

BBC  
BOOKS

# DOCTOR • WHO

## The Taking Of Chelsea 426

DAVID LLEWELLYN





## **Contents**

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by David Llewellyn

Also in the Series

Title Page

Dedication

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Acknowledgements

Copyright

## About the Book

The Chelsea Flower Show – hardly the most exciting or dangerous event in the calendar, or so the Doctor thinks. But this is Chelsea 426, a city-sized future colony floating on the clouds of Saturn, and the flowers are much more than they seem.

As the Doctor investigates, he becomes more and more worried. Why is the shopkeeper Mr Pemberton acting so strangely? And what is Professor Wilberforce's terrible secret?

They are close to finding the answers when a familiar foe arrives, and the stakes suddenly get much higher. The Sontarans have plans of their own, and they're not here to arrange flowers. . .

*Featuring the Doctor as played by David Tennant in the hit series from BBC Television.*

## About the Author

David Llewellyn was born in Pontypool in 1978. He is the author of three previous novels, *Eleven*, *Torchwood: Trace Memory*, and *Everything is Sinister*. He lives in Cardiff.

Also by David Llewellyn

*Eleven*  
*Torchwood: Trace Memory*  
*Everything is Sinister*

*Recent titles in the Doctor Who series:*

THE STORY OF MARTHA

Dan Abnett

BEAUTIFUL CHAOS

Gary Russell

THE EYELESS

Lance Parkin

JUDGEMENT OF THE JUDOON

Colin Brake

THE SLITHEEN EXCURSION

Simon Guerrier

PRISONER OF THE DALEKS

Trevor Baxendale

THE TAKING OF CHELSEA 426

David Llewellyn

AUTONOMY

Daniel Blythe

THE KRILLITANE STORM

Christopher Cooper

DOCTOR • WHO

**The Taking  
of  
Chelsea 426**

DAVID LLEWELLYN

**BBC**  
BOOKS



*For Jake Bennett, Ella Moggridge, and Jacob Llewellyn -  
saviours of the universe*

Alice Wendell stepped out beneath the great glass dome of the Oxygen Gardens and gazed up to see the glittering, icy moon of Tethys passing overhead.

She had lived on Chelsea 426 for almost six months, practically since her graduation, but still the other residents – and even her colleagues – looked at her and spoke to her as if she were a complete stranger. She was sure they meant nothing by it, of course; it was just their way.

Even her boss, Professor Wilberforce, addressed her in such a clipped and formal manner you might think they had only just met, and not that they had worked together almost every day since her arrival.

But then, the Professor had lived on the colony longer than anyone else. He had arrived when it first opened as a part of the Interplanetary Mining Corporation's first hydrogen mine on Saturn. Back then his role had been to maintain the Oxygen Gardens, a job he still carried out, though the mine had long since closed and the colony had become the property of Powe-Luna Developments.

It was they who had changed the name of the colony from Unit 426 to Chelsea 426, and they who had refurbished it completely, transforming it from a utilitarian domicile into a close approximation of a twentieth-century English market town.

Within the airtight confines of the colony there were gardens and tree-lined streets filled with shops, offices, schools and the occasional church. Outside, the colony resembled a raft cobbled together from barrels, though in the case of Chelsea 426 each 'barrel' was roughly the same size as a tower block. Flanking the raft of units that made up the colony were colossal, semi-translucent discs, each more than a mile in diameter, which reminded Alice of water lily pads. It was these discs, as well as the colony's fusion candle, that kept it floating on the surface of Saturn's gas clouds.

On the morning of 20 August, the gardens were a hive of activity, with botanists dashing this way and that, making all the last-minute preparations and adjustments before the grand opening of the Flower Show. With every passing day, more and more guests were arriving, and anticipation for the unveiling of the plants had reached feverish levels.

After a moment's pause, and a deep breath, Alice walked across the gardens to where Professor Wilberforce was standing at the foot of the largest specimen, a creation he had named *Caeruliflora Saturnalis*, the 'Blue Flower of Saturn'.

It was a giant of a plant, nearly four metres in height, its thick trunk rising high above a cluster of palmate leaves before erupting into one colossal blue blossom. Scattered in the flowerbeds around its base were numerous other shrubs and bushes, none of them recognisable as any earthly plant.

