

Mehmetçik (1917)

Süleyman Kebapçı counted himself a lucky man. He'd been nineteen when the war broke out, a lost and directionless youth. His father was a man for whom godliness came from strict discipline and sternly-enforced rules. *Baba* had the foolish notion that daily beatings would somehow raise his slight and feckless son above the life he had been born to; that each bruise was another step on the path towards entry into the civil service or some other imperial organisation, towards Istanbul where the power and influence and money were. Once there, his simple mission was to accrue to himself the maximum possible share of those three desirables and channel as much as possible to his dear father, who would wait, humbly hawking his kebabs in the backstreets of Burdur's bazaar. The Ottoman Empire had lasted six hundred years, *Baba* said, but there were only two constants that could be relied on: kebabs and *baksheesh*.

As Süleyman entered his teens and the insane optimism of this plan had become fully obvious to anyone who cared to look, *Baba* had, after one final despairing beating, entrusted him to the care of a nearby *tekke*. If he wasn't to be a powerful man, then at least the Sufis might mould him into an adequately godly one. The fact that Süleyman had no more interest in becoming a dervish than he had in becoming a civil servant was neither here nor there. He donned the black *hurka* cloak and conical *sikke* hat and his life became a blur of *sama* and *dhikr*, striving to attain mystical communion with God through meticulous rites and the whirling, spinning dance. He was barely competent, earning him no shortage of further beatings.

He was spared the religious life by the outbreak of war. The Mevlevi Sufis volunteered en masse and he was drafted into the army as a lowly Mehmetçik. They marched away from Burdur confident in the belief that this was just another tussle in the age-old and interminable struggle with the rebellious Greeks. Two months after they left, Burdur was struck by earthquake and levelled to the ground. The bazaar was poorly-built and had long been in need of repair. Süleyman's father, mother and both sisters were crushed by falling roof of their little kebab-shop. He marched on, the only survivor of his family.

It was at the straits of Çanakkale that he abandoned any hope of understanding this war. The enemy who hurled themselves suicidally against the coastal defences were not on this occasion Greeks, it turned out, but hailed from all over the globe. They were Australians and New Zealanders, Indians and French. Süleyman and the other Mehmetçiks had only the vaguest idea where half those places were, still less why they should suddenly have designs on Turkey of such import that they warranted dashing themselves in their thousands against the cliffs of the Dardanelles. Did those young men have any more idea what they were doing there than he did? He'd stood on the cliff edge and watched the great warships on fire in the waters between Asia and Europe. This was a war of great machines, he had realised, and the Mehmetçiks and Tommies and Diggers were just another kind of component to be deployed and used up and replaced by the adventurers on their distant divans with their grand plans for how the world should be, plans it was not given to them to know.

After Çanakkale the Hejaz was a blessed relief. Certainly, it was hot and dusty and plagued by rebellious Bedouin, but he was only in the *vilayet* two weeks before the Bey

picked him out for the garrison at Mada'in Saleh. A frontier outpost with nothing there save a small station on the pilgrim-railway to Medina and the abandoned tombs of a long-dead people. Some of the others worried about the djinn which haunted the ruins, for every peasant knows that ancient places attract such beings. Süleyman didn't worry. He was a Sufi and a dervish. He knew the truth of djinn. They are like men: they have their foibles and their factions and their intrigues. Some of them have ill will at heart, just as men do, but no race can be categorised all according to a single temperament. Not all djinn are the enemies of Man. So long as one treats them with respect, they are no more to be feared than is one's fellow human being.

That was probably why he had remained here so long. He'd seen the djinn. Everyone had – the Bey was close to them, evidently a man of deeper mystical understanding than any of the other officers Süleyman had encountered. There were strange lights at night around the necropolis, unearthly sounds and bizarre anomalies in the climate. One morning the previous August it had even snowed. Other soldiers panicked and fled, or prodded deeper into the Bey's affairs in search of answers and quietly disappeared. Süleyman watched them come and go with aloof resignation, all the time secure in his own scrupulously-maintained respectful detachment. Leave the Beys and the djinn to their business – both, when all was said and done, equally unfathomable – and concentrate on his own business of guarding the station. Süleyman had finally found something at which he excelled. Keep quiet. Ensure rifle is clean and loaded. Find seat beside the tracks. Put feet up and watch for anything untoward with the trains.

There never was anything. The most he ever had to deal with was damaged trains limping through after being damaged by enemy action. Their crews were usually somewhere between furious or terrified. Either way, they weren't Süleyman's problem. He pointed them in the direction of the Bey if they had business with him; waved them on their way to Medina if they did not. His world ticked reliably forward; readable in its own parochiality.

So when a train thundered out of the hills at ferocious speed, belching crimson smoke from its funnel, it took Süleyman Kebapçı a moment to know how to respond.

Recovering his wits, he snapped up his rifle and rang the alarm-bell just as the train rounded the last, broad bend before the station. By then, others had already spotted it. There were about two-dozen soldiers stationed in the handful of low, sandstone buildings that comprised the base here. At least half of them were running from their posts, yelling and waving their rifles even before Süleyman sounded his alarm. Someone got to the MG08 Maxim in its little embrasure and a moment later its angry staccato rattle echoed across the desert.

Süleyman fired off a couple of shots of his own, to show willing. They had no more effect on the locomotive than did the machine-gun.

Just before it left the tracks, he glimpsed a white man leaning from the cab, the wind rippling a prodigious confection of ash-coloured hair and an expression of grim determination etched across his craggy features. He seemed heroically unconcerned by the gunfire; indeed, in that split-second glimpse afforded him, Süleyman could have sworn the fellow wasn't even armed.

For the first time he felt a pang of fear.

Lawrence of Arabia had finally arrived.

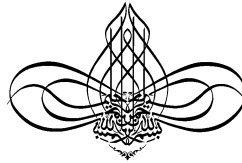
With a final burst of speed as it emerged from the bend, the train pitched from the tracks and speared haphazardly across the sand, scattering Süleyman's compatriots in its path. Some made it; many didn't. Süleyman watched the spectacle unfold in horror before realising, belatedly, that he probably ought to do something about getting out of the way himself.

He turned, threw aside his rifle and ran.

It was too late.

The train ploughed into the station-building, bringing it down around it.

Süleyman's last thought as the sandstone masonry crashed down around him was that perhaps he hadn't been all that lucky to end up here after all.



DOCTOR WHO

LOVED EGYPTIAN NIGHT

By

Philip Boyes

Episode 4

Al-Hi jo

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

Karl Marx – *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848

The Master's TARDIS brought them to a stone chamber lit by a shaft of pale-blue sunlight from high above. The timeship had been disguised as a camel in the desert – a suitably ill-tempered beast with a fearsome glower (and Jo wasn't about to forget entering that in a hurry!); now it appeared as a pilaster graven from the same Mars-red rock as the rest of the structure.

The Doctor's TARDIS stood on the opposite side of the room. Jo uttered an involuntary cry of relief when she saw it. After so many months in this strange and foreign world, its reassuring foursquare blueness felt agonisingly like home. She made to run over to it but the Master held her back.

'That would be most unwise, Miss Grant.'

It was surrounded by an elaborate cat's cradle of technology that seemed to have been cannibalised from equipment within. Jo recognised parts of the Doctor's food machine and a dusty old apparatus she'd once found acting as a planter for runner beans in the TARDIS potting-shed; the Doctor had somewhat shamefacedly admitted it had been an astral map until he'd spilt tea on it. Other items she didn't recognise, but they had the same look about them and she had little doubt they'd come from the Doctor's machine. The whole lash-up was interconnected by trailing skeins of cabling and faintly-glowing cobweb-like wire. A couple of what she assumed were power lines disappeared through the TARDIS's open door and into the central console.

