

Beledi (1918)

Even after the time they had spent in al-Quds, Abdul-Malik couldn't get used to how verdant Palestine was. Its slopes were thick with olives and cypresses, the ground fringed with ochre grasses. Wild date-palms grew by the side of the road that wound its way up the steep hillside to Deir al-Hamra. The little car strained and rattled with the effort. Najid had talked some British officer into lending them the jalopy for the day. He drove it now with terrifyingly misplaced confidence considering it was his first time behind the wheel. He had a pair of driving goggles pulled down over his eyes and a broad grin plastered across his face.

Abdul-Malik would miss the old dog. For all they'd been through in the last few months, there was still no-one he knew in Feisal's army who was half as good company. Najid could talk the legs off a camel and, it turned out, there was no finer cards player in al-Quds. Almost as soon as the victorious army had taken the holy city, Najid had installed himself in the British officers' mess. He was a permanent fixture lounged at a table under one of the slow-whirring ceiling fans, his loose robes arrayed around him and a toothless grin fixed on his face as he sucked lazily on a shisha. From any other Arab, such impudence would have seen him turfed out and on the receiving end of a thorough beating. No-one ever seemed to challenge Najid, though. Maybe it was that insouciant, mocking smile, maybe the glimmer of danger in his eyes. The Englishmen mostly steered a wide berth. But they couldn't resist his challenges at cards, however often the old Howeitat beat them. That he refused ever to wager money only seemed to heighten their irritable compulsion to defeat him. To Abdul-Malik's knowledge, none of them ever had.

He would be off soon. He talked excitedly of getting the train back to the Hejaz, eager to ride the railway he had helped blow up so many times. Not for him the settled life of a peasant villager. Not while there was desert to explore and battles to be fought. Abdul-Malik wondered sadly if he would ever see him again.

The car blew a gasket as soon as it pulled up in the dusty open space where Deir al-Hamra's only well stood, much to the delight of the *fellaheen* who had emerged from the houses and fields to stare. Najid laughed delightedly and opened up the machine's bonnet. Breezily he assured Abdul-Malik that he would have it working again in no time, before beginning to pull out and rearrange components with the entirely pretended experience of a life-long engineer. Abdul-Malik left him to it. He hauled his bag of belongings from the back seat of the vehicle and set off to find the little mud-brick house that was to be his home.

It stood on the uppermost terrace of the village, set a little way apart from the rest of the houses with its back to the hillside. A row of cypresses stood along one wall. A few chickens and a couple of scrawny-looking goats wandered listlessly in its small yard. Abdul-Malik stood in the shade and contemplated it a while.

'Not much of anything, is it?' asked Najid, appearing at his side. 'The houses in al-Quds are better, I think. And there one has the city to keep one entertained. Now that the Turks are gone, the place will be almost civilised.' He said this as if he were a jaded society man from London or Paris, whose very existence depended on being able to eat at a different

haute cuisine restaurant and attend a different opera every night of the week. He laughed heartily. 'If not that, then why not come with me back to the desert? It's harsh and spare but it makes a man. Never imagined you as a *fellah*, boy.'

'I'm done with sand. If the war didn't make a man of me, then I'm probably beyond hope.' He nodded at the oil-grimed metal gewgaw in Najid's hand. 'Shouldn't that be in the car?'

'These Europeans,' the older man replied. 'Forever loading themselves up with things they do not need.' He tossed the left-over component away into a thicket of dry brush. One of the goats sniffed at it before wandering away indifferently.

Abdul-Malik took a step towards the house. 'Come in?'

Najid shook his head. 'I'll be wanted back at the city.'

Of course. The very highest echelons of the British mandate must already be drafting frantic telegrams back to London as the ancient city crumbled around them.

'Will you be all right here, under the British? It might seem all right now, but when the Jews start to arrive...'

The Jews.

Always now, discussion among the Arabs turned back to the Jews, to the Zionist ambition to build a homeland for themselves here in Arab Palestine. Nothing had been the same since they had opened that letter. Najid had always been suspicious, of course, but the extent of British double-dealing had come as a shock to Abdul-Malik. There'd been outrage when it all became public knowledge.

But could it really be as bad as all that?

'King Hussein says the Jews are our brothers and countrymen. We should welcome them.'

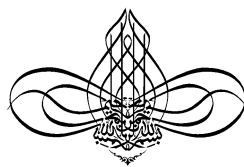
'He says that,' agreed Najid. 'What do you think would happen to him if he didn't? Just be careful, my lad. This treachery runs deep. We haven't yet seen the sum of it.'

Abdul-Malik laughed, turning away. Leave Najid to his xenophobia and suspicion. He'd spied a local girl among the trees. A slender and lovely thing. Was it his imagination or was she watching him? There! He hadn't dreamed that! A definite half-smile as their eyes briefly met.

'You worry too much,' Abdul-Malik told his friend. 'I'm going to be all right here, I know it.'

He patted Najid on the shoulder and wandered away to introduce himself to Yael.

'*Insha'Allah*, my friend,' Najid murmured to himself. '*Insha'Allah*.'



Mada'in Saleh (1917)

It was a place of the dead. Colossal rock-formations jagged up out of the desert into the dawn sky. Hesitant light raked across their elaborately carved façades. They resembled nothing so much as tombstones, and tombs they were. Nabataeans had hewn them from the cliff-faces two thousand years earlier, when this godforsaken desert backwater had been a city to rival their capital at Petra.

Captain Alec Quinn sprinted across the sand towards the camel paddock, the history of Mada'in Saleh the last thing on his mind. His pursuers' hounds seemed to be at his very heels. Torch-beams scythed the twilight.

His mind's eye fixated on the weary, almost apologetic expression on the Ottoman bey's face as he'd supervised the torture. Something about the base coldness in those dark eyes frightened him far more than soldiers with guns and dogs. The way he pretended not to enjoy it, to be a civilised man above such base sadism. *Sorry, old man*, his expression seemed to say. *This is all frightfully distasteful*. Not for one moment had he looked away, though. There was no mistaking the understated thrill with which he'd savoured Quinn's pain.

Let him savour. Quinn had given him nothing more. The bey's questions had got him nowhere.

Questions? What questions? What exactly had he been asked?

Johnny Turk had learned his lesson! Wouldn't be so cocky next time. He'd know now that Englishmen were made of sterner stuff. Quinn had not betrayed his mission or his country. He'd gritted his teeth, taken the pain. Just like being at school, he'd told himself. Never flinched from the willow there. Pain makes you stronger. Builds character, boy!

He'd taken it. Savoured it, as much as the Turk had. He'd bided his time.

And when the moment came, he'd escaped.

Just like that.

