

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Torchwood: Risk Assessment

James Goss

Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also in the *Torchwood* Series

Title Page

Dedication

I: The Evening of a Long Day

II: Bleeding Heart Yard

III: Moving in Society

IV: Mostly, Prunes and Prism

V: Fellow Travellers

VI: A Shoal of Barnacles

VII: The Progress of an Epidemic

VIII: In Which a Great Patriotic Conference is Holden

IX: Who Passes by This Road so Late?

X: Reaping the Whirlwind

XI: Mrs General

XII: Containing the Whole Science of Government

XIII: Appearance and Disappearance

XIV: A Castle in the Air

XV: Conspirators and Others

XVI: The Storming of the Castle in the Air

XVII: The Chief Butler Resigns the Seals of Office

XVIII: An Appearance in the Marshalsea

Acknowledgements

Copyright

About the Book

‘Are you trying to tell me, Captain Harkness, that the entire staff of Torchwood Cardiff now consists of yourself, a woman in trousers and a tea boy?’

Agnes Havisham is awake, and Jack is worried (and not a little afraid). The Torchwood Assessor is roused from her deep sleep in only the worst of times – it’s happened just four times in the last 100 years. Can the situation really be so bad?

Someone, somewhere, is fighting a war, and they’re losing badly. The coffins of the dead are coming through the Rift. With thousands of alien bodies floating in the Bristol Channel, it’s down to Torchwood to round them all up before a lethal plague breaks out.

And now they’ll have to do it by the book. The 1901 edition.

Featuring Captain Jack Harkness as played by John Barrowman, with Gwen Cooper and Ianto Jones as played by Eve Myles and Gareth David-Lloyd, in the hit series created by Russell T Davies for BBC Television.

About the Author

James Goss spent seven years working on the BBC's official *Doctor Who* website and co-wrote the website for *Torchwood* Series One. In 2007, he won the Best Adaptation category in the annual LA Weekly Theatre Awards for his version of Douglas Adams' novel *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*.

Recent titles in the *Torchwood* series from BBC Books:

9. ALMOST PERFECT

James Goss

10. INTO THE SILENCE

Sarah Pinborough

11. BAY OF THE DEAD

Mark Morris

12. THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

Guy Adams

13. RISK ASSESSMENT

James Goss

14. THE UNDERTAKER'S GIFT

Trevor Baxendale

15. CONSEQUENCES

James Moran, Joseph Lidster,
Andrew Cartmel, Sarah Pinborough and David Llewellyn

Torchwood Risk Assessment

James Goss



With apologies to Little Dorrit

THE EVENING OF A LONG DAY

In which the events of last night are recounted, the seventh seal is broken, and our heroes encounter something quite remarkable

JACK, GWEN AND Ianto stood in the Torchwood Hub, looking at the coffin. All around them, the vast space clicked and groaned as the storm raged outside. It had been a long night.

Jack reached out to touch the coffin, then drew back his hand and shook his head grimly. 'This is bad,' he said. 'Very, very bad.'

At that point, alarms went off. Red lights pulsed angrily, sirens whooped, and deep within Torchwood chimed the striking of a very old bell.

'But not that bad!' Jack protested, reacting in terror. 'No! No! No! No!'

It's a pity no one could remember who'd owned the buildings before they had been an air force base. But they had gone valiantly through two world wars, survived a few grim decades as a private airstrip, and finally they had become an industrial estate. But they had always contained a large amount of storage, which had long ago been unhappily converted into the Swindon Self-U-Store.

People kept a lot of things there - from furniture they'd never need through to books they'd never read. Old carpets came and went. Exercise bikes piled up like abandoned

dreams. But, through all that time, no one had ever opened the door of Storage Unit Seven. Well, there'd never been a need.

And now, with the distant striking of an ancient alarm bell, the door opened with a gentle creak, and a figure stepped out into the harshly lit corridor. It was the figure of an immaculately dressed Victorian lady – properly attired from her well-polished boots through to her neatly tied hat. She looked around herself with grim approval and, hoisting her skirts up as far as decorum would allow, made her way gingerly along the dank corridor towards an area labelled *Reception*.

At the desk, nodding with late-night fatigue, a fat man in an orange fleece slept through a news channel. For a moment, the woman paused, watching the screen with a mixture of fascination and disapproval. And then she tapped the man smartly on the shoulder. Startled, he woke up, blinking, and looked at her.

'Good morning,' she said, crisply. 'I would like to know two things, if you please.'

He rubbed at his eyes and struggled to focus on her. 'Where've you come from?' he demanded. 'It's 3 a.m.!'

'I know that,' she said, smiling politely. 'But I would very much like to know the year.'

Without thinking, he told her it was 2009. She nodded with mild interest and tilted her head to one side.