'What is this?' asked Abdul-Malik. He and Najid had reacted to the interior dimensions of the Master's vessel with less shock than Jo had expected. The poor men had seen so much today that they were probably incapable of much more than a resigned raised eyebrow by this stage. Faced with this technology, the boy seemed more curious than anything. 'I've heard about the machines you have in Europe. I didn't imagine they were like this.'

'These machines aren't English,' his older self growled.

‘What have you done to the TARDIS?’ Jo demanded. It was horrible to see it like this. It seemed somehow a violation. She’d seen the Doctor tinker with it countless times, of course, on occasion tearing the old girl almost into pieces in his efforts to work out why she wouldn’t work. Jo still remembered the week when he’d yanked every single roundel off the console room walls and replaced them with what looked like washing-up bowls in an effort to ‘gather residual artron energy and focus it in towards the Time Rotor’. Whatever that meant, it hadn’t worked, and she’d had to spend a tedious afternoon helping him put them all back. But when the Doctor attacked the TARDIS it was with an unflinching fondness and respect. He whispered to it and sang soothing songs to it as he worked, stroking the controls and patting the console affectionately at any sign of life. However chaotic things looked, however much of the machine’s innards were strewn around the console room and lab, it never felt *wrong*. It never felt like this.

The Master didn’t seem to notice her distress. One thing he did have in common with the Doctor was the urge to revel in his own cleverness, to show off his handiwork. Like a professor eager to explain his invention to a favoured student, he launched into an explanation of the device.

‘Fear not, Miss Grant: the Doctor’s TARDIS is perfectly intact. I am merely borrowing the energy from its motive core to equalise the potential in this Blinovitch cage.’

‘Blino-what-now?’

‘Oh come now. You’re not telling me the Doctor’s never mentioned Little Brother Blinovitch? Famous for his Limitation Effect, stroganoff and fondness for limericks?’

‘He might have mentioned the first one,’ Jo admitted.

‘The Blinovitch Limitation Effect limits one’s ability to interfere in one’s own established timestream. If you try, you risk shorting out the time differential.’

‘And that’s bad?’

‘To put it in terms even you might understand, Miss Grant, “bang”.’ He clapped his hands together violently.

‘Oh.’

‘The classic example is if you travel into your own past and touch your younger self. The energy release from a living subject is particularly impressive. Rather unfortunate for the subject himself, of course, but one can’t have everything.’

Abdul-Malik went pale. *Both* Abdul-Maliks. Each took an involuntary step away from the other.

‘And that is why one needs a Blinovitch cage: a device for safely harnessing, transmuting and channelling that released energy without all the... mess. A considerable technical achievement, I can assure you. One that will enable me to harness the full power of these *djinn*, as your friends so colourfully call them.’

‘So making a lawn in the desert was just a warm-up. I should have known you had something more sinister in mind than gardening.’ Jo said.

The Master wagged a finger. ‘Do not underestimate gardening, Miss Grant. The Zaver conquered three galaxies using the power of weaponised horticulture. What this device will give me is the ability to remake the environment at will. I can make the desert bloom: turn desolate wastelands into lands of plenty – and the reverse, of course. The world will be mine to command.’ He turned to the younger Abdul-Malik. ‘Imagine that, boy! Your people

wouldn't have to spend any more time grubbing round in these sun-blasted wastes. The Middle East could be what you've always wanted it to be: build in Jerusalem England's green and pleasant land.'

Abdul-Malik said nothing, but Jo saw his eyes widen as his mind encompassed the possibilities.

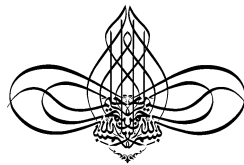
'And I suppose in exchange, all they'd have to do is serve you?' Jo asked.

'A small price for a life of comfort and plenty, surely?'

'Some of us like the desert,' said Najid. 'And our freedom. Arabia doesn't need fixing. Not by you, not by anyone. Don't listen to him, boy.'

Somewhere in the distance there was a colossal screech of rending metal and falling masonry.

The Master raised an eyebrow. 'I'm afraid I shall have to leave you for a little while. Unless I'm very much mistaken, the Doctor has just arrived.'



Lawrence crawled out of the wreckage of the boxcar with a new sympathy for the poor devils whose trains he'd spent the last couple of months blowing up. The train had careened into the side of the station building – little more than a sandstone hut – bringing the pitched roof and parts of two walls down around it. The locomotive was lost among a pile of masonry and a thick cloud of dust and steam; its carriages lay crookedly across the tracks and sands. He was lucky not to have been badly injured – his gunshot wound had opened up again and was seeping red blood into his white *thawb*, and he'd picked up a few cuts and bruises, but nothing too severe. He let the pain give him strength, focus his reeling mind. A familiar thrill ran through him. He'd miss this when it was over.

Many of the Arabs had been less fortunate. He recoiled at the sight of torn and broken bodies scattered among the twisted metal and splintered wood of the wreckage. There were Turkish defenders among the wounded too. One young lad in the uniform of a Dervish volunteer had lost most of his left arm and had suffered appalling steam-burns to one side of his face. He was dragging himself away from the station, uttering a low wail of keening pleas that Lawrence couldn't decipher. He drew his Webley and shot the youth cleanly through the skull. He felt no guilt: it was a mercy.

'Lawrence!'

The call was in English. He spun, picking out Quinn among the survivors. The captain was partly pinned beneath one of the carriage bogies. An Arab whose name Lawrence didn't know was fussing about trying to get him free, using a length of broken metal as a lever.

'Captain.' Lawrence still found it difficult to know how to approach the fellow. An unworthy part of him noted that it would have been more convenient had he perished in the crash. 'Are you hurt?'

'Broken leg, I think. Maybe a few ribs too. And I'm stuck.' This complaint coincided with the Arab making an effort to prise the bogie up a few inches with his crowbar. It slipped after little more than a second, eliciting a stifled cry of pain from the Englishman. 'Stupid ape!' Quinn snapped, clipping the native round the head with his free hand. Wincing with pain, he turned back to Lawrence. 'Think I'm going to have to sit this one out, sir. Bloody bad show – wanted to give that treacherous Svengali a piece of my mind!'

Lawrence just nodded. Out of the corner of his eye he was already looking around to see if there was anyone else important still alive who might spare him the rest of this encounter.

'Want you to know sir,' Quinn continued, 'wasn't my choice. I'd never – well, you know. Might be weak, but king and country and all that. Still means something. Rather hoped I could redeem myself here.'

'Just try not to get yourself killed,' Lawrence told him. He couldn't see Sharif Ali or any of the other Arab chiefs, though he could hear fighting over by some of the other buildings, suggesting some of his men at least had made it out of the train in reasonable shape. He would join them in a moment. First there was the unwelcome task of investigating the remains of the locomotive.

He approached cautiously. Steam engines weren't really his metier but he was aware there was at least the possibility that the boiler might explode, even without the added complication of the djinn (and where were *they*, for that matter? There was no hint of them in the drifting haze of settling sand and dust). There might be Turks alive and hidden, too.

'Doctor?'

No answer.

He didn't really expect there would be. As they had barrelled towards Mada'in Saleh, the Doctor had begun moving like a mad thing, operating the locomotive's controls with what Lawrence might have mistaken for random desperation had it not been for the expression of intense concentration on his face. As they rounded the final bend, he'd shouted a warning. They were going to come off the tracks and there was nothing he could do. In a tone that brooked no dissent, he ordered Lawrence and the Turkish fireman out of the locomotive. Lawrence had just made it back to the boxcar when the train derailed. He didn't see what became of the Turk, but his last sight of the Doctor was of him standing resolute on the footplate. At the last moment he let go the controls and peered out towards the station with stoical resignation. An instant later there was only darkness.

