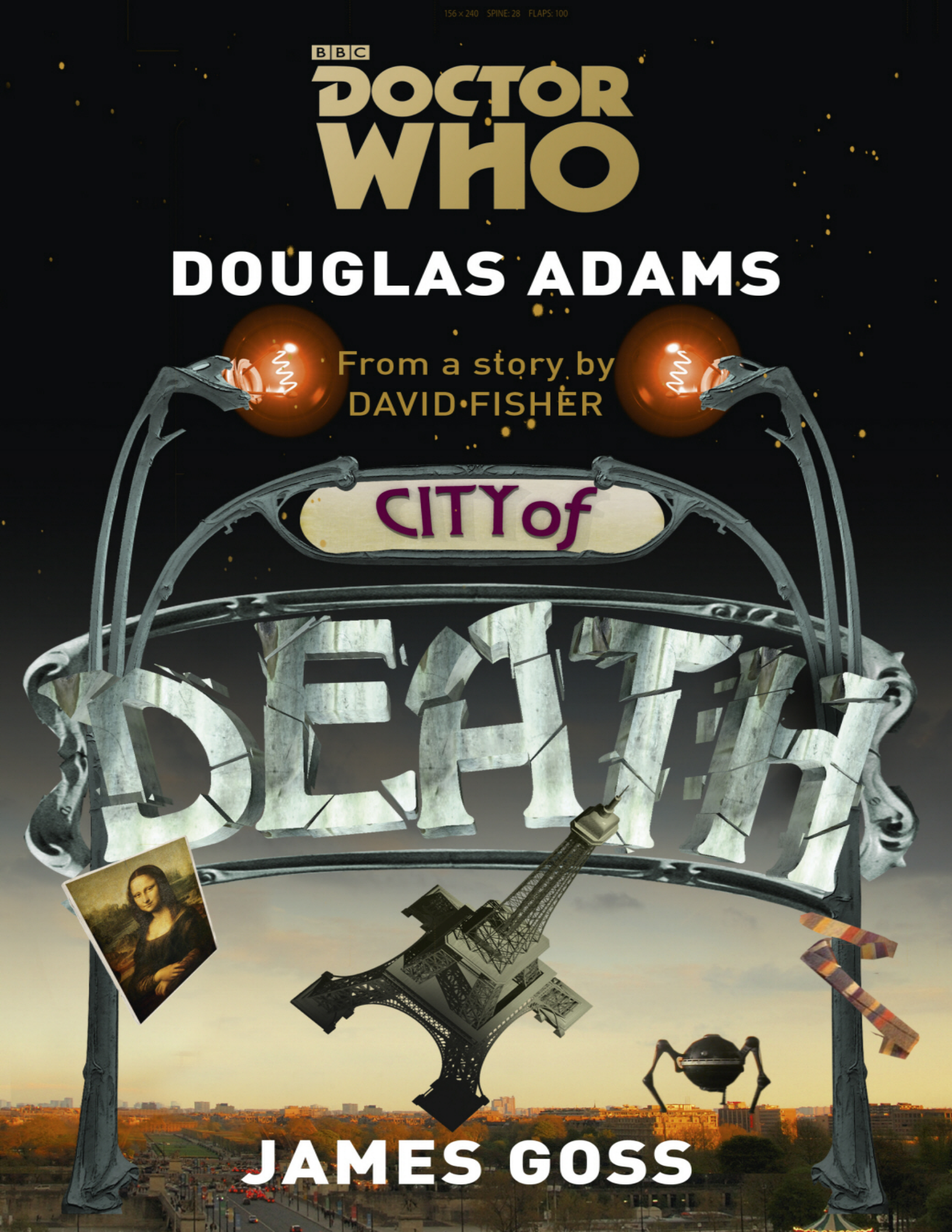
BBC

DOCTOR WHO

DOUGLAS ADAMS

From a story by
DAVID·FISHER



JAMES GOSS

Contents

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About the Book

The Doctor takes Romana for a holiday in Paris – a city which, like a fine wine, has a bouquet all its own. Especially if you visit during one of the vintage years. But the TARDIS takes them to 1979, a table-wine year, a year whose vintage is soured by cracks – not in their wine glasses but in the very fabric of time itself.

Soon the Time Lords are embroiled in an audacious alien scheme which encompasses home-made time machines, the theft of the Mona Lisa, the resurrection of the much-feared Jagaroth race, and the beginning (and quite possibly the end) of all life on Earth.

