers, landing battered space-hoppers in remote valleys, doing petty, low-budget deals

with nervous farmers. Kurt liked to operate with a little more class. He'd chartered an ancient but perfectly legitimate space-freighter and purchased a cargo of lenta, the tasteless but nutritious green bean that was the planet's main export.

With the help of a network of bribed spaceport loaders and officials, the cargo of lenta had magically become dried jekkarta - thousands of kilos of it, flown out under the nose of the customs, to a ready market on any one of a hundred planets.

At least, that was how it was supposed to be. The scam had already worked perfectly twice. This third and last cargo would fetch millions of credits - enough to bring Kurt the respectable trader's life he always claimed to crave.

Then it had all gone wrong. Just before blast-off an electrical fire in the power-room had spread to the cargo-hold. The thick, pungent smoke drifting out from the ship had produced some of the happiest cargo-loaders in the planet's history. An over-observant, and over-honest, young customs officer had done the rest.

Kurt wasn't too worried. He was heading for a service-gate in the perimeter fence, left open by a friendly, well-bribed cargo-loader. The profits from the first two trips were safely banked in a coded account on Algol III - except for a substantial slice in the money-belt beneath his coveralls. He'd lie low for a few days in the back-alleys of Port City. It was pretty much of a hell-hole, but anywhere was tolerable with enough credits and he could do with a rest. Then he'd buy a new identity and a passage off-planet. If things calmed down enough, he might even manage to bribe his freighter and his cargo free again.

At least, that was how it was supposed to be. But as Kurt headed for the gate and freedom, disaster dropped out of the sky.

With a roar of retro-rockets a shuttle craft landed directly ahead of him. With astonishing speed a door opened, a

ramp slid down and squat figures in space armour descended and fanned out. To his amazement, Kurt saw that other craft were landing all over the field, each one spewing out its quota of stocky figures, all armed with a variety of unpleasant-looking weapons.

Whatever was happening, Kurt decided, he wanted no part of it. But he had hesitated too long. A beam of light caught and held him and a voice blared, 'Stop! Do not move or you will be killed.'

Wearily Kurt held up his hands. 'All right, all right, no need to get nasty. Go ahead with your invasion, it's nothing to do with me. I don't even live here. I'm just a peaceful off-planet trader on his way home to bed.'

'You are our prisoner,' said the guttural voice. 'You will come with us.'

Kurt lay on the cell's hard wooden bunk for what felt like for ever, listening to the confused sounds drifting in from outside. There were a few shouts, the odd crackle of blaster-fire, occasionally the boom of some heavy weapon. Then silence.

The bit of the invasion he'd actually witnessed had been carried out with ruthless military efficiency. The Colony militia wouldn't stand up to that sort of thing for very long. By now, guessed Kurt, the invaders must have taken over the spaceport, and presumably most of the planet as well. As far as Kurt was concerned they were welcome to it. He just wanted to establish his status as not-so-innocent bystander and clear out. After a while he drifted into sleep.

When he awoke it was morning and he had company.

A smallish man in a crumpled white suit and a battered hat was perched on the end of the bunk.

'Morning,' said the newcomer politely.

Kurt grunted. 'Is it?'

'Not at your best before breakfast?' said the little man sympathetically. 'I know how you feel. Never mind, I'm sure

it's on the way. Coffee, toast and marmalade, bacon and eggs and a spot of kedgeree and you'll feel a new man.'

Kurt rose and stretched. 'What do you think this is, the Intergalactic Hilton? We'll be lucky if they feed us at all.'

'Surely we get the traditional hearty breakfast?'

'Traditional for who?'

'Condemned men?'

There was a clanking in the corridor outside the cell and the door was unlocked from outside. An armed guard pulled open the door and stepped aside. An enormous anthropoid creature entered, stooping to get through the entrance. It was carrying an iron bucket in each hand. The left-hand bucket was filled with green sludge from which projected the handle of a ladle. The right-hand one held wooden bowls and wooden spoons.