Alice had seen and studied extraterrestrial flora before at university, but this was the first time that any such plant life had been discovered within the boundaries of the solar system. Though the promise of a flower show might not have seemed an exciting invitation, the promise of *alien* plants was. Thousands were expected to pass through the doors of the Oxygen Gardens in the coming week, and thousands had, indeed, already arrived, making the journey to Saturn from all across the solar system.

As Alice crossed the gardens towards the Professor, she was carelessly knocked sideways by a colleague who was too focused on scribbling into a notebook to see where he was going.

'Scuse me!' said the botanist, seconds after he had passed her.

Alice straightened her lab coat and her glasses, took a deep breath, and carried on until she reached the Professor.

'Er, Professor Wilberforce,' she said, sheepishly. 'I . . . I was wondering if I could have a word?'

Professor Wilberforce turned to her and for a moment said nothing, simply staring at her with no trace of emotion.

‘That would be agreeable,’ he said, eventually. ‘You seem somewhat perturbed. Is something the matter?’

Alice nodded, nervously straightening her glasses once more.

‘Um, yes,’ she said awkwardly. ‘I’ve been monitoring the atmospheric readings and I’ve noticed that, er, the, er . . .’

‘Spit it out, girl,’ snapped Wilberforce. ‘I haven’t got all day.’

‘Well, I’m getting a high reading of ammonia.’

Wilberforce nodded thoughtfully, tapping the end of his pen against his teeth.

‘Ammonia, you say?’

Alice nodded, her chin in her chest.

‘Well that’s interesting,’ the Professor continued. ‘Very interesting indeed. Follow me to my office. I’m sure there’s a perfectly rational explanation for all this.’

‘Of course,’ said Alice, following the Professor as he left the main chamber of the gardens and walked down the narrow corridor toward his office.

Entering the Professor’s office was like stepping into another era. The walls were decorated with wooden panels on which the Professor’s many certificates and qualifications hung in frames. One wall of the room was occupied exclusively with bookshelves crammed from end to end with leather-bound volumes. His mahogany desk was huge and furnished with a large antique globe and a Tiffany dragonfly lamp.

In one dimly lit corner of the office, under a glass dome, he kept a smaller specimen of *Caeruliflora Saturnalis*, an almost bonsai-scaled replica of the giant in the main chamber.

As Alice neared the centre of the room, Professor Wilberforce closed the door behind her.

‘Now, Alice,’ he said, his tone suddenly warmer, more genial. ‘Why do you think there might be a noticeable trace of ammonia in the main chamber?’

‘W-w-well,’ she stuttered. ‘I don’t . . . I don’t know. The environment here is controlled one hundred per cent. There shouldn’t be *any* traces of ammonia in there. Unless . . . unless the plants are producing it, but we’ve—’

‘Already tested for that?’

‘Well yes. So the only thing I can . . . um . . . think is that —’

‘Somebody is leaking ammonia into the chamber?’

‘Er . . . yes.’

Professor Wilberforce clapped his hands together just once, beaming at Alice as if she were suddenly his star pupil. She had never seen him behave this way before. It left her feeling strangely uncomfortable.

‘Quite right,’ said Wilberforce. ‘Quite right. A trace of ammonia *is* being fed into the chamber. Fed, Alice. Not leaked.’ He walked across the office to the glass dome containing the smaller plant. ‘They really are a miracle, aren’t they?’

Alice nodded with what she hoped looked like enthusiasm, though she still felt uneasy.

‘All this,’ said the Professor. ‘This sudden fruition, this glorious outburst of life, and all from the tiniest of spores.’

‘Y-yes,’ said Alice.

‘How many years must the spores have been waiting there, Alice, do you think? Centuries? Millennia, perhaps? Who can say? All those years, those tiny, almost microscopic spores floated in the turbulence of the planet’s atmosphere, still alive but without the right environment to thrive. How do you think they survived, Alice?’

Alice looked from Professor Wilberforce to the plant and back again, shrugging.

‘They were alive the whole time,’ said Wilberforce. ‘Living breathing organisms, floating in clouds of hydrogen, helium

. . . and ammonia.'

Alice looked up, her eyes growing wide behind the lenses of her glasses.

'They breathe ammonia?'