Aided by British private detective Duggan, whose speciality is thumping people, the Doctor and Romana must thwart the machinations of the suave, mysterious Count Scarlioni – all twelve of him – if the human race has any chance of survival.

But then, the Doctor's holidays tend to turn out a bit like this.

Featuring the Fourth Doctor as played by Tom Baker, ***City of Death*** *is a novel by James Goss based on the 1979* Doctor Who *story written by Douglas Adams under the pen-name David Agnew.* ***City of Death*** *is one of the best-loved serials in the show's 50-year history and was watched by over 16 million viewers when first broadcast.*

About the Authors

DOUGLAS ADAMS was born in Cambridge in March 1952. He is best known as the creator of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which started life as a BBC Radio 4 series. The book went on to be a No. 1 bestseller. He followed this success with *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980); *Life, The Universe and Everything* (1982); *So Long and Thanks for all the Fish* (1984); *Mostly Harmless* (1992) and many more. He sold over 15 million books in the UK, the US and Australia. Douglas died unexpectedly in May 2001 at the age of 49.

James Goss has written three *Torchwood* novels, a *Doctor Who* novel, and two radio plays, as well as a *Being Human* book. His *Doctor Who* audiobook *Dead Air* won Best Audiobook 2010. James also spent seven years working on the BBC's official *Doctor Who* website and co-wrote the website for *Torchwood* Series One. His books *Dead of Winter* and *First Born* were both nominated for the 2012 British Fantasy Society Awards.

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

CITY OF DEATH

James Goss

BBC BOOKS

PART ONE

‘One’s emotions are intensified in Paris – one can be more happy and also more unhappy here than in any other place … There is nobody so miserable as a Parisian in exile.’

Nancy Mitford, *The Pursuit Of Love*

Chapter One
ALL ROADS LEAD TO PARIS

It was Tuesday and life didn't happen. Wednesday would be quite a different matter.

Scaroth, last of the Jagaroth, was in for a surprise. For one thing, he had no idea he was about to become the last of the Jagaroth.

If you'd asked him about the Jagaroth a mere, say, twenty soneds ago, he'd have shrugged and told you they were a savage and warlike race and that, if you weren't happy about that, you should meet the other guys.

By and large, all life in the universe was pretty savage and warlike. Show me a race of philosophers and poets, said Scaroth, and I'll show you lunch. It would, however, be unfair to say the Jagaroth were completely without accomplishments. They did build very nice-looking spaceships, although they were not necessarily very good ones. There was a lot to recommend the *Sephiroth.* A vast sphere rested on three claws. It suggested formidable menace whilst evoking the kind of insect you'd not care to find in your bed. The tripod arrangement of the legs also meant that it could land on anything.

Which was ironic, as right now it couldn't take off from anything. Something had gone very badly wrong in the drive unit almost as soon as they'd landed in this desolation. They'd been hunting a Racnoss energy signal and had made planetfall, hoping for one more victory. Just one more victory.

The Jagaroth had devoted themselves to killing. There was nothing else they'd leave behind them. No history, no literature, and no statues. As a species they'd never achieved anything other than wiping out life.

The problem was that every other life form was equally dedicated to the same goal. So successful had everyone been that there really wasn't that much life left in the universe. The Jagaroth were one of the last ones standing and, even then, not by much. When the Jagaroth talked about their fearsome battle fleet, the *Sephiroth* was pretty much it. Or, actually, just *it*.

Scaroth, pilot of the *Sephiroth*, battle fleet of the Jagaroth, worried about this. Nice-looking spaceships, frankly mediocre drive systems, rhyming names, and, oh yes, a frankly lunatic determination to keep going.

Hence the voices of his shipmates that filled his command pod from across the ship.

'Twenty soneds to warp thrust.' Someone was counting down.

'Thrust against planet surface set to power three.' And someone down in engineering was really keen on getting off this rock.

'Negative,' Scaroth snapped back quickly. 'Power three too severe.' Warp thrust was used to speed between the stars, not for lift-off. Even from a thinly atmosphered, low-gravity dead world. There were too many things which could go wrong. Warp thrust from a planet's surface had not been tested. 'At power three this is suicide.'

The voices urging him on fell silent at that. Of course they would.

'Please advise,' he said curtly.

Eventually that keen voice in engineering came on the line. 'Scaroth, it must be power three. It must be.'