Kurt studied the creature with mild interest. He'd never seen one so close before. It was a Jekkari, the native species of the planet. The Jekkari lived in the forests that covered most of the planet's surface - the forests the colonists were clearing for their crops. Most of the dispossessed Jekkari simply retreated into the forests. Some, however, seemed fascinated by the colonists, hanging around their farms and camps.

The colonists had shot quite a few of them before realising they were completely harmless. Now they used them as low-grade servants. The tame Jekkari were incredibly strong, and they could easily be trained to perform simple tasks. Best of all they worked for nothing.

The creature set the buckets on the floor, took two empty bowls from the right-hand bucket and put two wooden spoons beside them. It used the ladle from the left-hand bucket to fill the two bowls with sludge. All the while it was looking at Kurt's companion, a strange intensity in its great dark eyes.

To Kurt's astonishment, the little man reached out and took the Jekkari's giant hand. His fingers drummed on the

black and velvety palm in a complex tattoo.

The guard appeared in the doorway. 'C'mon, hurry it up, boy.'

The Doctor had already released the Jekkari's hand. It picked up the buckets and left the cell.

'Eat hearty,' said the guard. 'Trial's starting before very long.' He turned to go.

'Hey, listen,' yelled Kurt. 'What the hell's going on? How can you have a trial in the middle of an invasion?'

'Invasion's over,' said the guard. 'We've gotta new government, very keen on law and order. They'll sort you two out all right.' He slammed the cell door and locked it.

Kurt looked curiously at his companion. 'What was all that business—'

The little man shook his head, putting a finger to his lips.

Kurt shrugged, and picked up his bowl of sludge and his wooden spoon. He sipped the sludge. 'Lenta stew. Contains all the elements of nutrition necessary for health - so they say.'

His companion did the same and shuddered. 'And absolutely none of the ones necessary for pleasure.'

'You get used to it,' said Kurt indifferently. 'Cheap, nutritious, with a mild sedative effect. Standard fare in a lot of jails.'

'You seem to know all about it.'

'I've been in a lot of jails.' Kurt looked after the departed guard. 'That guy must have changed sides pretty quickly.'

'If you spend your life locking people up, I don't suppose it matters too much who you're locking them up for. Besides, the Sontarans have very efficient methods of recruiting local help.'

'Such as?'

'You work for them or they kill you.'

'Who did you say they were?'

'The Sontarans. Best summed up by the philosopher Hobbes's description of the Life of Man - nasty, brutish and

short. They're an intensely militaristic species - they live for war. They reproduce by cloning, a million warriors at a time.'

Kurt remembered the stocky armoured figures, swarming out of their battlecraft and spreading out with deadly efficiency.

'You'd think the galaxy would be overrun with them.'

'They're tied up in a war with their old enemies the Rutans.'

'So what do the Sontarans want with this planet?'

'I rather think they must be setting up a *cordon sanitaire* around their home world.'

'A what?'

'A protective zone. If they're attacked they'll fight the war here, and on other planets like it. The planets in the zone will be devastated but the home world will stay secure.'

Kurt nodded, absorbing the information.

After a moment his companion went on, 'I don't want to pry, but what brings you to this delightful spot?'

'I'm a smuggler,' said Kurt cheerfully. He explained about the ill-fated cargo of jekkarta weed. 'And you?'

'Just a wandering scholar, interested in other life-forms. I'd been out in the forests, living with the Jekkari. When I came back to Port City, the planet had changed hands.'

'You were *living* with the Jekkari?'

The other nodded.

'But they're just animals - apes,' protested Kurt. 'They don't even talk.'

'Silence doesn't always imply stupidity, you know,' said his companion sharply. 'Sometimes just the opposite. The Jekkari live in houses in the trees, whole villages of them. They're vegetarians, they don't like killing and they hate machines. They have an excellent civilisation of their own, one that suits them, and suits the planet. Or at least, they used to—'

‘— until the colonists came,’ said Kurt. ‘And now the Sontarans. Looks like your Jekkari have had it, one way or another.’

‘Not necessarily,’ said the little man mysteriously. ‘Sometimes two wrongs can add up to a right.’