A ruse, a ploy, a swift knee to his guard's solar plexus! *Bang! Bang! Bang!* with his stolen revolver. Startled Turk lads dropping. And he was out into the night, outrunning the enemy as he made good his escape.

He'd made for the locomotive sheds first, taking it in mind to commandeer one: he would burst from his captors' clutches under a great head of steam! But the patrols around the railway depot were too heavy. He had no option but to detour. Quinn allowed himself a rueful smile. Didn't know how to drive a train anyway.

Running in the opposite direction, he'd found himself out in the necropolis, stumbling over the sands between the great, ancient edifices. The Mohammedans were leery of the ruins. A superstitious race. They believed Mada'in Saleh cursed. He'd hoped they wouldn't follow him in.

No such luck, but he did at least get a sense that his hunters were somewhat less enthusiastic – and perhaps fewer in number – than they had been. He'd spied a paddock of camels over by a well in the shadow of one of the rock outcrops. Quinn thought back to his briefing. Surely it couldn't be more than a few dozen miles to the Arab rebel army. That chap

Lawrence would be with them. A strange fish, by all accounts, but Quinn wasn't about to be fussy.

A bullet whizzed above his head and ricocheted off the rock face.

Quinn cursed floridly. Two guards, over by the paddock. Hadn't seen them in the paltry light. One of them shouted something. Both fired again. More bullets kicked up the sand around him.

Quinn dived for cover, flinging himself against the cool rock façade of one of the tombs. His heart was pounding. Days without food and only a miserly ration of water. Couldn't keep this up much longer. Dog-tired. His every aching muscle and sinew begged him to just slump against the rock and let exhaustion take him.

Certain death. Obviously.

The pursuing soldiers were almost upon him. He risked trying to break out of his cover; jerked hurriedly back as a volley of shots filled the air around him. Out of options, old boy.

Except one.

The opening into the tomb was dark and utterly forbidding. When Quinn had been a boy, he and Cecil Jenkins had used to explore the crypts in the old tumbledown chapel that lay forgotten in one of the far corners of his father's estate. All good larks for a summer. Till one morning, after a night of heavy rain, the whole lot came down around them. Quinn had been lucky to emerge unhurt. Jenkins less fortunate. The sight of his shattered legs had been seared on the young Quinn's memory. Jenkins wouldn't walk again. Seemed a tragedy at the time. He wondered if Jenkins still thought so. His brothers had bought it at Gallipoli.

No rain here, at any rate. Another bullet blasted chips out of the rock. Even if the tomb turned out to be unstable, his demise within was no more likely than if he remained out in the open. Gritting his teeth and cocking his pistol, Quinn plunged inside.

Stone steps led down into a large chamber, the straight, geometric lines of its classical architecture cut with startling precision from the red stone. A crack in the rock far above let in a thin sliver of wan light, the only illumination. Its feeble glow picked out an object of startling incongruity.

POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX

Quinn stopped. Stared, open-mouthed. English lettering. Right-angles and even measurements (or near as damn it). The reassuring police blue of its paintwork. Whatever this was, it had no business being in Arabia.

'A funny old thing, isn't it?'

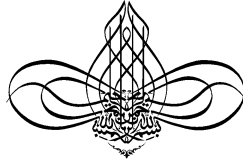
The Turkish bey stepped out of the shadows, a wry smile playing at his lips. He spoke English in rich, almost honeyed tones. Not a hint of an accent, though his saturnine features were redolent of the Orient. His attention was fixed on the strange box, black-gloved fingertips brushing its slightly-wonky detailing like a collector admiring the jewel of his sculpture gallery.

Quinn raised his revolver.

'I wouldn't,' the bey warned. Still didn't take his eyes off the police box. The faintest tilt of his head, indicating behind Quinn.

The old Arab was standing there with a Luger levelled at him. Expression as dead and emotionless as it had been throughout his torture. A faint commotion at the doorway attested to the arrival of the rest of the Turks.

The bey turned and regarded Quinn sympathetically. 'Never mind, old chap,' he said, mimicking Quinn's own upper-class English tones. 'Better luck next time.'



DOCTOR WHO

LOVED EGYPTIAN NIGHT

**By
Philip Boyes**

Episode 2

Prospects of Desolation

There is a destiny now possible to us — the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood. We are not yet dissolute in temper, but still have the firmness to govern, and the grace to obey. We have been taught a religion of pure mercy, which we must either now betray, or learn to defend by fulfilling...

And this is what [England] must either do, or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; — seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea.

John Ruskin – Lectures on Art, 1870

The Doctor listened to Quinn's story grim-faced. 'I knew it!' he exclaimed when the soldier finished. 'This has his fingerprints all over it!'

Quinn said nothing, staring at his feet, strangely silent now. Lawrence studied the fellow's face, his fingers absently probing the dressing on his wound. They were both lucky. Quinn's bullet had missed Lawrence's vitals by scant inches, passing harmlessly through his shoulder and out of his back. It stung like the very devil, of course, but pain Lawrence could handle. In the desert one soon learned to approach things as the Arab does: reject soft luxuries and easy comforts; find delight in abnegation, abstention and yes, even agony. He had learned to relish it, to take pleasure in its countless exquisite varieties.

The wound would trouble him; he would likely get little sleep tonight. But it was, in the end, no more than an irritation. He had more pressing concerns.

He considered Quinn. He'd known countless men like him. At Oxford first, and then in the army. Second or third sons of minor aristocracy. Reared in the bosom of privilege, the world beyond came as something as a shock for them. He was used to their barely-concealed sneers and disdain. His name was not a good one. Not by a long chalk. El-Aurens was better.

The thing was, priggish, aloof and haughty as Quinn's sort often were, they were still English soldiers and an English soldier is nothing if not brave and loyal and true. While he might consider them personally fools, Lawrence had had little occasion to doubt their abilities or motives professionally. Perhaps that was what had prompted him to save the man's life.

The gunshot had brought the Bedouin running. A couple of Beni Sakhr were first, waving their rifles around as they burst into the tent, thirsty for blood. Auda must have been nearby as he arrived only seconds later. He'd drawn the viciously-curved *jambiya* dagger from his waistband. He grabbed Quinn and would have slit the man's throat there and then, had some sudden instinct not compelled Lawrence to gasp 'Wait!'

The Doctor seemed to have been taken by surprise by the suddenness of the whole incident. He made amends by leaping to take charge now. His first action, for which Lawrence was grateful, was to check the wound. When he had swiftly satisfied himself that it was not immediately life-threatening, he ceded Lawrence's care to an Arab who came scurrying in with a medical kit. The Doctor strode over to the would-be assassin, gripped still in Auda's unwavering arms.

The man didn't struggle; he looked almost as dazed and shaken as Lawrence felt.

'Who are you?' the Doctor asked him. 'Why did you try to kill Lawrence?'