Typical. The refuge of the Jagaroth in definite absolutes. Scaroth twisted his face into a cynical expression. Well, as cynical an expression as could be conveyed by a face that

was a mass of writhing green tentacles grouped around a single eye.

As pilot, Scaroth was in charge. The one to push the button. If history remembered this at all, it would be his fault. He knew that it was a stupid decision, but then again, from an evolutionary point of view, the Jagaroth had made a lot of fairly stupid decisions.

'Ten soneds to warp thrust,' prompted the countdown. Was there a trace of desperation in the voice?

Scaroth ran his green hands over the terminal. If the *Sephiroth* had been working properly, warp control would have been a mass of status read-outs, all of which he had been carefully trained to simultaneously process. Instead, most of the panels flashed up requesting urgent software updates, or were simply blank.

Scaroth was relying on his instincts and the voices filling the module. And the rest of the crew seemed happy to leave it up to him.

'Advise!' he repeated, hoping to hear someone speaking sense.

The response that came was weary. 'Scaroth, the Jagaroth are in your hands. Without secondary engines we must use our main warp thrust. You know this. It is our only hope. *You* are our only hope.'

Thanks for that, thought Scaroth, his tentacles now positively quivering with cynicism. 'And I'm the only one directly in the warp field!' In other words, I'll be the first one to go. 'I know the dangers.' That was as close as a Jagaroth had ever come to asking for a rethink. Once they committed to an idea, no matter how lethal or ludicrous, the Jagaroth stuck to it.

Confirming his thoughts, the countdown came back on, sounding quite determinedly chipper. Whatever, something was going to happen now. 'Three soneds… two… one…' went the voice, as though unaware that the soned's days as a unit of measurement were about to be very firmly over.

Scaroth had a last attempt. ‘What will happen if…?’ It all goes wrong? If the atmosphere and gravity combine with the warp thrust to do something really unexpected and horrible? Starting with me.

Ah well. What’s the use? Arguing with the Jagaroth had only ever ended in death.

Scaroth pressed the button.

At full power, the *Sephiroth* glided majestically up from the surface of the desolation. The idea of staying a moment longer here had appalled the crew. Why stay here on a dead world fiddling with repairs when we could go somewhere else and maybe wipe out another species? The omens were good. A tiny fluctuation caused by a fuel leakage seemed to right itself. As the sphere rose, the claw-like legs tucked themselves neatly up underneath. For a moment the sphere hovered there, glowing with energy, magnificent, expectant.

Then it shattered.

Directly inside the warp field, Scaroth was both intimately aware of the ship falling into itself and also strangely removed from the experience. Nothing seemed certain except that everything hurt. And the voices of the Jagaroth were still filling warp control.

There was no sense that they realised they had made a terrible mistake, that they’d made him press the button. Simply that they now expected him to do something about it.

‘Help us Scaroth! Help us!’ they pleaded. As if there was anything he could do now. ‘The fate of the Jagaroth is with you! Help us! You are our only hope!’

The screaming voices cut off and, for a brief moment, Scaroth could enjoy his agony in relative silence.

I’m the last of the Jagaroth, he thought. For as long as that lasts.

The warp field finally, mercifully collapsed. The fragments of the ship, squeezed into place by impossible forces, finally felt free to fling themselves in burning splendour far and wide across the surface of the dead planet.

Scaroth died. And then the surprising thing happened.

That'll do, thought Leonardo.

Like most works of genius, it had arrived almost without being noticed.

One moment there it wasn't, the next there it was, somehow squeezing itself between the towers of paper and the dangling models that filled the cramped study.

Leonardo sat back in his chair and surveyed the painting, brush still in his hand. The brush hovered near the lip of the easel, not quite being laid to rest. He surveyed his work. Was that really it? Was there anything more that needed doing to it?

Finally, he tugged his eyes away from the painting. He looked over to the visitor snoring in the corner, boots up on the model of the dam designed for Machiavelli. Leonardo briefly toyed with the visitor's suggestions, no doubt kindly meant, about the portrait's face.

But no, he thought. He would come back to the painting, of course he would come back to it. That was his problem. Never quite able to finish anything. But yes, she would certainly do for now.

He let his brush fall, excitement turning into a vague sense of anti-climax and now what.