'Doctor?' Lawrence called again, coughing slightly on the blasted dust. He pulled his *keffiyeh* up around his mouth and nose and breathed a little easier through it.

There was a low moan from the rubble nearby.

'Good God!'

He was sprawled there among the ruined sandstone, one leg slightly raised and bent at the knee, his overalls charred and tattered and his bouffant laden with sand and dust. But against all probability undeniably alive. He coughed a couple of times, wearily dragging a silk handkerchief from a pocket, shaking it out and using it to cover his mouth.

‘Are you all right?’

‘Right as rain,’ the Doctor replied, sounding anything but. ‘That was rather a heavy impact. I’m starting to think somebody doesn’t want us here.’

Lawrence helped him to his feet, taking a *thawb* from a dead Arab and draping it over the other Englishman’s shoulders to cover the remains of his overalls. The Doctor took in the sight of the wrecked train and scattered bodies with a grimace.

‘Oh dear.’

‘So much for the element of surprise.’

The Doctor shot him a look. ‘Are many people hurt?’

‘Yes. Yes, I’m afraid so. But they’re mostly Arabs. I’ve not seen Ali or anyone else important among the dead.’

‘Oh, well if they’re only Arabs that’s all right then,’ the Doctor snapped.

‘Don’t get sanctimonious, Doctor. You were happy enough to use them to get you to this enemy of yours. You knew there’d be a battle. What did you *think* was going to happen to them?’

‘They’re people, not tools for you to remake the Middle East the way you want it!’

‘You think this is how I would have wanted it? Young men are dying all across the world in pursuit of politicians’ dreams of the world they want. We’re all of us tools, Doctor. The best we can do is try and influence the world that emerges, push it towards what we consider most worthy.’

‘Most worthy for whom? Where do you draw the line, Lawrence? When does the price of empire become too high?’

‘It’s not empire I’m interested in. It’s freedom.’

‘You won’t be the first to proclaim one while building the other. Nor the last.’

‘I’m not interested in empire,’ Lawrence repeated firmly. ‘Would I see a free Arab nation before I hand it to the British and the French to divide between themselves like so much loot? Yes! A thousand times yes. But you know and I know what will happen unless I build the right kind of Arabia now, while I have the power. When the fighting is done and the treaties are being signed, by then it will be too late.’

‘And all the Arabs who die for your dreams?’

‘I’m not heartless, Doctor. But there must always be sacrifices on the road to progress.’

‘And so I ask again: when is the price too high?’

Lawrence considered before replying. ‘All the subject provinces of empire to me are not worth one dead English boy.’

‘I see.’ He seemed dissatisfied with the answer and lapsed into a sullen silence. They left the tracks and the broken train and crept among the handful of low buildings that constituted the Turkish base. All around them there was fighting as the survivors of Lawrence’s train engaged the remaining defenders. The numbers of men on both sides were small but the combat was fierce and unrelenting. Rifle cracks stuttered between the buildings, scattering chips of sharp stone as the ricocheted off the masonry. Grenades exploded on all sides, kicking up great red-hued plumes of sand and dust. Lawrence’s overwhelming urge was to throw himself into the fray. The Doctor’s manner had riled him, and right at this moment nothing would provide more satisfying catharsis than to unload his

frustrations upon some unfortunate Anatolian conscript. The Doctor had no interest in joining the fighting, however. When Lawrence offered him a dead man's pistol he merely tossed it aside and continued unarmed. He was making for the jagged rock outcroppings of the necropolis, at a pace that made concessions to nothing and seemed driven as much by sulkiness as a desire to confront his enemy. More than once Lawrence tried to strike up a conversation or enquire as to his plan, but the Doctor refused to so much as acknowledge his existence. *Crikey*, Lawrence reflected, *something I said really struck a nerve. Properly in the doghouse here.*

Sound travels far in the desert, but even so, the sounds of gunfire had receded somewhat by the time they reached the ancient tombs. The great carved façades gave him a thrill of nostalgia for his archaeology days. Beneath the fallen walls of ancient Karkemish he'd met the famous Leonard Woolley; within a few years the pair of them had been charged with surveying the Negev. Ostensibly theirs was a search for the scriptures' Wilderness of Zin under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund; in reality the British army had noticed the clouds of war looming overhead and had masterminded the whole venture as a covert mapping operation. It came as little surprise to Lawrence or Woolley when, the war having finally arrived, they found themselves drafted into military intelligence. But that survey had taken Lawrence to Petra, the celebrated rose-red city of the Wadi Arabah. Even after years of travelling the Near East and visiting its manifold historical treasures, Lawrence had found himself marvelling at the grand Nabataean dwellings carved into the cliffsides, their stark abandonment a silent testament to the impermanence of civilisation. It had outlasted its builders and the Greek and Roman conquerors who succeeded them; it would doubtless stand centuries more, and who could tell what the world would look like then?

The grandeur of Petra found its lesser mirror in the tombs of Mada'in Saleh. The columned and decorated façades carved from the living rock of the crags were unmistakably of the same style. While there was nothing to compare in scale to the magnificence of Petra's grand Treasury, these monuments were by no means small, and in their isolation, jutting from the flat desert like colossal megaliths, no less affecting.

There were signs of Turkish presence – automobile tracks in the sand, a fenced-off paddock containing a trio of lazy-looking camels, a pair of Fokker biplanes parked on a flat patch of ground outside one of the tombs. All the guards seemed to have gone to join the fighting by the railway and the necropolis was eerily deserted. Nothing provided an immediate clue as to which of the burial-chambers was the one containing the Doctor's boat. This was where Quinn could have made himself distinctly useful.

The Doctor showed little hesitation, however. He made directly for one of the tombs as if guided by some uncanny instinct. Lawrence proceeded after him with rather more caution, pistol at the ready and eyes scouring the clifftops. There were a thousand places a Turkish sniper might make his nest.

'Doctor!'

The voice that rang out was surprisingly warm, almost as rich as the Doctor's own, but with a menacing undercurrent, a dangerous note of triumph. The Doctor stopped, planting his hands on his hips and watching like a haughty schoolmaster as a man emerged from the tomb.

After all the skulduggery the fellow had been up to, Lawrence realised he had subconsciously been expecting an imposing figure. This man was not that, physically at any rate. He wasn't a tall fellow – it was hard to judge at this distance but he could hardly be more than an inch or two above Lawrence's own rather deficient five foot five. Nor was he blessed with a powerful physique. The frame concealed within that innocuous but well-tailored suit was distinctly average for a man of his age in almost all regards. His face, though! Even at this distance it was enough to send a shiver up Lawrence's spine. Swarthy, saturnine and bearded like the very Devil himself. His eyes gleamed with manic fervour from deep within the shadow of his *keffiyeh*.

'Come out to play at last?' asked the Doctor, sounding irritable and bored more than anything.

The man – the Master – spread his hands. 'I thought I would let the mountain come to Mohammed. Although I did make a brief excursion to collect something you seemed to mislay in the desert. Tut tut, Doctor. If I had a travelling companion as charming and intelligent, as charming as Miss Grant, I would take rather better care of her.'

'I seem to recall what happened to your last travelling companion. What have you done to Jo?'