'And might I trouble you for a copy of Bradshaw's railway timetable?' She started to look mildly bored.

He got as far as opening a drawer before realising that they didn't own such a thing as a railway timetable.

'It's of little consequence,' she sighed. 'There's unlikely to be a service until dawn. No matter. Thank heavens I have my *Little Dorrit*.' And then she expertly knocked him unconscious and strode out of the Self-U-Store and towards the railway station.

An hour later, she guiltily crept back in and stole his wallet.

It had all been a bit of an anticlimax, really, thought Gwen as she coasted over the last speed bump on the way to work. After the horror of the last few days, the alarms last night had seemed like some absurd warning of doom. She'd been expecting explosions, fireworks or the imminent launch of *Thunderbird Two*. But, after less than a minute, they had just stopped, the bells ringing out like a missed call.

Jack, hands clamped round his head, had straightened up sheepishly and realised Gwen and Ianto were staring at him.

'What,' Gwen asked, more sharply than she meant, 'was that?'

Jack laughed nervously. Which wasn't like him at all. 'Oh . . .' He windmilled his arms around. 'False alarm. Hey, it was nothing.' He looked as casual as a politician caught in Jeremy Paxman's headlights.

Ianto clearly wasn't convinced either. 'I take it that was some kind of warning system?'

'You think?' Gwen was oddly charmed by this.

Ianto nodded. 'But what's it for, Jack?'

Jack jammed his hands in his pockets and, for an instant, looked as though he was about to start whistling. 'Ummm. An obsolete failsafe. That's all. Redundant. Yeah. Defunct. Out of date. Past its sell-by date. We'll unhook it tomorrow. Hock it on eBay.'

He realised his friends were staring at him. Decidedly unconvinced. He looked down at his boots.

'Look,' he mumbled - actually mumbled - 'It's not like we need some flashy system to tell us we're in trouble. We know that. But we're handling it. And the bells and whistles - it's all extra stress we don't need.' He shrugged, and tried out a low-voltage Harkness grin. 'Don't worry - it's as outdated as Nana Mouskouri. If there was any danger, I'd let

you know. Now – both of you – go home. Ianto – don't tidy up. Just leave it. Gwen – see that man of yours, find out if he's grown a beard. And get some rest. See you back here in the morning.'

He smiled. And the smile stuck like a greasy egg in an old frying pan.

Well, it was the next day now, and the world still hadn't ended. It was raining heavily, one of those grey Cardiff days when the sun's elsewhere. Gwen parked the car and stumped down into work, feeling the wind bite into her. She glanced nervously out to sea. She knew what was out there, and she knew how dangerous it was.

Rhys had sensed her mood and kept well back that morning. He'd been artificially bright, making tea and quiet conversation like they'd had an enormous row. She'd reached across and hugged him before she left for work. His face fell.

'Gwen,' he'd said. 'You look so sad.'

And she'd nearly cried. 'I know.'

She had to give him credit for being the sensitive husband while also guilt-tripping her into the middle of next week.

'You won't tell me what it's about, will you?' he'd said, eyes flicking away.

'No. No, I won't,' she'd replied. 'I'm too scared.'

She grabbed something hot and bacony from one of the shops in the Bay, smothering the white bread in ketchup. A little bit of cheap heaven on a wet morning in Cardiff. On an impulse, she nipped back into the shop and got two more bacon rolls. A little treat for the boys. The last few days had been so grim.

And with that, she walked into Torchwood.

Of course, had Gwen been looking in the other direction, she'd have seen something quite remarkable striding past Tesco. But no, she missed it completely.

With less than a quarter of an hour to go until something quite remarkable happened, the Hub looked as ordinary as a vast underground base could. A bit cold, a nip of damp in the air like a stately home, lights twinkling from workstations. Ianto was pottering around, making noise and coffee. Jack was prowling in his office. In the corner, Gwen could see the coffin. Jack had covered it with a big old velvet drape. It looked like Dracula's tomb. Not helping, she thought.

She handed out the bacon rolls. They took them wordlessly. Ianto carefully, neatly unwrapped his. Jack just started tearing into his, savagely.

I wonder when he's last eaten, she thought. And I know he says he doesn't really sleep, but he looks like he could do with crawling under a duvet and staying there all weekend.

Weekend? God, what day was it? Gwen thought about this, and didn't even have an answer. She was just so tired and miserable. The last week had been so stressful, living in a constant state of suspense, and too worried to even tell Rhys. She was shattered. They all were. How much longer would this go on for?

Jack and Ianto weren't speaking, she noticed. They were tiptoeing round each other. Almost like . . . no, they *had* had a row. And that was another sign of how mad things were. Jack and Ianto never rowed. Shagged like rabbits, occasionally shot at each other, but never actual couple-y things like a row. Blimey. She toyed with ringing up Martha. For a chat, a pre-wedding gossip, something boring and normal.