The man swayed and murmured incoherently.

'I'm talking to you, man!' the Doctor said, snapping his fingers a few times in front of his face. He didn't respond.

'Why waste time?' demanded Auda angrily. 'We should gut him where he stands!'

'We're not liable to learn much about who sent him if we do that, are we?' the Doctor replied dryly. 'Though I suspect I've got a fairly good idea. This man's been hypnotised.'

'Hypnotised?'

'Mesmerised, ensorcelled, bewitched. Don't strain too hard trying to understand it, my dear chap, you'll do yourself a mischief. I doubt you'll have come across anything similar.'

Auda went red with fury but the Doctor either didn't notice or didn't care. He pulled a fob-watch from his trouser pockets and began to swing it slowly this way and that in front of the English soldier's eyes.

'Not to worry,' he said. 'I've had plenty of practice doing this by now. I'll get him to tell us who sent him, then I can unhypnotise him.'

'Wouldn't the other way round make more sense?'

'Not unless you want to wait till morning. Sleep and temporary memory loss are side-effects of the deconditioning.'

'I see,' said Auda. Plainly he did not.

And so Quinn had told his story, or as much of it as he could remember. The Turkish bey had done quite a number on him.

'He's getting more accomplished,' the Doctor commented, almost admiringly. 'It seems you might be right, Auda. Some of Captain Quinn's memories we'll just have to wait to return on their own.'

'You know this Turk?' asked Lawrence.

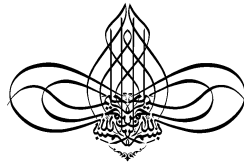
The Doctor nodded. 'Oh yes, we're firm friends.' The tone of his voice made clear they were anything but. 'I'm afraid he's not a Turk, though.'

'Then who is he? And why would he want me dead? There's more to it than just wanting the bounty on my head, I take it?'

'Money doesn't interest him. He's got no use for the stuff. Whatever he's up to, he's doing it for his own reasons. He lives to cause trouble, Lawrence. As if there isn't enough of it in the world right now.'

'His name?' Lawrence pressed.

To his surprise, the Doctor smiled. As if he relished the confrontation to come. 'Another thing he has no use for. He likes to call himself the Master.'



When Jo had first met the Doctor she'd idolised him. The dashing, kind man of science who could save the world with little more than a ball of twine and a hopeful smile. A hero who never resorted to violence – well, not *serious* violence, and not unless the villains were *really* asking for it – and who could somehow combine a burning, irreverent anarchism with the kind of clubbable geniality that had him forever being invited to London's swankiest clubs. It didn't seem to matter how often he cheerfully explained to his distinguished hosts how small-minded and wrong they were, the invitations never seemed to dry up. Maybe they just appreciated his help with the crossword.

Ever since she'd walked into that lab, Jo had pretty much just wanted to *be* the Doctor. This had come as a bit of a surprise, she had to admit. Ageing men with prodigious bouffants had not figured highly in her list of role-models previously, although she had spent three weeks in her early teens desperately wishing she could grow up to be John Noakes. By the time she got to UNIT, she'd more or less settled on the idea that she was basically going to be Emma Peel but with even better dress sense. But the Doctor had a charisma which was impossible to ignore. Even after a first day on the job which was, by anyone's standards, more than a little trying, there'd been absolutely no doubt in her mind that the Doctor was, in almost every conceivable way, the bee's knees.

That was not to say, however, that she'd ever been under any illusions about his singing ability.

Unlike him.

His resonant, fruity tones filled the camp as dawn broke, much to the evident confusion of several of the Arabs, who were regarding his tent with expressions of mild alarm.

*'Down in urkey-urkey, Abie Cohen
Was selling fancy clothes to anyone who'd wear 'em
When the Turks were called away to war
A Turk asked Abie if he wouldn't watch his harem.
Tum-ti tum ti tum tum, Rrrrum-ti-tum-ti tum
Tum-rum-ti-tum-ti-rum-ti-tum...'*

It was almost enough to make her forget about the Letter.

Jo let herself into the tent. The Doctor was already dressed, and for once had eschewed his usual ruffled shirt, looking resplendent in burgundy and white Arab robes. His hair was damp.

'Very dapper,' Jo remarked.

'I try, Jo. And a very good morning to you too.' He resumed humming as he towelled down his bouffant. That too, she had to acknowledge, looked particularly fine this morning. She didn't enquire as to where he'd found the water to wash it. There were some things a girl simply wasn't meant to know.

'You're cheerful this morning,' she observed. 'Some of the men about were saying there was trouble last night...'

'Mm? Oh, yes. That British chap they brought in yesterday? Came to and tried shoot old Lawrence.'

'Lummy! That makes you happy? Is he all right?'

'He'll be fine. Fit young fellow like him. Aren't you going to ask why he did it?'

She frowned. 'Doctor, there's something I need to talk to you about. About the British and the Arabs.'

'Well it'll have to wait, I'm afraid. You see, that assassin didn't know what he was doing. He'd been hypnotised.'

Jo's heart sank. 'Oh no.'

'Quite.'

'But why would the Master want to hurt Lawrence?'

'I'm not sure,' the Doctor admitted. 'But our first priority has to be to find out. Lawrence is the centre of all this, I'm sure of it. He's the pivot on which this part of history turns. Kill him now and the Arabs won't unite; the Revolt will fail. The Turks could keep hold of their southern Empire. The Ottoman Empire might not collapse when it should. The whole history of the Middle East could change irrevocably.' The scratched at his chin. 'The more I think about it, the less I like it.'

'We've got to stop him!'

'Don't worry, Jo. We will. Fortunately we know exactly where he is – Mada'in Saleh.'

'So he's the one who wanted us there? He's working with the Turks?'

'Doing his usual party piece of throwing in his lot with the most morally disreputable people around. But yes, he seems to have convinced them he's on their side. Enough for them to send him the TARDIS, anyway.'

'It's there? How do you know?'

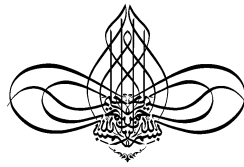
'Captain Quinn gave a very passable description of the old girl, considering the police box won't be invented for another ten years or so.'

Jo felt herself brightening. After weeks of uncertainty as to where – or even if – they would find their way out of this time, sometimes in the dead of night she had begun to find herself contemplating what life would be like stuck here. The twenties wouldn't be too bad, she'd reckoned. She'd make quite a good flapper. But the thirties – depression, and then being middle-aged during the Second World War. Not the most enticing prospect. The knowledge that the TARDIS was within reach was a huge relief. Even knowing the Master was around no longer troubled her as much as it once had. Last time they'd met she had proven she could hold her own against him; she'd forced him to recognise that she was no longer the little girl he'd so easily brainwashed a few years ago. With the Master to fight, she and the Doctor were no longer lost and adrift in one of the most violent times in human history; it was business as usual. The Doctor versus his nemesis.