Deciding that tonight would be a drinking night, he poured himself a cup of cheap wine, and sipped it fearfully. Perhaps he'd buy something better tomorrow, but he probably wouldn't. He gazed out through the arched window at the stars and the city slumbering beneath them. His eyes wandered across the squares of Florence. God alone knows what they'll make of this on the forums, he thought. He knew that tomorrow all the whispering would

be about his latest painting. Some would say it was a disappointment. Others would say he should stop dividing his time between painting and inventing. No doubt a few would say it was a triumphant return to form.

Ah well, let them. He was happy with it. More or less.

His visitor shifted in his slumber, and Leonardo wondered about the portrait's face again.

No. Leave her be. For the moment.

He rocked back in his chair, enjoying the wine as much as was humanly possible, and drinking in the painting. She had been a struggle, and, while he wasn't quite at the top of the mountain, the struggle had definitely been worth it.

Thank the Lord he wouldn't have to go through that again.

William Shakespeare was cheating at croquet. His visitor frowned and, while the Bard wasn't looking, subtly scuffed his ball closer to a hoop. He looked up. Well, bless him if William hadn't done the same thing. The two smiled at each other politely.

'Patrons!' exclaimed Shakespeare, changing the subject.

His visited nodded and clucked sympathetically.

'This one's very keen,' continued the Bard. 'I tried out some of my new stuff on him last night. Normally that sends them scurrying away for weeks, but this one's promised he's coming back at the weekend. So he must have more.' He angled his mallet and sent the ball bouncing merrily across his lawn, neatly avoiding his visitor's scarf, which was unaccountably trailing across its path. The ball sailed through a hoop and smacked against the post. Shakespeare smirked.

'Oh, well done,' applauded his guest insincerely.

'He was very nice about a bit I was pleased with.' Shakespeare waited, both for a dramatic pause and for his visitor to miss his shot. 'Ah yes,' he announced with a studied spontaneity which explained why he'd given up

acting. '*I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I had bad dreams*. Yes, that was it. He said it spoke to him and he couldn't wait to find out how it ends. Pah! Wonder what his bad dreams are, eh? Probably nothing much. Oh poor you, that is a shame.' As his visitor muffed his shot completely.

All thoughts of his patron's bad dreams banished, Shakespeare got on with winning the game.

It was said that the Nazis loved art as much as they loved a joke. Curiously, however, as they'd stormed into Paris they'd filled their lavish hotel suites with as much art as they could lay their hands on. And, when they'd swept out of Paris the first thing they'd done was to take their art with them. And the last thing they'd done was to forget to settle their hotel bills.

The train had been loaded by the Wehrmacht in the dead of night. It was one of the final ones to leave Paris, rattling slowly through the north-eastern suburbs, windowless metal containers baking in the summer heat. Behind the train came the steady, self-important crump of the American army. Ahead of the train lay Germany.

Inside one of the carriages was a very young German soldier, his poise stiff, even if his uniform was several sizes too large. His posture didn't waver, not even when the train juddered to an abrupt and unexpected halt just outside Aulnay. The tracks ahead were gone, blown up by the Resistance.

The young soldier could hear gunfire, shouts and footsteps walking down the track towards his carriage. He pulled out his gun and waited. The young soldier made a list of his options. He could fight his way out (unlikely), he could shoot himself (practical), he could set fire to the cargo (regrettable). For once, he took no action, and simply stood to attention as the bolts were undone and the container door slid to one side.

A flashlight landed on his handsome, perfectly Aryan face. The soldier tensed, just a little, expecting the shot that would end his life.

It did not come.

‘Good evening,’ The voice behind the flashlight sounded endlessly amused. ‘Well, it all seems to be in order.’ The light played over the contents of the carriage, some neatly in crates, the rest stacked up against walls. The carriage was full of paintings. ‘Tell me, what do you think of it?’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘I said,’ the voice purred, ‘what do you make of it all?’

The soldier found his voice. ‘It is all excellent.’

‘Yes, it is, isn’t it?’ the man’s voice laughed. ‘And it’s mine.’ The tone shifted just a little, addressing him like a hotel porter. ‘Thank you for looking after it so well…’ A pause. A question.

‘Hermann, sir.’

He could hear the man nod. ‘Thank you for looking after it, Hermann.’

Major Gaston Palewski glared at the mountain. It did not explode.

Perhaps, just perhaps, they should not have named the bomb Beryl. He’d never cared for the name. Major Palewski groaned with annoyance.

‘Give it time, my dear Gaston,’ oozed the smartly dressed man at his side. Nothing ever seemed to rattle him. A fellow of infinite patience. In some ways so terribly French, in others so terribly not.