Jack strode away towards his office, wiping the bacon fat off onto a fistful of naval charts. He started making angry little pencil scribbles in the margins.

Gwen gave Ianto a sympathetic glance.

'He's frightened, isn't he?'

'Aren't you?' Ianto was talking with his mouth full. Another sign of the end of the world.

‘I feel so helpless. All that work, and now we can’t really do anything. Except wait for the worst to happen.’

Ianto nodded. And then he leant over, confidentially. ‘We need a bit of a break, I think. There’s nothing we can really do, is there? I was wondering about bunking off.’

‘What?’ Gwen laughed, and then shushed herself like she was in a library. ‘Like nip up to the Red Dragon and watch a nice romantic comedy?’

‘Or bowling,’ considered Ianto. ‘I mean, we could do that. But I was wondering about a Weevil hunt. There’s a couple out in the sewers.’

Gwen grinned. ‘After all this, yes. That would be so bloody normal.’

‘Normal?’ boomed Jack. He stood over them, smiling. Much like his old self. ‘I never do normal.’

And that’s when the invisible lift above them swung into action.

They all stared up, aghast. They were the only people in Cardiff who knew that if you stepped on a certain slab in a certain way, complicated machinery under the water tower would lower you down into the heart of Torchwood.

But the lift had opened. Rain was pouring in. They all ran forward. For an instant, Gwen had an absurd notion of a startled Japanese tourist, snapping excitedly away as they came down. But the reality was far, far stranger.

All of them stood there, open-mouthed, as the lift revealed its passenger.

Standing on the lift’s stone slab was an elegant woman dressed in elaborate Victorian clothes. She was holding a parasol and a carpet bag, and she had fixed them all with a prim, complacent smile. She appeared unconcerned by the speed of the lift. She just looked completely at ease, like Mary Poppins’ posher sister. In control. She seemed totally at home in the Hub.

Behind her, Gwen heard Jack use a word. It was, she thought, the very last word she’d ever imagine him using. It

just didn't seem like him. But it was short, and rude and surprisingly blunt.

As the lift came to the bottom with a smooth click, the woman . . . no, the *lady* strode forward, reaching out a gloved hand to Jack.

'Harkness,' she said crisply. 'My compliments on still being here. Am I to take it that you are now in charge?'

Jack nodded. 'Like a bad penny, ma'am.' He sounded grim. But also . . . afraid?

The woman looked around her and fixed her eyes on Gwen and Ianto.

'Well, Captain,' she said, her voice purring with carefully controlled elocution, 'are you going to introduce me to your colleagues?'

Jack turned around, face squirming like he had a mouthful of slugs. 'This . . .' his voice dried, and he began again, 'Gwen Cooper. Ianto Jones, may I introduce you to Miss Agnes Havisham?'

Do you know what, thought Gwen to herself, bugger me backwards with a bent pole, now I've seen it all.

II

BLEEDING HEART YARD

In which something quite remarkable must account for herself, there is
sad mention of a submarine, and the domestic skills of Mr Jones are
brought into question

THEY WERE ALL sitting in the Boardroom. Rather like a loveless marriage, Agnes was at one end of the enormous table and Jack at the other. Gwen sat tactfully in between, and warmed up a carefully friendly expression.

Ianto brought in coffee. He offered Agnes a cup. She looked up at him with her blue eyes and smiled brightly. 'Why, thank you so much, dear child, but could I possibly have a cup of tea? If that is not too much trouble?' Her smile widened a little more, and Ianto hurried away.

For a minute, there were just the three of them in the room. Agnes looked around herself placidly. 'Well, this is nice,' she said. 'Most pleasant, to be sure.'

Gwen nodded. She couldn't think of anything to say.

'Did you have a pleasant journey?' murmured Jack.

Agnes looked at him sharply and then beamed at Gwen. 'Miss Cooper, my dear, did you know, in the old days, when I awoke, I would be greeted with a carriage or, in recent times, a limousine. Positively spoiled, really.' She giggled. 'But Captain Harkness knows me better than that. I am a martyr to self-sufficiency. I made my way here using First Great Western.'

'Ohhhhhh,' groaned Jack despondently.

‘Quite,’ said Agnes. ‘The seat had fleas.’

A silence settled on the room.

Ianto returned, carrying a cup on a trembling saucer and a teapot. He set them down before Agnes and scurried over to sit near Gwen.

Agnes looked around expectantly. ‘Will the others be joining us?’

Jack coughed. He’d once spent two thousand years underground. To Gwen, he looked as though he was contemplating burying himself again.

‘This is it, Miss Havisham,’ he said, eventually. ‘My Team!’