There was only ever one winner. No wonder the Doctor seemed so jolly.

‘So d’you think you can convince Lawrence to let us go to Mada’in Saleh then?’ she asked.

‘No need,’ said a voice behind her. Lawrence stood in the entrance to the tent. He looked a bit stiff – he was evidently in some discomfort – but not at all bad for a man who’d been shot only a few hours before. Suddenly he reminded her less of Mike and more of the Brig. ‘We’re all going,’ Lawrence continued. ‘I mean to take Mada’in Saleh for the British.’



Lawrence was a liar. The thought had been buzzing round and round Abdul-Malik’s head since he awoke. It had infected his dreams. He’d come into the desert like no other Englishman: fluent in Arabic, outwardly respectful of their ways. He scorned the protocols and hidebound orders of the British Empire; he adopted their dress and ate their food. He spoke with sincerity and charisma of the profound connection he’d felt when first he’d come to the East, away from a soggy, green-and-grey island that offered him nothing. When he had promised them an Arab nation able to take its place among the great powers of the world, Abdul-Malik had believed him.

But it was lies, all lies.

The British had no intention of letting Hussein and his son Feisal be rulers of a greater Arab nation. The Levant was just another corner of the map to be shaded in pink. Najid said it was about oil. Mesopotamia was full of it, he said, and before the war the British had had a nice little earner in the Turkish Petroleum Company. They wanted to safeguard that and ensure access to the Mediterranean. Almost as importantly, they wanted to make sure the French didn’t get it. And then there was Palestine. The jewel in the crown of the Arab world, the sacred land where the holy city of al-Quds – which the English called Jerusalem – had stood glittering since the beginnings of history. For over a thousand years Arab *fellaheen* had tended its crops and fished in its waters. They had defended it from the Crusaders and worshipped Allah in its mosques.

And the British meant to give it to the Jews.

How could Lawrence allow it?

He wondered briefly if he was being unfair. After all, the letter made clear that the British were pretty suspicious of Lawrence’s intentions themselves. Could it be that he really had no idea? Abdul-Malik couldn’t claim to know Lawrence, not as a man. But he’d never struck him as a dupe.

He fished his battered old copy of Kipling from his camel’s saddlebag and turned to the page marked with its folded-over corner. They’d told him this was the work of Civilisation; that if he understood the poem it would reveal how the British and the French and the Germans saw the world. He’d brought it with him into the desert in the hope that it would help him understand why they fought, how the new Arab nation must be built. It was

hard to tease the meaning from the strange script and foreign words, but when he'd finally and imperfectly grasped it, Abdul-Malik couldn't help but feel roused by the stirring sentiments, proud to be an ally of a British Empire which had such a noble calling.

In the light of the letter, those verses suddenly struck him somewhat differently. There was a darkness, a contempt about them that discomfited him.

*Take up the White Man's burden--
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard--
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--
"Why brought he us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"*

'Penny for them?' asked a voice at his shoulder. It was Jo. Abdul-Malik stumbled over his reply – he didn't understand the expression. She didn't seem to expect an answer anyway.

'Ooh, Kipling,' she said. 'I loved the *Jungle Book*! I didn't know you could read English.'

'A little. I'm not like Najid or most of the others. I wasn't born a nomad in the desert. My father's home was in Wejh. Have you heard of it?' She shook her head. 'A small town by the sea. My uncle's family came from Egypt, from Cairo. We went there once, to visit them. When I was a boy. The city was like nothing I had ever seen. I was a foolish boy, never listened to what my father told me. Second morning there we were in the souq shopping for rice when I noticed this stall selling little monkeys. Have you seen monkeys? So full of energy and mischief – no child's going to be able to resist. I wandered over for a closer look. I was only there a minute or two, but when I turned back, my mother and aunt were gone.'

'I ran all round that souq, out of my little mind. I shouted for them so much my throat was as dry as it is here in the desert. Wherever I looked there were only strangers. A souq's a terrifying place if you're small and alone. All the bustle and noise and shouting. I thought I'd be lost there the rest of my life.'

'What happened?' she asked, her voice touched with genuine concern.

'I was found by a professor. A scholar from the university. He was a strange sight to my eyes – half Arab and half European. He looked like us, but he wore a European suit. He had one of those little fezzes the Egyptians like. He knew the city well, and when I told him who my uncle was he was able to take me home. On the way he told me he was a digger, a – what do they call it? – an *archaeologist*. Worked with the British, delving into tombs and ruins. They've found all kinds of things out in the desert there. Makes you wonder what's under our sands. Those kind of places always gave me the creeps. My grandfather had filled my head with silly tales about the djinn that haunt those places. I must have looked scared when the professor mentioned them. He laughed and told me not to worry. Said there are no such things as djinn. All that was superstition we should have to leave behind if we were to become a modern people.'

‘I asked him about the Europeans. Egypt was still meant to be Ottoman, but the British had made themselves at home by then. I’d seen them everywhere, even in the short time I’d been there. So alien in their white suits and pith-helmets. They fascinated me. I asked him if they were as strange and advanced as everyone said.

“Advancement,” he said to me, with a little smile, “is in the eye of the beholder. If you want to know if they’re advanced, you must learn about them and judge for yourself. Of course, to do that, you must learn to read their language.”

‘He returned me to my uncle’s home. My mother beat me hard for wandering off, but not as hard as she might have. I could tell from her eyes that she’d been weeping. My father and uncle invited the professor to stay for dinner as thanks for bringing me home. After the meal, when night had fallen and it was late, he came to me and showed me a book. An English book. He pointed out the different letter-forms to me. After we had looked at it for a while, he told me that he had to go then, but that if I liked, and if my father would allow, he should like to return and teach me more.

‘My family spent two months in Cairo. Almost every night he would call on me and we’d read English together by lamplight. When the time came for us to leave, he presented me with some of his books and told me to carry on studying. It’s harder on my own, but I try. Things were simpler then. Sometimes I miss those Egyptian nights.’

They sat in silence for a while, then Abdul-Malik spoke again.

‘I think I was wrong, though. About the British. For a long time I thought they were noble and modern, bringing culture and progress across the world.’ He waved the poetry book slightly. ‘That’s what this says: *seek another’s profit, work another’s gain*. But listen, Mr Kipling talks too of “new-caught, sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child”; he talks about “sloth and heathen folly”. He’s talking about the Negroes; I understand that. Of course *they* need taking in hand and showing the way into civilisation. They might not see it now, but they’ll be the better for it in the end-’

‘Hang on!’ Jo objected. ‘You can’t talk about them like that. They’re people too – just like you or me!’