Kurt gave him a baffled look. ‘OK, so you’ve been living up a tree with the Jekkari. How come you ended up in jail?’

‘According to the Sontarans, I’m a spy.’

‘And are you?’

‘Who, me? Do I look like a spy? I’m a simple scholar, spending my life in the search for knowledge.’

‘Sure you are. And I’m a humble trader, in search of an honest credit. Nothing like getting your story straight.’

They came for Kurt and his companion shortly afterwards, a human guard backed up by two Sontaran troopers. They were marched across the landing-field to the central administration buildings.

Apart from the one wrecked outbuilding and a toppled space-freighter there were few signs of battle. Kurt saw his own freighter, still unharmed, at the edge of the field. Unharmed, and, presumably, still fully loaded.

Kurt shook his head, thinking sadly about wasted profits. If the Sontarans had invaded a day later, they could have had the planet and welcome to it.

The spaceport’s main conference room had been transformed into a court. A flag, presumably that of the Sontaran Empire, was draped over the rear wall, flanked by two Sontaran troopers.

A table stood before the flag with an empty chair behind it. Kurt and his companion were taken to a spot directly in front of the table and left to wait. A huddle of spaceport officials stood under guard at the back of the room.

After what seemed a very long time, the door behind the table opened and a Sontaran came through it. The

Sontaran guards stiffened in salute, arms across their chests.

The Sontaran officer walked to the chair and sat down. He removed his helmet, placing it on the table beside him.

For the first time, Kurt looked into the face of a Sontaran. It was a moment he was never to forget.

The Sontaran's huge round head seemed to emerge directly from the massive shoulders. The hairless, strangely ridged skull was covered with leathery greenish-brown skin. The nose was a pig-like snout, the cruel mouth long and lipless. But the worst thing of all was the eyes. Small and red, they glowered out from beneath bony ridges, like savage fires burning deep in a cave.

Kurt had seen many aliens in his time, and done business with most kinds. He had traded smuggled goods with everything from arachnoids to octopods. He liked to say any conceivable body shape, any assortment of eyes, claws and limbs, was fine by him - as long as the credit rating was sound...

But never before had he met an alien life-form that conveyed such an immediate chill of fear. It was a primitive, atavistic sensation, and suddenly Kurt realised its origin.

Kurt had grown up in the back-alleys of his native planet's Port City. He had been brought up, more or less, by a kind-hearted, slatternly woman who kept a back-street tavern. At bedtime she had told him gruesome fairy-tales from a score of planets.

The Sontaran, Kurt realised, came straight out of his childhood nightmares. It was the monster in the woods, in the cupboard, under the bed. It was the bogeyman that would get you if you were a bad boy.

Kurt had been a very bad boy indeed in his time. Now the bogeyman had got him.

The Sontaran raised his burning gaze and stared into Kurt's face. 'I am Commander Steg, commander of the

Sontaran Expeditionary Force, currently in charge of this newly constituted Sontaran outpost. First case.'

The voice was harsh and guttural.

A white-faced spaceport official came reluctantly forward. 'Who are you?' barked Steg.

'I am the Prosecuting Officer of the Jekkar Spaceport Authority.'

'Continue.'

'This man is known only as Kurt. He has a long criminal record and is a known smuggler and arms runner. He has also been accused of space-piracy, although charges were never proved—'

Steg cut across him. 'His criminal past does not concern me. What crimes has he committed *here*, on Sontaran territory?'

'He was caught attempting to smuggle jekkarta weed immediately before your - arrival.'

In a trembling voice, the official gave details of Kurt's offences against Colony law. They were many and complicated.

Steg listened impassively. He considered for a moment or two.

'Guilty!'

'Now hang on a minute!' shouted Kurt.

The Sontaran trooper raised his blaster.

Commander Steg held up his hand. 'Sontaran justice is renowned galaxy-wide. The prisoner may speak.'

'Ah, well,' said Kurt, rubbing his stubble of beard and struggling to rally his thoughts. Then, as so often in a crisis, his mind went into overdrive and inspiration came.

'Even if I did commit this smuggling offence - and I'm not saying I did, mind you - what do you Sontarans care? What's it got to do with you?'