‘Really?’ said Agnes, and she looked at Ianto and Gwen. Hard. And then back at Jack. ‘Are you trying to tell me, Captain Harkness, that the entire staff of Torchwood Cardiff now consists of a woman in trousers and a tea boy?’

‘. . . yes,’ whispered Jack.

Agnes reached into her carpet bag, took out a leather-bound notebook, folded open a fresh page and made a careful little note with a fountain pen, all the time staring straight at Jack.

‘There were two more,’ said Jack sadly. ‘But they died.’

‘How unfortunate,’ said Agnes flatly. ‘I always wondered what would become of this place if you were in charge of it. Not much, clearly. Next you’ll be saying you’ve lost the submarine.’

Jack winced.

Agnes sighed witheringly.

‘Sorry!’ said Gwen, brightly.

Agnes glanced at her. ‘Yes?’

Gwen tried out her best smile. ‘Hello. Yes. Excuse me, but who are you?’

Agnes chuckled, a short, deprecating little laugh. ‘You can’t mean, my dear Miss Cooper, that Captain Harkness hasn’t told you about me? Goodness me, what an oversight!’ She clucked with amusement. ‘Out of sight, out of mind, dear Harkness,’ she said, and turned back to Gwen.

‘I am Torchwood’s Assessor, my dear,’ she said, her voice rising to ring around the room with authority. ‘I was charged by Queen Victoria to watch over the future of Torchwood. Whenever there is a crisis at any of the Torchwood stations, I awake; I take charge, I monitor and, if necessary, I intervene. My authority is absolute, my decision is final, and my judgement is impeccable.’ She smiled. ‘The machinery is most discriminating – it knows I am to be aroused only at a moment of great chaos.’ She caught Jack smirking at *aroused* and stilled him with a glare. ‘Now, don’t be scared. I’ve only awoken four times in the last hundred years – and each time we were able to sort out the situation with the very minimum of fuss. I’m sure we should be able to muddle through admirably. Now, what seems to be the trouble?’

She folded her hands and glanced around expectantly. No one said a word.

‘Captain Harkness?’ said Agnes, her voice already sounding a little tired.

‘Oh,’ said Jack. ‘Well, that was why we were so . . . taken aback at your visit. Not that it isn’t always a pleasure . . . it’s just . . .’ He paused.

Oh my God, thought Gwen, he’s actually frightened of her. She appraised Agnes. A few years older than her, tall, with strong, regular features and a stern expression. Normally the kind of ice queen Jack went for like a terrier for roast beef. But no . . . he seemed really worried. And sheepish. Wow.

Agnes seemed to notice her appraisal. She tilted her head slightly at Gwen and almost seemed to wink. Then she turned back to Jack. ‘Yes, Captain Harkness?’

Jack scratched at the dirt under a nail. ‘Well, there’s so little on really. Just a couple of Weevils on the loose.’

‘Really?’ Agnes wrote something in her book. Gwen hoped it wasn’t ‘bollocks’. ‘And the alarms went off purely because of that? How extraordinary.’

'The systems are very old,' put in Ianto. He looked about 12, thought Gwen.

'Why yes, they are, to be sure,' agreed Agnes. 'But I'm sure you keep them excellently maintained. All that brass and levers – must keep you on your knees quite a bit. I know how Captain Harkness admires a well-polished knob.'

Gwen spat out her coffee.

'Something to say, Miss Cooper?' asked Agnes.

Gwen shook her head. Jack was trying not to catch her eye, and she felt like she was back at school watching Willy Griffith getting sent to the naughty step for looking up girls' skirts. The more trouble he got in, the bigger his grin would get. Of course, once he'd got out of short trousers it had been less fun, but there was something of the perpetually grinning naughty 8-year-old about Jack.

Agnes shut her book. 'Well, well, well, what a mystery we have here! I've always loved mysteries. Still, while we're here, perhaps we should go and hunt some Weevils. Captain Harkness, I presume you have some guest quarters to put at my disposal?'

'Gwen will show you the way,' said Jack, dully.

Agnes stood, smoothing down her skirt. 'Very well, then. I shall retire to my chambers, freshen up, and then perhaps we could strike out for town?'

Gwen opened the door of the cell. 'Our very best guest suite!' she said brightly.

Agnes strode in after her, and sniffed disapprovingly. It reminded Gwen of whenever her mum came to visit. She and Rhys could spend about a week tidying the flat, and it didn't matter – her mum would zero in on a stray spot of dust or a tiny coffee stain. Only, in this case, Gwen could kind of see her point. The cell was bare, and clearly hadn't seen the business end of Ianto's duster for quite some time. A spartan bed and a chair were clumped in a corner. The fluorescent light was buzzing like an angry wasp.