‘But that’s what I mean. I always thought we were different, that the British recognised us Arabs as civilised. But that letter – to them we’re no different to the Negroes, are we? Just sullen heathens who aren’t qualified to rule ourselves!’

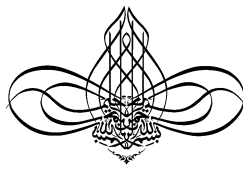
‘I-’ Jo began, then stopped awkwardly.

‘Did you speak to your friend? About the letter? You said he’d help us?’

She looked embarrassed. ‘It’s not quite as simple as that. There’s a lot happening right now. Someone tried to kill Lawrence, and the Doctor thinks it was the Master! He’s an enemy of ours and he’s probably got some frightful plan to change history or something and-’

Abdul-Malik nodded sadly. ‘And Lawrence’s life and your English feuds matter more than the fate of the Arab nation. I see.’

He didn’t blame Jo. Not really. Like him, she was utterly out of her depth. And at least she had the grace to look terribly, adorably ashamed.



Why couldn't they have left him with his pistol? At least then Quinn might have done the decent thing. But no-one seemed interested in punishing him at all, really. They'd just shoved him off into a spare tent and told him not to leave. There was a half-hearted Arab guard outside, but everyone seemed satisfied that he was no longer a threat. From the hustle and bustle he could hear outside, they were preoccupied with the business of striking camp and preparing to move out. No mean feat for an army of this many unruly natives.

Quinn was left alone with his thoughts. He felt absolutely wretched.

He had tried to kill a superior officer. He was weak-minded enough to succumb to mesmerism and to commit treason under the 'fluence of some damned oriental Svengali! How was an officer and an Englishman supposed to recover from that?

He wished he could remember more. About what he was doing in Mada'in Saleh in the first place, about what his manipulator might have hoped to achieve. But even that scant redemption was denied him.

Why couldn't they have left him his pistol? A single bullet. That's all it would take.

But in his heart, he knew even that wish was false. If he'd meant to top himself, there were countless ways he could do it. Hang himself from the tentpole with his belt. Refuse water. Provoke one of the Arabs into doing it for him.

If he didn't, it was because he did not dare.

Weak-minded! he berated himself. *Weak-minded, cowardly traitor.*

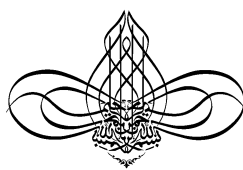
'It's not your fault, you know old chap.'

The other Englishman – the one Lawrence called the Doctor – stood at the door-flap. Like Lawrence, he wore Arab dress. Like Lawrence, he wore it with a casual, knowing panache that no Arab would aspire to and few Englishmen could pull off.

'I shot Lawrence,' Quinn told him glumly. 'Who else's fault is it if not mine?'

'Self-pity never solved anything. The Master is one of the finest hypnotists this universe has ever produced. I've seen him mesmerise an Arcturan battle-walrus and they're as stubborn and wilful as any walrus you could ever hope to meet. There's no shame in this. Believe me, old chap, there's nothing you could have done.'

Quinn appreciated the sentiment, but shook his head. 'There's always something one could have done,' he told him softly. 'That's what being British is all about.'



With the tents and provisions packed up, Lawrence's army struck out into the desert, a great caravan of men and camels and horses. The Doctor took his place alongside Lawrence, Sharif Ali and Auda at the head of the column, looking every inch the swashbuckling hero as his robes flapped around him. Despite the intense, burning sun, there was a hint of breeze today. It came as precious little relief. There was something off about it, the Bedouin complained. An icy undercurrent that had them pulling their robes and *keffiyehs* tight.

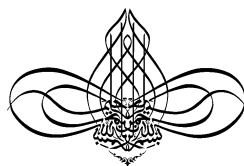
Jo rode in the middle of the camel train alongside Abdul-Malik and Najid and some irritating kid called bin Shatam, who they didn't seem to be able to shake. She didn't talk, her usual optimism blunted by what Abdul-Malik had said.

Lulled by the steady rocking and swaying of the camel, the interminable vistas of desert, Jo's mind was free to wander. She remembered her first trip to the Middle East. Before Istanbul, before Kebiria. When she'd been around nine or ten, her uncle had been stationed out in Israel on government business. Jo's mother had taken her and her brother out for two weeks to visit him. The sights and sounds of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem had captivated her. For all the modern buildings and advertisements which had sprung up, it was easy to imagine that she'd stepped back into a world she had only imagined at Sunday School. Amid the crumbling stone and mud-brick streets where now businessmen and housewives and rabbis hurried this way and that about their business, little Josie had imagined prophets and pharisees and cruel Roman soldiers.

She tried to remember the Arabs she knew must have been there. The Palestinians in the margins of her Biblical adventure. Things had been bad then, she knew now. But then, when *weren't* they bad? Jo didn't tend to follow current affairs – her life was quite exciting enough, thank you very much – but the lads around UNIT HQ had mates and relatives in the regulars. In the quiet times between occasions when the Brig and Mike and the Doctor called on them to risk life and limb for Planet Earth, they'd gossip about military matters and what wars might be brewing. Last time she'd been in her own time, they'd been saying things were taking a turn for the worse out there again. An endless treadmill of violence and hatred. As a kid, she'd run through the middle of it, smiling and giggling. She hadn't even noticed.

All that begins here, she thought.

And the Doctor's more interested in his latest run-in with the Master.



Afternoon came. The sun was tortuous; any skin left open to its remorseless onslaught felt like it could crackle and catch light at any instant. Lawrence called a halt. Leaving the army in the lee of a rock outcrop, he and his lieutenants rode to the brow of a high ridge. Beneath them, the gleaming arc of the Hejaz Railway sliced across the landscape.

‘We can’t ride all the way to Mada’in Saleh,’ Lawrence said. ‘The Turkish force there’s too strong. By the time we get there the men and the camels will be weak. We’ll be picked off easily.’

‘We took Aqaba,’ Auda replied gruffly, as Lawrence knew he would. Aqaba had been his proudest day. Since they’d captured the harbour stronghold, the old warlord took any suggestion that there might be a limit to his Howeitat’s military capabilities as an almost personal affront.

‘Yes,’ Lawrence agreed, ‘we took it. We took it by surprise. We shall take Mada’in Saleh the same way. But not from the backs of camels.’

The Doctor had been listening silently till now, lost in thought. ‘You mean to use the railway, I presume? You think it can work?’

‘I’ve spent the last few months sabotaging this railway, Doctor. As far as the Turks are concerned, my only interest is in blowing up trains, not riding them. They’ll be completely unprepared.’

‘You mean to capture a train?’ asked Ali. A grin was already playing across his face. ‘Audacious. But risky. It wouldn’t take much for the Turks to get wind of it.’