'Nothing. Rescued her from a suicidal venture into the wilderness. That is all. I fear you've not been paying attention, Doctor. She's been having an entirely different adventure to you.'

'What are you prattling about? Where is she?'

'With her friends. Don't worry, she's quite unharmed.'

During this exchange Lawrence had been subtly raising his Webley under the folds of his cloak. He brought it to bear on the Master's chest. At this range the outcome was a little doubtful, especially since he couldn't aim through the sights, but if nothing else the distraction would give him cover to move closer and perhaps get off another shot.

'Distinctly over-optimistic, Major Lawrence,' the Master called out.

The weapon grew suddenly hot in Lawrence's hand. Scorching hot. With a cry he dropped it, shaking it clear of his robes. The Master chuckled.

'What did you do?' Lawrence shouted. His hand was throbbing with pain, the skin of his palm red and blistered.

'The same thing that did for the train, I should think,' observed the Doctor. 'Localised molecular control using some sort of nano-swarm. Basic control over the elements, both chemical and meteorological. Probably meant for terraforming or something.' He glanced towards the Master. 'How am I doing so far?'

'Rather worse than I had expected. Rather better than you will be a few moments from now.'

He snapped his fingers and the air around Lawrence and the Doctor blurred and shimmered.

'Great balls of fire!' the Doctor exclaimed.

'If you insist. I'm always happy to take requests.'

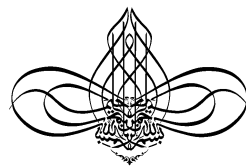
A good half-dozen fireballs coalesced out of the mirage. They whirled and reeled around them, their movements growing ever-faster until it seemed they were surrounded by a blazing curtain. There was a sudden flare and a great burning likeness of a man formed

from the flames, its skull crested with horns and great wings of fire arching from its back. Its face was a half-formed bestial semblance, all instinct and anger. Typically Eastern. It roared.

‘Now he’s just showing off!’ the Doctor muttered. For the first time there was a hint of anxiety in his voice. He masked it with bravado, calling loudly to make himself heard over the noise of the flames: ‘Meant to be a djinni, is it? I see you haven’t lost your penchant for melodrama. Really, old chap, all this grubbing round for mythical spooks to ally yourself with is getting a bit tacky, you know. What’ll it be next time? The troll under the bridge? The big bad wolf? Fungus the Bogeyman?’

Any response the Master made – if he even heard – was lost beneath another roar from the fire-creature. It lunged down at them with blazing claws, trailing sparks. Lawrence struggled to keep calm. He was not a superstitious man. He was an Oxford graduate and an academic and an Englishman to boot. But his learning on the subject of Arab fire-demons had tended very much towards the theoretical.

He wondered whether his gun had cooled down yet. Didn’t seem likely, somehow. He ducked a vicious lunge from the creature. More of this and he’d have to risk it. And pray bullets had some sort of effect.



‘It was a mistake for him to leave us alone in here.’ Najid had a sparkle in his eye. Since the Master had gone outside and taken his djinn with him, the Arab had regained something of his old confidence. That would have done more to raise Jo’s spirits if it hadn’t been for the older Abdul-Malik having a gun trained on them.

‘You think so?’ the old man asked. His voice was weary and hollow. A man who felt he’d lost it all and was resigned to let life wash him along where it would. Jo knew the tone well – back when she’d been new to UNIT, it had disturbed her the way some of the boys would just vanish after one alien incursion or another. No memorial service so they weren’t among the dead; no leaving party so they hadn’t been transferred back to the regulars. She’d asked around. All anyone would say was ‘stress’. Never one to be fobbed off easily, she’d made a pest of herself and batted her eyelashes at John Benton. Eventually he’d scrawled an address on the back of a napkin and warned her she’d be wise not to visit. She’d ignored him and gone to see those men in a hospice near Chelmsford. There was nothing physically wrong with them, but the way they talked... The world was not the place they’d thought it was and they didn’t have the energy to learn to comprehend it anew. They’d just given up. They weren’t mad. The fact that they were completely sane was the worst part of all. The hopelessness in their voices unnerved her. Too much like Mum in the last few years. She never went back.

Najid was eyeing the Master's contraption avariciously. 'You heard what he said. This machine can remake worlds. Do it to a patch of desert – it's a conjuring trick. Do it to a country – you can change the course of the world.'

Old Abdul-Malik shook his head. 'What you said before: that was sense. Arabia doesn't need fixing. This? This is foolishness.'

His younger self started. 'It is? But why? Life's hard in the desert! Why shouldn't we have water and fruits and pastures? Things could be plentiful. Like they are for the English! What they have – that could be ours!'

His counterpart sighed. 'I was such a foolish young man. Damn that Egyptian fellow filling my head with ideas about the British.' He looked into his younger self's eyes. 'You read that letter. You *know* the truth. The British should be *nobody's* model for progress. I've seen what the years to come bring. Treachery, deceit and exploitation.'

'And the Jews?' asked Najid.

There was an awkward pause before Abdul-Malik answered. When he did, he said carefully, 'Jews are just people, same as us, Najid. You never did understand that. Not really. The Jews aren't the problem. The problem is *nations*. Politicians with grand ideas in their heads of where borders should go, which race or people one belongs to and where one belongs. Great men who speak only to each other, care only for the rivalries between themselves. They are a people of their own. The rest of us are just their pawns, whether we're Arabs or English or Jews.'

'And that's why you're helping the Master?' Jo asked him. 'To destroy the politicians and the old nations? It won't be any better under him! You'll just have one ruler enslaving everyone. He's worse than any of them! He's evil! Surely you see that?'

'I have lived through two world wars and the driving of my people from their homeland,' Abdul-Malik said wearily. 'I recognise evil.'

'So why are you doing this?' Her eyes were on the gun. All she needed was the slightest sign that he was getting lost in the emotion, the pain he was evidently carrying, even for a second. One momentary dip of the weapon and she could have it out of his hand. Well, hopefully. To be honest she was always a bit of a ditz on the training days and this kind of thing usually ended up with her hurting the instructor, herself or her fellow learners. In the end the Brig had just stopped sending her and hoped that some of the Doctor's poise would rub off on her. Oh well, she'd soon find out if that policy had paid off.

But Abdul-Malik was a trained soldier. His gun never wavered. 'Sometimes we do what we must, not what we want to do.' He spoke with mournful finality, evidently considering the matter closed.

Najid had long-since lost interest in the exchange. Motives only held his attention so long. It was action that excited him. And he evidently glimpsed countless possibilities for action in the Master's device. He fussed around it with an engineer's excitement, tracing connections and trying to figure out what operated which component. You could almost see the plans cascading through his thoughts.

'It's not Arabia I want to change,' he told them. 'We've got the machine, we've got what we need to make it work.' He glanced at the two Abdul-Maliks. 'We don't need the Master at all. This power is in *our* hands now. We can make the world the way *we* want it.'

The younger Abdul-Malik caught on first. 'We can use it as a weapon! Drive the Turks out of Arab lands. Right now, with only a thought.'

'Drive them out?' Najid scoffed. 'Too small, lad! With the djinn we could bring down the entire Ottoman Empire!'

'You can't!' Jo said.

'Why not? It's had its boot on our necks for five hundred years! That's quite long enough, it seems to me. But even that's thinking small. We bring down the Turks and what happens? The British and the French and the Germans and everyone else piles in to carve up Arabia, just as they're planning anyway. They let the Jews into Syria and Palestine. I say we end this war now. All the empires go. Turks and Europeans alike. We raze their lands as they've razed ours. They'll have no choice but to drag their armies back home to rebuild. The captive peoples of their empires will be free.'