Commander Steg frowned. 'That is your defence?'

'Yes, it is,' said Kurt defiantly. 'The crime - the alleged crime - took place when this planet was an Earth colony. It

is now a Sontaran outpost. Do the Sontarans have any laws concerning the export of jekkarta weed? I very much doubt it.' He folded his arms triumphantly. 'I rest my case!'

The Sontaran's thin lips twitched in what might almost have been a smile. 'Ingenious. Most ingenious. However, it is the policy of the glorious Sontaran Empire to uphold the laws of such territories as it may acquire - except when such laws conflict with the guiding principles of the Sontaran military code.'

'Which are?'

'Anything not expressly permitted is forbidden.' Steg slammed a three-digit hand down on the table. 'The prisoner is found guilty. He will be shot at dawn.'

'Shot for smuggling?' Kurt was outraged. 'I thought you were committed to upholding Colony laws.'

'That is so.'

'Well, the most they'd have given me for smuggling is a fine. How can you justify the death penalty?'

'It is quite simple,' said Steg patiently. 'You were found guilty under Colony law, but you will be punished under the Sontaran Military Code, where the death sentence is mandatory.'

'For *smuggling*?'

'For everything. Next case.'

Kurt was dragged back and the other prisoner shoved forward.

This time a Sontaran officer came forward to give evidence.

'The accused, who gives his name as Smith, was found without permission on Sontaran territory. He is charged with spying.'

Steg nodded. 'Has the prisoner Smith anything to say?'

'I most certainly have,' said the prisoner Smith indignantly. 'I am a harmless and innocent scholar, studying the native life-forms. When I left Port City this planet was an Earth Colony.'

'When you returned it was Sontaran territory,' Steg pointed out. 'Since you are undoubtedly here, you are undoubtedly, technically speaking, a spy.' His hand slammed the table once more. 'Guilty. To be shot at dawn.'

The prisoner Smith was also inclined to protest. 'That's outrageous! What am I supposed to have been spying on? There's nothing of interest on this planet but anthropoids in trees!'

'They are now Sontaran anthropoids in Sontaran trees,' explained Commander Steg. 'Everything inside Sontaran territory is automatically classified as top secret.'

'But they weren't Sontaran anthropoids when I was studying them. Nor are they now. The Jekkari are a free people.'

'Not any longer,' said Commander Steg. He rose and studied the two prisoners. 'You may consider your sentences harsh. In a sense, they are. But that is for a very good reason.'

'That's nice to know,' said Kurt, who reckoned he had nothing to lose. 'Are we allowed to know what it is?'

'This planet is now a Sontaran military outpost. Its laws must be scrupulously obeyed. Your deaths will serve as an immediate and dramatic example to others. Insignificant as you are, you give your lives for the glorious Sontaran Empire. I trust you appreciate the privilege.'

'It's a great consolation,' said the prisoner Smith politely.

'Puts the whole thing in an entirely new light,' said Kurt.

Commander Steg turned and stalked from the room. Two troopers hustled Kurt and the prisoner called Smith away.

As they crossed the landing field they passed close to a couple of Jekkari, who were clearing rubble from the wrecked building under the supervision of a colony guard.

Smith stumbled and fell against the nearest Jekkari. As he gripped a massive hairy arm to save himself, Kurt saw his nimble fingers beating a swift tattoo. One of the troopers dragged Smith free and shoved him onwards.

Back in their cell, Kurt marched up and down cursing the Sontarans and all their works. 'Pot-bellied, potato-headed, murderers. Call that justice!'

Smith perched cross-legged on the bunk, listening with mild amusement. 'You should be grateful for at least one Sontaran characteristic.'

'Which is?'

'Their strong sense of military tradition. For some reason prisoners are always shot at dawn. If they ever sentenced people to be shot at tea-time we'd be in trouble.'

'You mean we're not?' said Kurt bitterly. 'I must say, Smith, you're taking all this very calmly.'

'Not so much of the Smith, if you don't mind,' said the little man with dignity. 'I'll have you know you are in the presence of General Smith of the Jekkari Liberation Army.'