‘Our attack will have to be decisive,’ Lawrence agreed. ‘And swift. Speed is of the utmost importance. We mustn’t delay the train so long as to raise suspicions. And we can’t let any Turks get away to raise the alarm.’

‘I hope you mean by taking them prisoner,’ the Doctor said firmly.

‘Of course. What else would we do?’

‘Prisoners eat food and drink water,’ grumbled Auda. ‘The Turks cut their prisoners’ throats. Maybe they’re the smart ones.’

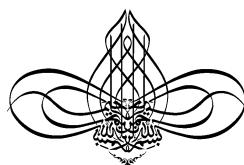
‘You’re not fighting for the Turks any more. The British have somewhat higher standards,’ Lawrence snapped. ‘Auda, this attack must be orderly; one could even say *surgical*. No looting. No shooting up the train. Can you keep your men under control?’

Auda snorted to show what he thought of that question.

Lawrence turned to the Doctor. ‘You see what I have to deal with? These desert Arabs live in a world of bright light and dark shadow. They understand subtlety about as well as my camel understands Homer. Left to their own devices, they’d strip that train bare within the hour. They’re a brave people, one can’t deny, but they’re also greedy, barbarous and cruel. And yet,’ he added with a grin, ‘they’re quite my favourite race.’

The Doctor reacted uncomfortably. ‘Yes, well how about we save the anthropological observations for later and start doing something about stopping a train?’

‘Very well.’ Lawrence pulled a pocket-watch from his robes and checked it. ‘We have around an hour, by my reckoning. I suggest we begin blocking the tracks.’



Tanrım, thought *Mülâzım-ı Sani* Mehmet Çetinkaya, *this is a bleak land!* It was months since he'd been plucked from his post at İskenderun and set to guarding trains in the Hejaz. The great red-ochre wastes of rock and earth and sand had long since lost their novelty. The train carriages were close, stifling and smelly, even with all the windows open. They'd been plagued by a cargo of irritating stowaway flies all the way from Amman. The soldiers slouched uncomfortably around the boxcar. They looked tired and bored. Çetinkaya couldn't blame them. There was nothing to do on these endless journeys except hope that each run wouldn't be disrupted by enemy action. Every Turk on the railway had grown to fear the Englishman Lawrence and his gaggle of motley pirates. Their bombs were indiscriminate, striking civilian and military trains alike. The Arabs fell on the survivors without mercy. The carnage was swift and brutal; then they would melt away back into the wilderness like ghosts.

It was a coward's tactic, to Çetinkaya's mind. He'd heard the chatter among the ranks. Every day it seemed more and more of the army were buying into the legend of Lawrence that the Western newspapers had begun to put about. He was some sort of superhuman, the whispers said. A modern-day Musa, Salah ad-Din or Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah. The uncrowned King of Arabia. Such foolishness was to be expected of these *köylüler* and *taşralıların*. Mehmet Çetinkaya held himself studiously aloof. As far as he was concerned, the Englishman was nothing more than a bandit. If they ever crossed paths, Lawrence would witness the mettle of a true Turk.

The breeze from the open windows lessened. The train was slowing.

'Sir?' asked one of the men, abandoning his backgammon and reaching for his rifle.

Çetinkaya ignored him, rattling open the door from the front of the coach to the engine. One of the stokers was waiting for him by the tender. Soot and smoke had stained the pits and lines of his sand-blasted face black. He doubted the man ever managed to free himself of the crazed grime-tattoo.

'What's going on?' he demanded. 'Why are we slowing?'

'The line's blocked,' the man said apologetically. His accent spoke of one of the northern *vilayets*: Kastamonu or possibly Trebizond. Çetinkaya briefly wondered what chain of bureaucracy had seen him dispatched all the way down here. 'Some idiot Bedouin's let his camels go to sleep on the tracks.'

Çetinkaya swore in disbelief. Taking a firm grip on a handhold he swung himself out to the side of the tender. In the distance he could just make out the low mounded shapes of a handful of camels sitting unconcernedly on the rails. A small clutch of peasants stood around them, watching the train approach incuriously.

'*Tanrı aşkına!*' Çetinkaya exclaimed. He pulled his pistol and fired off a couple of shots into the air. The engine-driver followed up with three long blasts on the train's whistle. The Bedouin were too far off to be able to make out their expressions, but they didn't seem any more inclined to move.

'They've always been a lawless bunch down here,' the stoker complained with a shrug. 'Even before the war the Bedouin never really admitted any authority but their own. Now the Revolt's got them all riled up with talk of independence. Every so often you get one who decides to make a nuisance of himself.'

Çetinkaya had encountered them himself. Usually young hotheads or stubborn old leather-skins. Too immature or world-weary to care much about the consequences of their actions. It was hollow bravado. Their recalcitrance didn't last long once the guns came out. He checked and reloaded his pistol. He was going to shoot one of this bunch, he decided, whether they moved or not. It might improve his mood.

Çetinkaya hopped down from the footplate the instant the train ground to a standstill. He was yelling at the Bedouin before he even touched the sand, jabbing the air with his pistol to emphasise his point. One of the old men looked up for a moment as if in puzzlement, and took a swig from a goatskin and went back to whatever he was doing. It didn't seem to be very much. God knows how these people filled their days. A couple of women in *niqabs* got up and shuffled slowly over towards him. One of them, Çetinkaya decided. He'd shoot one of them.

'Is something the matter, *Mülâzım-ı Sani*?' asked the taller of the women. The menfolk didn't seem concerned that she was speaking to him. Barbarians. It was the first time he'd heard one of these peasant bitches talk. *Tanrım*, they had strange-sounding voices. High, lisping and bizarrely-accented. Her Arabic was a strange and archaic dialect even by local standards.

'What are you doing?' Çetinkaya demanded. 'What in God's name do you think you're doing?'

'The camels were tired,' the woman complained. 'They needed to rest.'

'There's hundreds of miles of empty, featureless desert that doesn't have a railway on it that they could rest on! Why do they have to stop on these few feet of it? You're not seriously telling me it's more comfortable for them?'

'Yes, well,' said the woman, her voice suddenly dropping an octave and taking on a distinctly masculine timbre. 'I have to admit you've got me there.'

Before Çetinkaya could react, the second woman had whipped a pistol from her drapery and trained it on him.

'Hands above your head, if you'd be so kind.'

With her free hand she tore off her veil, revealing blond hair and a youthful, grinning white face.

'Lawrence,' Çetinkaya hissed. He slowly raised his hands.

As Lawrence disarmed him, his companion pulled off his own veil. He was older, his hair a fluffy cloud of grey. Çetinkaya had no idea who he was, but he was evidently as English as Lawrence was.