Around the Major, people checked watches, squinted through binoculars, lit cigarettes and tutted. It felt pretty much like a Parisian café, only they were all stood roasting on a plain in the Saharan desert.

‘Not really sure I need to be here,’ muttered the Major. ‘Rubberstamping exercise.’

‘Oh, I think you do.’ The man was enthusing again. His smile was indelible. ‘Nuclear power is almost the greatest force this world has ever known.’

‘Almost?’ Gaston raised an eyebrow.

‘Well, who knows?’ His companion frowned, but his smile did not go away. ‘It’s certainly the greatest achievement of humanity. Before you build all those power stations, I think you really do need to see a nuclear explosion for yourself.’

Well yes, Gaston had always liked fireworks. Even during the war, he had enjoyed watching barrage lighting up the night sky. But this was different. He felt a moment’s unease at the presence of the genial man at his side. There were rumours about him, about his family – who were they really? Had they been *collabos* during the war? But there were rumours about everyone’s family, and this was the new France, after all. Perhaps it needed people like this. Especially if the Palewski Plan was to succeed. The Major wanted France to be at the forefront of nuclear energy, and this man had convinced him to build even more power stations than the country currently needed. ‘We have to think of the future, Gaston,’ he’d assured him.

Well, why not, thought Gaston. Something to be remembered by.

He glared at the mountain again, and it exploded at last. Just not in the way it was expected to. Instead of shooting up into the air, a vast jet of flame shot horizontally across the plain, blazing towards them. The light seared their eyes. Even the Major flinched and screamed, backing futilely away from the fireball.

As quickly as it had appeared, the flame vanished, replaced by a choking black cloud that washed over them.

When eventually Gaston straightened up, he realised his companion had remained standing throughout, and was now dabbing black smuts off his white linen suit. He was smiling broadly.

‘An impressive demonstration, I’m sure you’ll agree,’ he laughed.

‘But…’ Gaston could not find his voice. He coughed, clearing ash from his lungs. ‘That was not supposed to happen! Was that safe?’

‘Oh, perfectly.’ His companion folded away his handkerchief into his top pocket. ‘Perfectly.’

Gaston would not be the only person there to die of leukaemia, killed by a bomb called Beryl.

Heidi found most of Daddy’s clients stiflingly boring. But not this one. Already her visitor had taught her that she had been wrong about something. No one had ever done that before.

Heidi had grown up thinking that money was dull and that people with a lot of it were even duller. Their clothes were dull, their conversation was dull, even their vices were dull. And her father put up with all of it. Because he ran one of the most exclusive banks in Switzerland and it was his job to somehow find these tedious people interesting.

It had been all right when she was young, but now she was coming of age, she’d realised to her horror that he was planning on marrying her off to one of them. Her mistake, she realised, was never rebelling when she had had the opportunity. There had been a point, somewhere, when she had still had a chance. Perhaps when her expensive finishing school, well, finished and before the emptiness of the rest of her life began. She could have hopped on a tiresomely punctual Swiss train and gone somewhere, anywhere other than Switzerland. She wouldn’t have starved. Daddy, whatever his faults, would have made sure of that.

But instead she had come home and waited by his side, working in the family business. Most Swiss banks are, in their own quiet way, family concerns. Clients liked that

sense of continuity. Heidi and her father would go to the airport to meet people off planes that were never late, and arrive in a restaurant in perfect time for their reservation. The plates would be cold, the conversation empty, and each evening would stretch on until she wondered if she should stab herself with a butter knife or just marry one of them to get it all over with. When her father had first insisted he accompanied her, she wondered if he was grooming her to take over the bank. Now she realised that she was simply an asset he was looking at realising. That was certainly how her father's clients regarded her.

She had an office. As it was mainly for show, she had made the most of it, ripping out the wooden panelling and filling it with sharp steel furniture and fragile glass tables. There was even a desk toy, on which, pulling back one little steel ball would send another eleven flying off and ticking back. Little planets, knocking into each other. Back and forth until even they gave up and fell still, waiting for something else to happen.

Heidi could tell the client was impressed by her taste. He took in the room, rather than her. She liked that. When he looked at her it was almost as though he was assessing her as another gorgeously perfect piece of furniture, approving both the cut of her trouser suit, and the cut of her hair.