'You can't do that!' Jo protested. 'It's monstrous! Think of all the people who'll die! They're innocent!'

'Who's innocent? If you work in the factories that make the armaments or plough the fields to feed the armies, or buy cheap clothes made by native labourers in a subject land, are you innocent? Can you wash your hands and say the empire's nothing to do with you?'

'Najid!'

'She's right,' said the young Abdul-Malik. 'If we do that, we're no better than they are. They call us barbarians – we'd just be proving it!'

'Sometimes violent revolution's the only way to throw off the chains of oppression!' Najid shouted.

Jo had heard that kind of thing before. It was the kind of thing Mum would say when she was puffed up with indignation at some critical remark a friend or someone on TV had made about the Russians. Jo had learnt not to argue with her – politics wasn't her strong suit by a long chalk and she'd come to realise that Uncle Frank had been right in what he used to say when she was small: Mum really didn't understand what she was talking about. Dad had been the brains of the family; he was the one who'd understood all the politics. Mum had just gone on the marches because she fancied him. Since he'd died, parroting the slogans and the dogma seemed to make her feel closer to him, but deep down Jo thought even she knew it was hollow bluster. No-one could look at what the Soviet Union was and truly defend that. All the talk of revolution and throwing off oppression sounded good in theory, but every day the news was full of what that got you in the end.

And yet...

And yet there was the Doctor. A man who was happy in his club, hob-nobbing with the elite, a delightful Chablis in his hand – no Marxist he. A man with a country house and a vintage car. A man who without a second thought and as little effort could sweep down on a planet, tear its politics to the ground in a night and leave it in a state of glorious anarchy. She'd never given much thought to what happened to all those planets after they left. How many of the plucky rebels did set up a brave new world without kings and nations? How many good intentions wound up in their own USSRs? The Doctor said he couldn't control the TARDIS, that he couldn't go back even if he wanted to. Was that true, she wondered. He made it back to Earth often enough. What if he was just scared? What if he was just afraid to

know how many of those worlds turned out better from his interference and how many worse?

There was a murmur from the older Abdul-Malik. Jo couldn't decipher the word. It sounded like 'Yael'.

He stretched out a wrinkled hand towards the Blinovitch Cage.

She realised he wasn't pointing the gun at her any more. She sprang, expecting to have to prise it from his fingers. He barely even seemed to notice.

'We won't attack the Europeans,' he said. 'Nor the Turks. But this is a gift from God. A chance for a different future to the one I've known. We can't waste it. A show of power, something spectacular that will show the world what we can do. And then we demand that all foreign forces withdraw from Arab lands, or we *will* use the device as a weapon.'

'A show of power?' Najid asked suspiciously. 'What did you have in mind?'

The old man smiled. 'Have you heard what the Zionists call Palestine? "A land without people for a people without a land".'

'Palestine is not without people,' Najid growled.

'Of course not. But suppose there was a land that was? An empty, bountiful land of milk and honey large enough for all the Jews to have a home of their own.'

'There's no such place.'

'We could make it. We could raise an island from the ocean somewhere, cover it with plants, make it a paradise. And in our demands we make clear this is for the Jews, a gift of friendship from the Arab peoples.'

'It'd never work!' Najid complained.

'Why not?'

'The Jews would never agree. They want Palestine. They think it was promised them by God. They'll accept nothing else.'

'Some of them. Many more will be reasonable. Most Jews are not irrational. They merely want a place where they can live safe and unmolested. As I've told you many times, they don't plan their lives to do harm to Arabs.'

'You've told me none of these things.'

'I will.'

'It might work,' said the younger Abdul-Malik. 'And surely it's better to prove our strength with generosity rather than violence? What do you think, Jo?'

What *did* she think? Surely it couldn't be that simple? The Arab-Israeli conflict wasn't about to be averted by a few Arab nomads and her in an ancient tomb, was it? She tried to think what the Doctor would say.

'Err... I don't think we can change history? Can we?'

'It's not history!' exclaimed Najid. 'It's the future!'

'It's my history,' admitted the older Abdul-Malik. 'And yours, I think,' he added to Jo. 'I'm right, aren't I? I often wondered about it as I grew older – where you and the Doctor really came from. It's the future, isn't it? Beyond even my time.'

'I'm from the 1970s,' Jo admitted.

'And does it get better, the situation in Arabia and Palestine? Is there ever peace?'

She looked at the floor.

‘Then it’s not a history worth keeping. We have a chance for a better one. We must try.’

Najid nodded. Slowly at first, then with enthusiasm. ‘All right. I always said you had potential, lad.’

Jo found herself on the outside looking in as the three Arabs – or two, depending how you chose to count them – began exploring the device, trying to figure out how to make it do their wills.

This felt wrong.

‘We don’t even know how to work it,’ she protested lamely. ‘You could kill yourselves!’

‘You’re from the future. Don’t *you* know how it works?’ the young Abdul-Malik asked. She shook her head.

‘She wouldn’t anyway,’ said Najid. ‘She doesn’t want us to do it. I don’t blame you, *anisa*. You can’t understand. You’re English, after all. It’s your empire we’re going to end.’

‘I don’t care about empires! It won’t last anyway. None of this is British by my time – hardly anywhere is. Britain’s just a small wet island in the corner of the world. We let our empire go after the wars.’

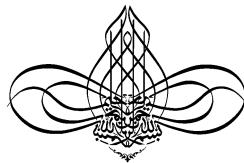
‘Then what do you care about? Why won’t you help us?’

Because this is wrong. This isn’t the sort of thing we’re supposed to do!

But we do it on other planets all the time.

‘I... I need to find the Doctor!’

She ran for the door.



How do you fight fire? With fire, the proverb goes. But they didn’t have any of that and what they did have was no use at all. The Doctor’s sonic screwdriver hadn’t been any more effective against the wraith than it had been against the djinn on the train. Lawrence’s pistol turned out to be cool enough to touch but was no more helpful. The bullets simply passed through the flame without impact. The Doctor even tried singing to the devilish thing, which, predictably enough, only succeeded in enraging it.

Both men were getting tired. They’d been dodging and ducking the djinni’s attacks for what felt like an age. Lawrence was finding it harder and harder to ignore the pain shooting from his wound and, sly as he was, the Doctor was no spring chicken. The monster was toying with them, Lawrence realised. There was no other reason this should have gone on so long. It was batting them around like a cat with a mouse, content to let them

exhaust themselves before it finally went for the kill. It could have finished them any moment it chose since it first manifested.

The creature flashed overhead from one side of the ring of fire to the other. They had to dive low to avoid it. Lawrence landed awkwardly on his wound and cried out with the pain. He bit it back and lay there panting.

I'll get up in a moment. Just... in a moment.

The Doctor stayed down too. He'd been a fraction slow that time. The djinni had clipped him a glancing blow, leaving the trailing end of his *keffiyeh* smouldering. The Doctor stubbed it out in the dust.

'Lawrence?' he asked wearily. 'You... all right... old chap?'

'Just a little charvered, Doctor. If... you've got any more bright ideas, now's the time.'

'Well, short of asking for three wishes...'

The ifrit drew back and the curtain of flame parted to allow the Master through. He looked down at the men on the ground with an expression somewhere between amusement and disdain.

'You disappoint me, Doctor. You've been off your game ever since you got here. I had hoped our little rivalry would end on a high.'

'Why don't you just finish us and have done with it?' the Doctor snapped.

'No reason I can think of.' He flicked a gesture at the djinni. 'Kill them.'

'No, don't!' The voice was unmistakably Miss Grant's. She appeared in the doorway of the tomb and began running towards them.