'I have to say, that went rather well, I thought.' He was beaming with self-satisfaction. 'The Time Lord larynx is an immensely flexible tool. With practice and a little talent, it's possible to become literally a man of a thousand voices.'

'All of them your own, apparently,' Lawrence observed dryly. 'Don't get ahead of yourself, Doctor. This is far from over.'

'Wouldn't dream of it.' At that moment, one of Çetinkaya's men finally seemed to wonder what was going on and emerged from the carriage to investigate. The older Englishman reacted instantly. With a ludicrous shout of *Haiii!!* he yanked the startled youth off the step by his arm, flipped him heavily on to the hard earth. The unfortunate Turk

uttered an incoherent, winded grunt and slumped back, apparently out cold. A couple more men followed him out a second later, their rifles already raised. The Doctor dispatched one with similar efficiency. Lawrence felled the other with a left hook square in the jaw.

All hell broke loose.

Ottoman soldiers began streaming from the train, hurrying to bring their guns to bear. Gunshots from the Bedouin by the camels felled two of them before they could get shots off. Lawrence put his fingers in his mouth and whistled. On the ridge to the right more camels and riders than Çetinkaya had ever seen suddenly rose into view. They thundered down the slope, screaming a war-cry, catching the Turkish soldiers by surprise. For some reason they didn't seem to want to use their rifles – many of them had scimitars and daggers raised high above their heads.

There wouldn't be a better time to make a move.

Çetinkaya swung round, making a grab for Lawrence's gun-arm. He seemed to be favouring it slightly; instinct told him there was a wound there. Sure enough, when Çetinkaya took hold of his shoulder, the Englishman doubled over in pain with a fearful yell. Çetinkaya punched him hard in the chin, following with a volley of kicks when the man went down.

'*Bunu nasıl buldunuz?*' he shouted furiously at his victim. He didn't even care about the sounds of carnage from the battle all around him. '*Nasıl, bu ukala İngilizce piç seviyorsunuz?*'

There was a tap on his shoulder.

Çetinkaya turned. The Doctor was there. 'You know,' he said, somehow finding time to quip even while Çetinkaya brought his arm up for a punch, 'that sort of language is really most unbecoming an officer.' He prodded a single finger against Çetinkaya's forehead and everything went black.

Lawrence's second wave waited in reserve at the brow of the ridge. Jo crouched behind a rock, feeling helpless. She'd been in this situation countless times before and the feeling of uselessness in the pit of her stomach never went away. Always on the sidelines watching as young men she barely knew fought and died around her. But what could she do? She was an agent, not a soldier – and a clumsy, ditzy one at that. It was one reason it had been a relief to leave Earth and join the Doctor on his travels. There was still danger, of course, still deaths – *too many deaths* – but she didn't seem to find herself in the middle of full-scale battles as often as she had with UNIT. The risks were ones she could contribute to; not this kind of mindless havoc.

'This wasn't what I expected,' she said. 'When they said we wouldn't be using guns I thought... Well, people are ending up just as dead.'

'That tends to happen in war,' Najid replied icily. 'Though Aurens and your friend seem to be doing all right.'

He pointed and she spied the Doctor fighting near the engine, a seemingly-untiring flurry of gangly limbs and implausible manoeuvres as he fended off the Turks with his Venusian aikido. He seemed to be enjoying himself. Lawrence was by his side. He held his pistol but seemed content to rely on punches and holds, his fighting-style less flamboyant than the Doctor's but undeniably effective.

'At least that's something,' she said.

'I'm sure it'll be a comfort to the families of the Arab lads who've died.'

'Najid,' Abdul-Malik objected, 'come on now, it's not her fault.'

A shout went up. 'Second wave ready!'

All around them, Arabs were drawing weapons and taking up their reins. Abdul-Malik and Najid clambered up into their saddles.

The words of the second cry were lost in the thunder of hooves and the war-cry bellowed out all around. Abdul-Malik made to spur his camel forward.

'Wait!' Without quite knowing why, Jo grabbed his saddle. 'You can't do this!'

He hesitated. Najid too. Around them, the other riders surged forwards, over the crest of the ridge and down towards the battle.

'If you go down there, you might die!' Jo shouted over the din.

'That's war,' said Najid.

'But what *for*? You know the British are just using you. Why are you risking your lives?'

'What else can we do?'

'I don't know,' she admitted. 'I don't know, but this is *wrong*. You must see!'

Down below, the Doctor was gleefully cracking Turkish heads together.

'*Ya allah*,' said Najid, 'we've got to do *something*. We just sit here and we'll be shot for cowards.'

Abdul-Malik glanced down at the fighting. 'I'm all ears,' he said, uncertainly.

Najid came to a decision. 'On your camel!' he barked to Jo.

'But...'

'Get on!'

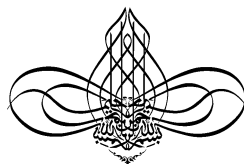
She did so.

'Now come on!' Najid yanked hard on the reins and wheeled his camel round, setting off at a gallop away from the railway. Abdul-Malik was close behind. Jo hesitated, caught between her new friends and the Doctor. If she went with the Arabs, she might never see him again. When he got the TARDIS back, would he look for her?

'Jo!' Abdul-Malik shouted.

With a last, despairing glance towards the carnage by the train, Jo dug her heels into the camel's flanks and rode away.

Watching through binoculars from atop a rocky outcrop some way away, the Master smiled with quiet satisfaction.



Twenty Arabs lay dead; more of the Turks. All were young. The Doctor shook his head sadly.

‘There was no need for that violence,’ he snapped at Auda, who was passing on his way to where the Ottoman prisoners had been rounded up. The Arab just shot him a contemptuous, pitying look and kept walking.

‘This was your battle,’ Sharif Ali said grimly. ‘Yours and Lawrence’s. The Arabs have no need for Mada’in Saleh.’

The Doctor rounded on him in righteous fury. ‘The plan was to take the train without anyone getting hurt! This was just senseless brutality, mindless thuggery of the highest order!’

‘Well I suppose that’s what happens when you use barbarians to do your dirty work,’ Ali retorted, and strode away.

Lawrence emerged from the train.

‘Don’t let them get to you,’ he said. ‘They’re just bent out of shape because there’s no loot to be had.’

The Doctor scowled. ‘Men have died, Lawrence. Just because they’re Arabs and Turks doesn’t mean their deaths matter any less.’

‘No, of course not,’ the soldier replied stiffly. ‘But this is a war. People are dying everywhere. Europe is a charnel-house. If this helps end all that the sooner then surely it’s a price worth paying.’

The Doctor regarded him coolly. ‘You don’t have to relish it so much.’

Lawrence returned his stare. ‘You didn’t exactly seem to be having a miserable time of it yourself.’