This client was definitely different. For one thing he was fun. And for another, he was a fraud. Her father hadn't noticed, but then her father was a great one for appearances and hunches. Heidi wasn't. She enjoyed thorough research. She had a whole folder lying in front of her on the glass table. This man had come to the bank with the details of a vault which hadn't been opened for a very long time. It wasn't unheard of for a vault to be passed down through a family without being visited for several generations, but it was certainly unusual. All the paperwork for this vault was perfectly in order. That was the problem, as far as she was concerned.

In such cases, the paperwork was never in order. There was always some small thing awry, some tiny detail that the bank would need to help smooth over. But not in this case. It was all in complete Swiss order – even down to the original documents just happening to provide information that matched the slightly revised requirements brought in after all that fuss caused by those nice Germans salting so much of other people's money away. Unless this handsome man sat across from her, smiling that charming smile, was somehow on speaking terms with his long-dead relatives, that was impossible. Which clearly meant that he was a fraud.

A fraud who was sitting back, insolently at home in her chrome and leather chair, his legs crossed, an exquisitely cobbled-shoe tapping the air gently, waiting for her verdict.

She had him. She could send him to prison for life. He was a fraud come to steal money from her father's bank. Now that, thought Heidi, would be interesting. She couldn't help smiling, couldn't hold in a little laugh at the thought.

The fraud looked at her, and he smiled too, laughing along with her. No, more than that – he winked. He knew. He knew that she'd seen through him. And he didn't care.

Heidi let him lean forward across the desk, face reflected in its surface as he lit her cigarette for her. With a toss of her long blonde hair, she leaned forward too, regarding this charming man thoughtfully. There was already an intimacy between them. A shared joke. One thing her father had taught her was that it was always fatal to get caught up in emotion. Her family prided itself on its tact, grace, and caution.

Heidi had long been planning on rebelling. Here was a man come to rob her father's bank. And she was going to let him. Because it would be fun.

'So,' she said to him coolly, 'how much money would you like to steal?'

The man didn't even blink. 'All of it,' he said.

‘Now what?’ Harrison Mandel thought. Having found himself suddenly, embarrassingly rich, he had no idea what to do next.

As was increasingly the case in the world, his problems had been caused by a computer. Harrison had invented one. Or rather, Harrison had come across some letters belonging to Ada Lovelace. A lot of people knew that Byron’s daughter had invented the first programming language. Many people discounted her actual language, preferring to patronisingly applaud her efforts. While her contemporaries had been trying to dance in corsets or write novels about dancing in corsets, Ada had invented computer programming, whilst wearing a corset. The problem with her audacious attempts at programming was that they just fell a little bit flat when fed into an actual computer.

That was, until Harrison Mandel had found her correspondence with an Italian polymath. Harrison realised that the letters described a rather different kind of computer to any that had ever been built. Perhaps, Harrison figured, the letters were an elaborate game between tutor and student, an attempt to invent two sides of a coin by post.

Whatever, Harrison had been so diverted by this discovery that he sat down and built the computer they described. It was surprisingly easy. The jottings by Lovelace and her Italian were simpler to follow than the instructions that came with his wardrobe. They might almost have been written deliberately with that intention.

He fed in Lovelace’s code, figuring that at most it probably wouldn’t even compile and that would be that. But it had worked, and worked brilliantly. The problem lay in what to do next.

The Americans had ordered ten thousand. The Russians had ordered twenty. There’s just the one, he’d protested, adamant that this was a discovery that belonged to the

world. When he'd refused, things had suddenly started going a little awry in his life. As though he was wandering through a Laurel and Hardy film. Pianos really did fall out of windows near him. Cars mysteriously failed to stop at crossings.

Nervous, Harrison decided the best, and certainly the safest thing would be to sell it after all, but to a private bidder. Let them deal with the Russians and the Americans. The offer he received was so ludicrous, he'd said yes.

When his sudden, embarrassing riches were merely impending, his only problem was how to quantify them. He'd idly flicked through a newspaper, and noticed the headlines about the recent sale of a hitherto unknown Van Gogh, the kind of art treasure that only obscenely wealthy people sold to each other to convince themselves that they were cultured people. He looked at the painting reproduced splotchily in newsprint and thought, 'I'll be worth exactly that.'

It was a funny feeling. On the one hand his life's worth equated exactly to one of the treasures of the world. On the other hand he was worth exactly as much as a sheet of pasteboard daubed with cheap colours by a lunatic between one hangover and the next.