Kurt gaped at him.

Smith leaned forward. 'I originally came to this planet because I didn't like the way the colonists were treating the Jekkari. I didn't bargain for the Sontaran invasion, though. Maybe I can kill two oppressors with one revolution.'

'Those Jekkari,' said Kurt slowly. 'All that tapping business... You were communicating with them.'

Smith nodded. 'The Jekkari don't speak because they have no vocal cords. They communicate by a very complex system of signing.'

'But if the Jekkari are as intelligent as you say - why do they hang round doing dirty jobs for the colonists...' Kurt saw the answer as soon as he asked the question. 'Yes, of course...'

'That's right,' said Smith. 'Intelligence agents. Spies if you like. It cost them quite a few lives at first, but as soon as the colonists became convinced they were dim and harmless, the Jekkari could come and go as they liked. They were studying the colonists to discover their weaknesses. They completely fooled the colonists. With luck, they'll fool the Sontarans too.'

Kurt was only concerned with his own survival. 'Will they help us to escape?'

'They'll help me,' said Smith. 'And you might as well come along - if nothing else, it'll annoy the Sontarans.'

'Thanks a lot. So what do we do now?'

'We wait till dark.'

As the shadows of night spread across the little cell, there came a muffled thumping from the corridor outside. The heavy metal door of the cell began to creak and groan and vibrate. With a shriek of metal it disappeared - ripped from its hinges from outside.

Smith and Kurt moved out into the dark corridor. They could just make out the massive shape of a Jekkari crouched over the prone body of a guard. It was rocking mournfully, to and fro.

'He's upset because he killed the guard by mistake,' whispered Smith. 'They hate killing.'

He drummed rapidly on the Jekkari's shoulder, and the giant anthropoid rose and led them down the corridor.

Another guard came round the corner, saw them and said, 'Hey—'

It was all he said because the edge of Kurt's hand took him across the throat. Kurt drew back his arm for the second, killing blow, but Smith caught his wrist in a surprisingly powerful grip.

'No! I hate killing too.'

Smith's fingers gripped the still-choking guard's neck, and the man went limp. Kurt caught him and lowered him to the ground. He rubbed his wrist. Little Smith was stronger than he looked.

They moved across the dark, silent landing field until they reached Kurt's freighter.

'Can you pilot that thing by yourself?' asked Smith.

Kurt nodded. 'I had it adapted for solo use. Partners cut down profits.'

‘Then I’d get on board and blast off. I don’t think the Sontarans will follow you. Most of them are out subduing Port City. The ones left here are due for some unexpected trouble at their command centre. The Sontarans won’t find this planet as easy to hold as they think.’

As if to belie his words, a harsh voice croaked, ‘Halt!’

Kurt, Smith and the Jekkari all froze, as a Sontaran trooper stepped from the shadows, covering them with his blaster.

‘You are all my prisoners. Return to the command post. Resist and you will be killed.’

Kurt decided that he couldn’t face losing his freedom now. He tensed himself for a suicidal attack. If he could get his hands on that blaster –

Smith put a restraining hand on his arm.

A huge dark shape materialised behind the Sontaran trooper. Giant hands seized him, raised him high in the air – then dashed him head-first to the stony ground with such shattering force that they heard the skull shatter and the thick neck-bones snap.

Kurt let out a long shuddering sigh. ‘I thought you said they didn’t like to kill.’

‘They don’t. But they can do it now, if they must. It’s something I had to teach them,’ said Smith sadly.

Kurt swung the metal wheel that opened the entry-hatch.

‘Come with me. I’ll take you anywhere you like.’ Sudden, overwhelming gratitude pushed Kurt into utter recklessness. ‘Hell, I’ll even give you half my profits on this trip – well, a third, anyway...’

Smith smiled and shook his head. ‘Keep your profits, Kurt. If they’re big enough, you could even turn honest.’

‘How are you going to get away from here?’

‘I’ve got my own transportation, hidden in the forest. Besides, I’m not leaving yet. I’ve got unfinished business here.’