They said nothing for a long time.

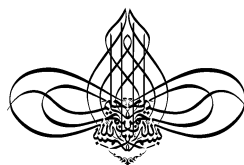
A thought struck the Doctor.

‘Have you seen Jo?’

‘Not since earlier. She was riding with some of the junior Arabs. Why?’

‘I haven’t seen her since this morning.’ He looked around anxiously, seeing if he could pick out her bright clothes among the drab whites and browns of the milling Arabs. Nothing.

‘Well she’s not among the dead, so I shouldn’t worry’ Lawrence replied evenly. ‘Ask around. She’s not exactly inconspicuous. Someone’s bound to have noticed where she’s got to. I need to get our strike team on to the train. Honestly, you wouldn’t believe what I have to put up with. Leading Arabs is like herding cats.’



‘So what’s the plan?’ It wasn’t the first time Abdul-Malik had asked but Najid seemed to have got into one of his enigmatic moods. At least it made a change that for once he had something to be enigmatic *about*. Normally when he acted all mysterious and evasive he was just either seeking attention or winding people up.

Najid said nothing and hastened his camel with a kick to her flanks. He'd kept up a brutal pace ever since they'd left the railway. At this rate he was going to drive the animal into the ground. Abdul-Malik could feel his own mount flagging. Jo had dropped so far behind he had to squint she was still in the saddle and following them.

'Najid!' he shouted. This time when his friend didn't reply Abdul-Malik drew his pistol and fired off a shot into the sky.

Najid whirled his camel round and cantered back to him. 'What are you doing?' he demanded. 'You want to let everyone know where we are?'

'Maybe that would be a better idea than riding at random out into the desert?' Abdul-Malik shot back. 'I don't know – I'm not a Howeitat, but it seems like it. You know, just maybe?'

'Don't try and get sarcastic with me, lad,' Najid growled. 'You're too young and you haven't got the balls.'

'Well tell me where we're going then! What's the hurry all of a sudden?'

'The hurry? The hurry my friend is this!' Najid was suddenly brandishing the Englishman's letter. 'You want to show the English how civilised we are, don't you? Well this letter, my friend, is *late*. We have no idea how late it is, but the chances are it is very late indeed. Do you think they would stand for that from the Royal Mail? Do you think the Kaiser thinks nothing of it when an important dispatch arrives days or more overdue? Poor General Allenby must be beside himself! The things he must be saying about the Arabian post! My boy, I'm afraid the British will never take us seriously again!'

'Now who's being sarcastic?'

'We have something that's meant for General Allenby,' Najid said firmly. 'And we're going to give it to him. Along with a little token of regret for the delay.' As he thrust the letter back into his robes, his fingers brushed against his revolver. The implication was clear.

'You can't be serious.'

'You can always go back to the train, boy. Me, I have business in Cairo. Revolutions are the locomotives of history!'

With that, he spurred the camel on and thundered off once more.

'How does he even know Cairo's in that direction?' Abdul-Malik wondered aloud as Jo finally caught up.

'Trouble?' she asked brightly. 'I don't suppose he said where we're going?'

'Cairo.'

'Oh. Right.' She considered this. 'I was hoping it might be somewhere... closer.'

'I think he means to assassinate General Allenby.'

'You're not serious!'

'That's what I said.'

'We've got to stop him!'

'Obviously. But h- No, wait, hang on. Why do we?'

'What?'

Abdul-Malik thought about it. 'Allenby's our enemy! His orders are to enslave us. Make us no better than the Negroes. Maybe we *should* kill him?'

Jo was appalled. 'You can't just go around killing people! Anyway, that's hardly going to change anything. There's loads more generals just like him. You'd just be throwing your lives away!'

'But for a while it'd disrupt the British. When the Arabs hear what we've done and why they'll rise up in rebellion!'

'You're already in rebellion against the Turks! You're very brave, Abdul, and I'm sure you're very good fighters, but do you really think the Arabs can beat the Ottoman Empire and the British one at the same time?'

'I...' He tailed off. She was right. His flight of fantasy blew away like sands in a wind. Actually, on the subject of wind...

Abdul-Malik inclined his head and loosened his *keffiyeh*, feeling the touch of the breeze on his skin. Desert winds were cherished and beloved of those who traversed the sands; if you spent any time in the wastes you soon learned to distinguish their peculiar flavours and properties.

'Oh no,' he murmured.

Jo caught the new note of concern in his voice. 'What is it?'

'The breeze has changed. I know this kind. There's a storm on its way, Jo. It's coming in fast!'

'But- We're miles from the others! If we're caught out here in a storm...'

He nodded. 'It won't be good.'

The most important thing now was to catch up with Najid, persuade him to break off his desperate ride and find shelter. Abdul-Malik knew it was hopeless even before he reached his friend. The storm closed in with terrifying, unnatural swiftness. Its gusting winds seemed to swirl in around them from every direction and none. Clouds rolled into a sky which had moments earlier been an unblemished field of blue. This was no ordinary *habub*.

Najid knew it. He reined in his camel and allowed Abdul-Malik and Jo to catch up with him. The undisguised fear on his face did nothing to allay Abdul-Malik's concerns.

'We're not going to find shelter in time,' Najid said without preamble, his eyes wide and fixed on the sky.

'We have to do something!' Jo shouted over the roar of the gale.

'Do what, girl? What would your English practicality have us do? This – this is beyond what even the Bedouin can weather. No natural storm closes in so fast and so fierce.'

The winds carried with them dust and sands. Jo had to pull her headscarf across her face to keep the stinging grains from her eyes and skin. The camels shied and rumbled their discomfort.

Something in the swirling maelstrom caught Najid's eye. 'There!' he called excitedly. 'You see it?'

Abdul-Malik saw nothing, but couldn't spare the energy to say so over the onslaught. Najid didn't seem to care. He leapt down from his camel and stood in the eye of the storm, whirling and darting as he tried to glimpse whatever had captivated him. His lips were moving in some whispered prayer.

'I...' said Jo suddenly, then shook her head. 'No. Just for a second I thought I saw something. Something alive in the storm.'

'There's nothing,' Abdul-Malik replied firmly. 'There can't be anything. Nothing can live in this.' It was true. They were going to die. Nothing could stop that now.

'You saw it,' Najid called out. 'Don't doubt it, girl. You know you saw it!'

And as much as he wished he could deny it, Abdul-Malik saw them too. Dozens of them, spinning and dancing ethereally in the midst of the chaos. Not human, not weather. Something different. Something elemental.

'You know what they are,' Najid shouted as the spectres closed in. The triumph had gone from his voice, as if he realised what it meant for them.

A sudden silence fell in the instant before the beings fell upon them

'The djinn have us.'