He kept staring at the picture. He could not work out how he felt about it. Harrison had never really been moved by art. He'd paid money to go to museums and look at things. But all the time he'd been preoccupied by everything else. The perfume of the woman next to him, the way his left foot always ached more than his right, the distant smell of the café, the hilarious faces of people pretending to be transported by aesthetic rapture. The pictures themselves did nothing for Harrison other than fill up the walls. What were they for? Come to think of it, what was *he* for?

Now that he was suddenly and embarrassingly rich and wondering what to do with his life, Harrison Mandel found

himself pondering art and pondering what he was missing out on. An idea struck him. Surely there was only one place in the world to find out about art?

Nikolai couldn't possibly eat any more. No matter how hard both his host and the waiter pressed him, he waved away, with a good-hearted show of reluctance, both a final sorbet and another round of the cheeseboard.

His host topped up his wine personally, smiling with delight at his appreciation of the vintage. The sommelier rushed over to suggest a no doubt delightful dessert wine, but Nikolai, to much good-hearted laughter by all, waved the fellow away.

Everyone agreed he had acquitted himself excellently. Praise was heaped on his judicious choices from the menu, and a few regretful chuckles were had about roads not taken. Ah well, all agreed, there'd be plenty of time. Maxim's wasn't going anywhere.

His host took care of the frankly extraordinary bill and then went off to fetch their car. Slowly, Nikolai heaved his considerable bulk off the banquette, nodded to the waiters like old friends, and then waddled slowly over to the window to savour once more that magnificent view.

His host returned, and they shook on the deal, before Hermann, that exquisitely dressed chauffeur, handed him into the car. Of course it would be a Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, of course it would be.

He settled his head back against the reassuring leather upholstery and marvelled again as Haussmann's floodlit boulevards whipped by.

Yes, thought Professor Kerensky, I'm going to enjoy working in Paris.

If it hadn't been for Swansea, none of it would have happened.

Some agents in the Department could push back their chairs after one drink too many, ruefully recalling their nemeses, and they would talk of Geneva, Monte Carlo, Tangier and Berlin. Names you could conjure with. Locales that spelt allure, style, romance and tragedy. In the world of the Department, it was all right to fail if you did so somewhere with subtitles.

But Duggan? His downfall was Swansea. Ironically, he had never even been to Swansea. But that's where the Department's expenses desk sat. Probably on its own in a car park. As much as Duggan ever imagined anything, he imagined it rained a lot in Swansea.

Duggan had had a hot lead, a trail that pointed to a shipping container in Ghent. He knew he had to get there quickly before the evidence vanished for ever. This was the kind of urgency that required a helicopter, a private jet, or even a hovercraft. But that desk in Swansea had its limits, and those limits were a cheap hotel and an early ferry.

If only, Duggan thought later, they could have allowed him another two pounds. He could have got a hotel that wasn't so abysmally cheap. Then he could at least have had a proper night's sleep. Every cheap hotel, along with a thin pillow and a chipped tooth glass, includes someone called Barry, who pops in at 3 a.m. to shout out his own name and slam some doors. If only Barry could have done that at 5 a.m., then Duggan wouldn't have missed the early sailing. As it was, Duggan slept through his alarm and was left to prowl the harbour miserably for hours, becoming briefly convinced he was being tailed in Woolworths, before passing some time in a café where they served you your tea with a greasy thumbprint on the mug.

Duggan had always been a man of limited emotions, but later, on the evening ferry crossing, he found himself toying with some new ones. His constant companions Anger and Annoyance were shuffling over to make room for Apprehension. He kept checking his watch, brushing aside

the sleeve of his crumpled raincoat and staring at the dial. Time was doing two things simultaneously – it was crawling by very slowly but it was also racing past. The ferry lurched through the waves to Ghent with all the hurry of a Sunday rail replacement bus service. Meanwhile, on the distant docks a shipping container could be emptied at any moment.

Inside the container was the smoking gun, the hot potato, the reward for the last eighteen months of gruelling work. Work that had taken him nowhere near Geneva, Monte Carlo, Tangier or Berlin. He'd fought his way into, and out of, an auction house in Aberdeen, and traded blows with toughs in a dull town in Norway. He'd made a lot of trouble, but Duggan knew that trouble was how you got noticed. If you were walking into a spider's web, he'd told his chief, you'd best do it as an angry wasp.

His chief had nodded seriously at that and told him that his heart was in the right place but his foot was best off in his mouth.