'Jo, stay back!' the Doctor called. She ignored him.

'Damn that incompetent Arab!' The Master stayed the djinni with another flick of his wrist. He withdrew a slender tube-like apparatus from an inside pocket and levelled it at Miss Grant. If it was a weapon it was like none Lawrence had seen before. She skidded up short and pulled a pistol of her own. Even from here Lawrence could see she was trembling. The Master noted the weapon with a raised eyebrow and a respectful half-nod. 'You're supposed to be a prisoner, Miss Grant. Do you mind explaining how you got away from Abdul-Malik?'

'They're going to start up your machine! They've got plans of their own.'

The Master's pretence of calm shattered in an instant. With a cry of anger, he ran past Miss Grant and bolted for the tomb. The djinni swept after him, dissolving into its constituent fireballs as it went.

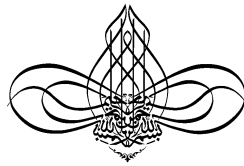
Lawrence sighed with relief and wiped the sweat from his brow with his *keffiyeh*.

Miss Grant ran to the Doctor, throwing her arms around him and all but knocking him back flat on the ground.

'Oh, Doctor! Abdul and Najid went out into the desert to fight the British and I felt I had to go with them – because of the letter about the Jews – and the Master's built a machine to change the world and now they want to use it to free Arabia and...'

'Slow down!' the Doctor chuckled tiredly, mopping at the sweat on his brow with an un-charred corner of his *keffiyeh*. 'What letter? What have you got yourself mixed up in? You should know better than to ride off into the desert! And what on Earth have the Jews got to do with any of this?' She opened her mouth to say something but the Doctor continued, in

full flow. 'No, never mind that now. We'd better get after the Master before he does something we might regret. Come on, Jo. He didn't look at all happy!'



God knew how Najid had managed to get the machine working. Blind luck and unfounded confidence in his own abilities, most likely. When the Doctor, Jo and Lawrence arrived in the tomb, the two Abdul-Maliks were seated on chairs at the centre of the lash-up, surrounded by crackling static and the rising hum of energy. The Master was trying to wrestle Najid away from the controls, cursing the Arab with every breath.

'What the dickens is this?' asked the Doctor, taking in the scene. And then, a moment later, 'What have you done to my TARDIS?!

Lawrence weighed into the tussle to help Najid, but he was still exhausted and the Master shrugged him off with ease.

'Stop it!' the Doctor commanded. Najid shoved the Master back with his foot, almost toppling him into the machine. 'Stop it, all of you! If you disrupt the Blinovitch field you could blow us all sky high!'

The Master raised his hands and backed away slightly, his eyes smouldering with an almost bestial rage towards Najid. The Arab lunged at him, but Jo interposed herself.

'Najid, no!'

He scowled, but let the Master be. Lawrence covered the villain with his pistol.

'That's better,' said the Doctor. 'Now, would someone mind explaining to me what all this is about?'

'The British are planning to betray us!' Nahid snarled. 'The Arabs won't be free. We'll be parcelled out between the British and the French, half our lands taken away and given to the Jews. You know it, Aurens! Why did you not tell us?'

Lawrence looked shamefaced. 'How could I? You think it's been easy for me? I wrestle with it every day. Try to tell myself I don't know what the generals and politicians are planning. But what choice is there? If I told you, you wouldn't fight, and Arabia would be taken over anyway. At least this way there's a chance of establishing an Arab power-base and presenting the British with a *fait accompli*. Damn it, I'm doing the best I can!'

'Not enough!' Najid brandished the letter to Allenby. 'The generals know what you're planning, Aurens! They don't care in the least.'

'Let me see that!' The Doctor swiped the document from his hands and scanned it for a moment before declaring, 'A forgery. Wrong kind of ink and unless I'm very much mistaken this was typed on a Smith-Corona 4, which won't be released for another few years.' He glanced over at the Master. 'Your handiwork, I take it?'

The Master shrugged. 'There's nothing in that letter that's not true.'

‘So why bother at all? The Balfour Declaration’s later this year; it’ll all be made public soon enough. What do you have to gain from this, except encouraging these fools to meddle with your machinery?’ Realisation dawned. ‘Of course! This is what you wanted all along, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Lawrence.

‘That makes two of us,’ Jo chimed in. ‘You’re saying the Master faked that letter because he *wanted* Abdul and Najid to do this? But he was trying to stop Najid...’

The Master was laughing smugly to himself.

‘Oh do stop that!’ the Doctor snapped at him. He turned back to Jo. ‘He had to make it look convincing. He’s playing a more devious game than I thought.’

‘I suspect that wouldn’t be too difficult, Doctor. You’ve had barely the faintest idea what’s going on here ever since you arrived. You’ve been so wrapped up playing boy’s own adventures with Lawrence, you’ve missed what’s really going on! It’s a pleasure to meet you, Major, but I’m afraid you’re gloriously irrelevant to this entire enterprise.’

The machine shuddered and a spark of energy scintillated across the framework between the two Abdul-Maliks. The younger yelped with pain; the elder screwed shut his eyes and gripped the arms of his chair tightly.

‘Doctor!’ exclaimed Jo.

He rushed forward, examining the controls. ‘The artron build-up’s reaching critical levels.’

‘It’s time,’ said the Master. ‘The Blinovitch effect must be now or the time differential will tear them apart. And probably take this godforsaken corner of the desert with it.’

‘Can we stop it?’ asked Lawrence.

The Doctor was already trying, working at the machine with his sonic screwdriver.

‘Why do we have to?’ asked Jo. ‘Why don’t we just let them touch? They’re not trying to hurt anyone! They only want to save their people from ending up part of someone else’s empire. If this works all the problems of the Middle East might never happen!’

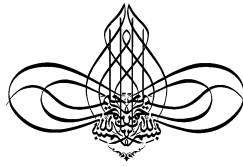
‘Oh Jo, if only it were that simple.’

‘It *is* that simple! The energy will let them control the djinn. They’ll be able to protect Arabia, make a new homeland for the Jews... I don’t understand why this is a bad thing.’

‘You can’t change history, Jo.’

‘But we do it all the time! Every time we land it’s *somebody’s* history!’ She realised she was sobbing now. Why didn’t he understand? He was always so certain in his morality and she’d never doubted him, not for a moment. But this just didn’t make sense. He was acting like Abdul-Malik and Najid were the villains. ‘The Master’s right!’ she found herself accusing him. ‘You’ve spent the whole time swanning around with Lawrence, having your adventures and worrying about the Master and you’ve not paid any attention at all to the Arabs! This isn’t just somewhere exotic for you to have a fight with the Master in and a chance to strut around in fancy clothes, you know! This is their home! What happens to it matters. *The people here matter*. Sure, they might not be famous or have history books or films about them, but they’re still important!’

With that she stormed out of the tomb, leaving the Doctor dumbfounded behind her.



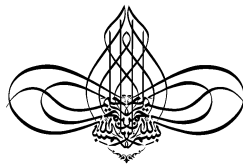
The energy was pulsing through his body and through his history. All of it was one. He was a young boy sat at his grandfather's knee in Wejh, mouth hanging open as he listened to stories about djinn in the ruins. He was a wayward child in Cairo, learning about progress and the achievements of the West from a scholar under a moonlit sky. He was a naïve warrior, fighting for an Arabia free to take its place as an equal on the world stage. He was a husband and a father, running through the olive-groves of Palestine with his lover and his son. He was a lonely old man whose world had died before him, ravaged in a final betrayal by the Western nations he had once idolised.