Professor Wilberforce beamed once more.

'My dear girl,' he said, 'you clever thing. They *breathe* ammonia. But only the spores. For the plants to truly thrive they need so many other elements. Ultraviolet light, carbon dioxide . . . All the things that earthly plants require.'

Now Alice frowned.

'But that doesn't make sense. Why would a plant develop on Saturn that could only survive in its spore form?'

Professor Wilberforce smiled and nodded without answering her question. He lifted the glass dome away from the plant.

At once Alice could smell it: the same faint unpleasant whiff of ammonia that had first led her to check the readings from the chamber.

'But,' said Professor Wilberforce, 'what if the plant did not develop on Saturn? What if it was developed elsewhere?'

Alice nodded thoughtfully, trying hard not to wince at the unpleasant smell.

'Well we have discussed exogenesis,' she said, placing the back of her hand over her nose. 'They may have arrived here on a comet, or a meteorite. They could have come from another planet.'

'Well done,' said Professor Wilberforce, still grinning from ear to ear.

'But you said *developed*,' said Alice. 'What do you mean?'

Professor Wilberforce gestured toward her with one hand, beckoning her closer to the plant.

'Come here,' he said, still smiling warmly. 'A little closer, if you will. That's it. Lean closer. What if the plant were developed elsewhere, and designed to fulfil a purpose?'

Alice leaned close to the plant, studying its azure petals and its snaking, almost reptilian stem.



‘What if,’ the Professor continued, ‘its restive state would only require it to breathe ammonia, waiting very patiently for the day when others might discover it?’

‘Others?’ asked Alice, turning to the Professor. ‘You mean us?’

Wilberforce nodded.

‘Yes,’ he said, still smiling. ‘You.’

‘I’m sorry, but I don’t know what you m—’

Before she could finish her sentence the blue flower spat out a small but dense cloud of heavily perfumed green dust, the particles so fine it looked almost like smoke.

Alice breathed in sharply, coughing and spluttering and clutching at her throat. She tried to speak but couldn’t; her throat felt as if it were getting narrower and narrower. Coloured lights danced before her eyes and the room began to spin.

Professor Wilberforce hooked his arm around her and carried her to a chair, placing her down gently. Everything around her was beginning to lose focus; the office, the desk, the Professor. The room was getting darker and the Professor’s voice echoed as if he were very far away.

‘There there,’ she heard him say as she was swallowed by the darkness. ‘It will all be over in a moment.’

Minutes later, Alice Wendell and Professor Wilberforce were standing in the main chamber of the gardens, at the foot of the *Caeruliflora Saturnalis*.

‘We weren’t expecting *humans*,’ she said, with disdain.

‘No,’ said Professor Wilberforce with a sigh. ‘We weren’t. It would appear our enemies are not the only ones mining hydrogen in this sector.’

‘How many of us are there now?’ Alice asked.

‘A few,’ replied the Professor. ‘Not many, but soon there will be visitors. Thousands of visitors.’

‘Thousands?’ said Alice, turning to Wilberforce and grinning malevolently.

‘Oh yes,’ he told her, returning the smile. ‘Thousands.’



JAKE CARSTAIRS LOOKED out at the ink-black canvas of space and waited. He pressed his nose against the cold glass, his every breath fogging up the window a little more than the last, and he waited.

Eventually it came into view, the colossal cylindrical hulk of the hotel pod, its retro rockets firing out streams of gas. There were people in the windows, little more than silhouettes against the interior lights of the hotel; guests and hotel staff, he imagined. He wondered whether any of them were looking down at his parents' guest house just as he was looking up at them.

Slowly, and with surprising grace for an object nearly a hundred metres in length, the hotel pod turned and aligned itself with the westernmost wing of the colony. Beyond the western wing and the hotel pod, the surface of the planet stretched out like a vast and seemingly infinite desert, neatly cut in two, to the south, by the shadow of the rings.

The hotel pod was now surrounded by tug craft, pulling it in closer to the docking platforms. Hydraulic arms reached out and fastened themselves to the hull of the pod until it finally came to rest.

'Another one?'

It was the voice of Jake's sister, Vienna. More than just his sister, Vienna was his twin, born less than twenty minutes before him nearly fourteen years ago. He didn't turn to see