He had no future and no past. Only an eternal present. The energy of time flowed through him and gathered within him until he felt like he would burst. He longed for relief, for the ecstasy of release.

With both (all) his bodies he reached out his hands to a still point at the centre.

The djinn called out to him in soundless voices, singing encouragement.

Touch! Give us the energy and we will be truly free. Give us this and we will remake the world as you command. We will make your wishes come true.



For a moment the Doctor stood stunned by Jo's outburst. The girl clearly idolised him; Lawrence doubted he'd ever heard her talk to him like that. He made a move to follow her outside, then glanced at the machine and hesitated. The Master was grinning with feline delight, revelling in his foe's discomfort.

'I'll follow her,' Lawrence offered.

The words seem to jolt the Doctor back to himself. 'No, I need you here to keep an eye on the Master.' He turned to the Arab. 'Najid, isn't it?' The fellow nodded warily. 'Would you go and keep an eye on Jo? Make sure nothing happens to her out there.'

Najid looked set to argue, but then merely gave another curt nod and hurried from the chamber.

The other two Arabs were stretching out their hands to touch. Amid the shimmering energy field the movement seemed slow, as if underwater or in a ghastly dream; their fingers questing infinitesimally closer.

'If this thing blows, you'll die too,' he warned the Master.

'It's not going to blow. They're almost touching. The time-differential will be shorted out and the djinn will be unleashed.'

'And then?'

'And then we get to make our wishes.'

'But what Miss Grant said, Doctor,' interjected Lawrence. 'Why do we have to stop them? It pains me to say it, but forged or not, that letter's probably a fairly accurate account of what the brass are thinking. British plans for Arabia really aren't honourable. Maybe things *will* be better if they succeed?'

'They could scarcely be worse. What your people do here will set in train a course of events which will destabilise this region for decades, centuries even. The West's treatment of the Middle East has been – and will be – nothing short of shameful. But you can't change it this way. There's no quick fix. No magic bullet.'

'But as Miss Grant said,' the Master pointed out, 'that's what you do on every planet you meddle in. There are reasons we have non-intervention rules.'

'Do be quiet!' The Doctor did something with his screwdriver, and yanked a lever with a hopeful flourish. A small explosion and a shower of sparks burst from part of the device. 'Well that wasn't quite right.' He resumed tinkering. 'It's hard to explain, Lawrence, and these aren't exactly ideal circumstances. But some parts of history are important and some less so. Some can be meddled with and some can't.'

'Some people matter and others don't,' the Master chipped in pointedly.

'Lawrence, can you find something to gag him?'

'So basically we have to stop them because you say so?' asked Lawrence.

The Doctor considered this. 'In short, I'm afraid so. Yes.'

He pulled another lever. A flash of coruscating energy flashed out from the contraption, illuminating the tomb as if with daylight.

Lawrence shielded his eyes until the glare died down.

'Did you stop it?'

'No,' the Doctor admitted.

'So they touched? The energy was released?'

'Not that either, I don't think. Look.'

The two Abdul-Maliks were frozen on the cusp of touching, their fingertips a hair's breadth apart. One good sneeze would be enough to make them collide. But they had stopped.

Slowly, with perfect mirror symmetry, they drew back their hands.

'They've changed their minds!' the Doctor gasped.

The Abdul-Maliks opened their eyes. 'I can't do it,' they said in unison. Their voice seemed to run the full gamut between the barely-formed lisp of a toddler and the deathbed croak of an ancient. 'If I change my history I lose Yael. I can't do it.'

The synchronism broke and the older man began to cry. 'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I can't do it.'

'Of course not,' said the Doctor sympathetically. 'Because you're human. Your history is what makes you who you are. All that you've been through. All that you've gained and lost. That's what life's all about.'

As a homily, it seemed to Lawrence somewhat redundant, and nobody paid it much attention. It seemed to make the Doctor feel better, anyway. The hum of power began to subside. The Doctor made a few more adjustments to the controls, pulled a lever and it died away completely. He yanked out a power cable just to be sure. The tomb was silent.

For a moment.

'Doctor, the Master's gone!'

He must have taken his chance when they were dazzled by the light. Lawrence hurled himself out of the doorway, the Doctor close behind.

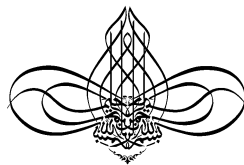
There!

The Master was sprinting for one of the biplanes. Miss Grant and Najid were already giving chase, but they couldn't catch him before he was inside and had the engine running. Slowly at first, then with gathering pace, the Fokker began dragging itself forward across the sand. Miss Grant looked at the other aircraft, apparently considering it, then ran for the paddock where the camels and horses were. With impressive athleticism for one so short, she swung herself up into the saddle of a grey palfrey. As the Master's aeroplane lifted him off the ground, Jo's horse vaulted the enclosure fence and began galloping out into the desert after him. Najid was hurrying to get one of the camels out, but the dromedaries were less co-operative beasts and not nearly so amenable to jumping fences.

The Doctor reached the second Fokker and hopped up into the pilot's seat. As the prop span up to speed he donned an aviator's hat and pulled the goggles down over his eyes. There was still time for Lawrence to join him – there was an empty navigator's seat and the aircraft was only yet moving slowly. He didn't see what use he would be, though. Besides, he'd been up in crates like these before and had little desire to repeat the experience.

Seeming to sense his reticence, the Doctor shouted over the din of the engine: 'Go back to the others! Get them out of the machine and make sure they're all right!'

He opened up the throttle. The Fokker accelerated forwards in a cloud of sand and dust, soaring away skywards in pursuit of the Master.



It wasn't a long chase. The planes must have been awaiting refuelling when the arrival of the train had drawn everyone away from them; the Doctor's gauge was reading near-empty and, judging from the erratic stuttering that soon began to come from his engine, the Master wasn't doing much better.

They flew low through the rocky crags north of Mada'in Saleh. The Master's eagerness to escape was making him daring – or foolhardy. He swung his Fokker into a narrow gorge, following the railway tracks. The clearance on each side of the wing-tips was only a few feet and the thermals funnelled through the narrow space buffeted and tossed the

little canvas-and-wood aircraft. The Doctor kept a firm grip on the stick and tried to remember what Blériot had taught him.

After a couple of tight squeezes, both planes burst out of the gorge unscathed and swooped down over a bare rock massif. The desert stretched out unobstructed before them, only a few isolated upthrust sandstone outcroppings interrupting the expanse of low dunes. The Master wouldn't lose him here.

The air up ahead shimmered. Not a mirage, the Doctor realised. Djinn. He'd half-hoped that by coming so close to attaining power over them with the Blinovitch cage, the Abdul-Maliks might have disrupted the Master's control, but he knew it was a long shot. If there was one thing the Master was an expert in it was projecting his mental will.

There were a thousand ways the power those djinn commanded could have made things bad for the Doctor. Unmanageable thermals. An intense storm. A pocket of hard vacuum or Venusian atmosphere. Thankfully the Master lacked imagination. He went with the fireballs again. A pair of them streaked towards his aircraft. The Doctor slammed forward the stick and threw his plane into a dive. The djinn swept overhead and fizzled out of existence.

The ground came up to meet him fast. Not a metaphor – it really was moving. He yanked the plane into another feat of aerobatics just in time to avoid a finger of jagged rock that stabbed skywards from the sand. More followed. The Doctor lurched the Fokker right, then left, struggling to gain height with what was left of his fuel. He heard something snap over to his left. The manoeuvres had been too much for one of the wires that ran between the wings. It lashed loose, tearing at the canvas. The aircraft dipped and pitched alarmingly.

Up ahead, the Master looked back over his shoulder at him and laughed.

A moment later his engine cut out. The Doctor allowed himself a smirk of satisfaction.

Both planes effected creditable crash-landings in the desert. The Master spotted a patch of compacted earth and glided in for a neat and unremarkable touchdown. The Doctor tried to follow but his erratic left wing caught a gust of breeze and dipped as he came in low over a bank of dunes. It clipped the crest of the sand and the plane pitched forward into a spin. The Doctor just had time to throw himself clear before the plane tumbled nose first into the ground and tore itself apart in a mangle of canvas and shattered struts.

He rolled down the dune, winded and short of breath. The Master was waiting for him at the bottom.

'Had enough of running?' the Doctor asked, wiping sand from his face.

'Where would I run? Look around: there's nothing but desert for miles.'

'Your TARDIS?'

'Back at Mada'in Saleh, I'm afraid.' The Master spread his hands and smiled. 'Finally, Doctor. Peace and quiet. Somewhere we won't be interrupted. We can settle this once and for all.'

The Doctor tried to get to his feet but the Master kicked him back down.

'Are you going to tell me what this has all been about?' the Doctor asked. 'Faking the letter, manipulating those Arabs... There's easier ways to change history. If that was what

you were after, you could have made sure Quinn finished off Lawrence properly that first night.'

'The history of this planet is of not the slightest interest to me, Doctor.'

'Then what?'

'Miss Grant.'

'What's Jo got to do with anything?'

'She's grown a lot, that one,' the Master said. 'But she still worships you as much as she ever did. It's really kind of pathetic. Do you think she'd still dote so much if she knew what you really are? What you've done? I thought it was about time she had a little glimpse of just what kind of a hero you are.'

'That's it?' The Doctor couldn't keep the contempt out of his voice. 'The sum total of your grand plan was to try and turn Jo against me!'

'Sometimes it's the small things which are the most satisfying,' the Master admitted. 'And anyway, I daresay I could have conquered a few planets once the nanoswarm was fully operational.'

'Well, you've failed badly, haven't you? You've always underestimated Jo.'

'Have I, Doctor? It looked to me like she was rather upset back there.'

'Just a little emotional from all the excitement. Nothing will change.'

The Master smiled. 'We'll see. Sometimes it takes a little time for seeds to sprout.'

He took a few steps away. The Doctor took the opportunity to finally clamber back to his feet. The Master shucked off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves.

'So, shall we do this?' he asked.

'You want to *fight*?'

'It would provide a little catharsis, if nothing else.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'I'm not fighting you.' He turned his back and began trudging back up the dune in the direction of Mada'in Saleh.

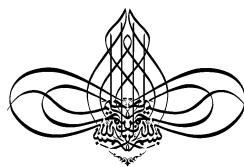
'I still have the djinn!' the Master called after him.

'Their power's running down. That much was obvious from your little display just now. You won't get another use out of them without the Blinovitch energy. You've lost.'

He kept on walking.

'This isn't the end!' the Master shouted.

'No, the Doctor muttered to himself. 'It never is.'



Salaam (3173)

A still Levantine night hung over the ancient city. The stars shone bright overhead now that the last remains of the old overcity had been removed, each of them now mapped and charted by human explorers, many long-since settled, integrated into the Empire and subsequently freed. Representatives of half a thousand species revelled and delighted in the festivals that filled the city's streets tonight.

On the acropolis that had in its time been called Har haBáyith, Haram ash-Sharif or the Temple Mount, dancers from fifteen religions and twice as many races whirled and cartwheeled their way through what could only loosely be described as a parade to the sound of exotic, joyful music. The air was pungent with frankincense and wessil-blossom and the scents of food cooking on stalls all around. Among the families and kin-pods and bond-cohorts that watched and ran alongside, a middle-aged man from very far away indeed was watching. A tear ran down his lined, sun-beaten skin.

Amid such merriment, colour and liveliness, few noticed the incongruous blue box that stood between al-Aqsa mosque and the glittering Third Temple. Perhaps those who did thought it was merely another part of the festival decorations.

Outside its doors, in the vermilion light of one of the floating coloured lanterns that bobbed across the holy precinct, a white-haired man in a dark velvet suit and cloak and a small, blonde girl in a cricket jersey and beige jacket watched the revelry appreciatively.

'This is marvellous!' Jo enthused. 'Not just the party, I mean. But everything. It's all still here a thousand years later! No-one's blown it up or demolished it or torn it apart.'

'Well, there were a few close calls,' the Doctor admitted, 'but yes, it's still here.'

'And there's peace?' She still hadn't worked out what this festival was actually for. It didn't look like anything she recognised from her own time. But then, why should it? The world moved on. Even ancient religions change.

'New prejudices have come and gone,' said the Doctor. 'Nations and empires have risen and fallen. Peace never lasts forever. But in this place, at this time, there's peace. Arabs and Jews. Humans and Hith and Zaver and Zarbi. Humanity gets there in the end.'

He smiled. He seemed so relaxed now; a far cry from the figure Jo had met trudging out of the desert and helped on to the back of her horse. Najid had passed them on the way back, said he would go on to find the Master. He came back later. He'd found the two planes, but no sign of the Time Lord. By the time they got back to Mada'in Saleh, the pilaster that was his TARDIS was gone. The Doctor didn't seem too disturbed.

'But it took so long,' she said.

The Doctor nodded regretfully. 'Sometimes it does.'

'But it didn't have to. We could have done something!'

'Time doesn't work that way, Jo. Sometimes it's just not our place to meddle, however much we want things to be a certain way. Politics, ideology, prejudice... Those are things that must be dealt with every day, little by little. They're not something we can just sweep in and fix.'

She thought about that.

‘When I first joined UNIT,’ she said after a while, ‘Mum was really cross. She was really low by then. Since dad died... Well, anyway, she’d never liked the army. Never agreed with the kind of things my Uncle Frank does.’

‘He’s the one at the UN?’

‘He is now. I could always see her point of view – I mean, I don’t think the Brigadier’s always right when he charges around shooting at things. I don’t think the British were right with what they had Lawrence doing. But what’s the alternative? She just sits there, getting more and more depressed about everything. Crying about the way the world is but she never *does* anything! I told her I wanted to make a difference. I know it sounds terrifically cheesy, but I wanted to make it a better place, you know? Let’s face it: I was never going to be a great scientist or a politician or anything like that. But I thought by joining UNIT I could make a difference.’

‘And you have, Jo. You and I and the Brigadier, we all make a difference all the time.’

‘I know. It’s just... It feels like we should be able to do more. We save the world, Doctor. But how much do we actually change it? All those terrible things that just go on every day because they’re not big and dramatic and they don’t involve famous people. Racism and sexism and greed and wrecking the environment. It feels like we should be able to do something about those too.’

The Doctor didn’t say anything. He seemed lost in thought, his expression hard to read. A little sad, perhaps.

‘The Master said you’d grown, Jo. Maybe I didn’t realise how much.’

The way he looked at her then gave her the shivers. It made her think of Dad – what little she could remember of him. That proud, sad smile when he waved her off on her first day at school.

She forced a laugh, trying to jolly the Doctor along. ‘I’ve not grown up so much I’m going to sit on the sidelines here and let everyone else have all the fun! Come on, you: I want to try those purple things on that stall over there. Abdul-Malik seems to be enjoying them!’

She crooked her arm for him and gave him her cheeriest grin. Worked like a charm. His solemnity cracked and that familiar, rakish grin burst free across his face. He looked young again. He slipped his arm through hers and together they joined the festival.