Finally, Ghent loomed on the horizon like a hangover. The sun was setting over the harbour's unpromising skyline. The air was turning cold and some rain had popped over from Swansea. Duggan shivered, pulled up his raincoat and made his way to the docks. He hurried through the maze of iron boxes, guided by the tip-off he'd torn out of that terrified oculist. Was that really only yesterday? He glanced again at his watch, rubbing at an egg stain on his sleeve. It was fine. He would be just in time. It was always about time, this job.

There were a couple of guards on duty at the dock. Of course there were. He made swift work of them. Maybe they were in the gang's pockets, maybe they weren't, but, at the end of a miserable day, Duggan didn't care. He didn't have time to find out and hitting them made him feel better.

He didn't linger over the padlock either. He carried tools with him that were as useful for ironmongery as they were

for interviewing suspects. As he unlatched the door, Duggan's mind tried out another new emotion. Trepidation. No, he didn't like it.

If luck was on his side and hard work was to be rewarded, then inside this container would be everything he'd need. Its contents had been gradually moved here from all over Europe. People had died getting each object here. This shipping container was one of the most audacious clearing houses in history, and, if Duggan was right, even with that missed ferry, he'd got here just in time. With luck, he'd even have caught them red-handed.

The door swung open. The container was empty. Apart, that was, from an empty champagne bottle sat on the floor. Resting against it was a note, also, no doubt, completely lacking in fingerprints. The note read: 'Sorry to have missed you.'

At the lazy end of time there was a box. People have variously described this box as small and blue or vast and white, depending on how they looked at it. An estate agent once described it as deceptively spacious before bursting into tears. A mechanic in the spacedock of Centrum IV once had a look at the engines and was still scratching his head and sucking air through his jaws several years later. A scientist had called it impossible. A philosopher had called it annoying. Genghis Khan had thrown an army at it with little success. His grandson had won it at backgammon. It had flown through black holes, it had crashed into bus stops, but right now, it was idling.

Inside the box was a complicated hexagonal mushroom where computing and thought met in a series of wonky switches and some big, red, juicy buttons. A hand emerged from underneath the mushroom holding a spanner. Flinging it carelessly to one side, the hand hastily edged its way past some dials (all either at 'Zero' or 'Danger!'), flirted with some switches and then settled on the juiciest and reddest

of the buttons. The hand formed itself into a fist and thumped the button heartily, as if it were part of a fairground game.

And, in many ways, it was. The Randomiser was, at heart, the most important fruit machine the universe had ever known. A single press would fling the little-blue big-white box somewhere and somewhen in the universe, completely at random and without a thought for the chaotic consequences which would inevitably follow.

For a single moment the box hung perfectly still in space and time, paused between here and now. And then, with a triumphant laugh at dimensions collapsing and rules being torn apart, the box pirouetted away.

The TARDIS was on its way.

Chapter Two
ISN’T IT NICE?

‘Nice, isn’t it?’

The overheard phrase made Harrison Mandel nod unconsciously. He’d been about to join in with the crowd of sightseers who were all outdoing each other in superlatives (especially the Americans). Really, he thought, the Eiffel Tower was just very high up.

The journey in the jolting, crowded lift had been as mildly terrifying as a Ferris wheel, one that smelt of French tobacco and diesel oil. The tower itself was thunderingly solid but also spoke volumes about the Parisian spirit of defiance. Put up in a hurry for the 1889 World Fair, it had lingered magnificently. It had survived two world wars and quite a few letter-writing campaigns. The criss-cross lattice of ironwork dominated the Paris skyline, but with an air, just an air, that at any moment it might hoist up its stumpy little legs and stomp off to bring some glamour to Bruges.

The thing about the view from the Eiffel Tower was that it gave you a perfect vista across Paris, across the orderly boulevards, the haphazard jumble of palaces and squares and even a few peeps towards the disappointing humdrumness of the suburbs that, by mutual agreement, left the tourists alone. The one thing you couldn’t see from the Eiffel Tower was the Eiffel Tower, which seemed a bit of a shame. If ever a building had been designed to be seen from a great height, it was that one. The best you could do was peer down through its legs, feel a bit giddy, and then go and buy some postcards.

Harrison stood next to a gasping tour party. The Italians were terribly excited, a Japanese couple treated the occasion to a couple of flashbulbs, and the Canadians said that, actually, they had a tower of their own that was a bit higher, but no one was interested. Harrison hung back, squinting down at Elena. He'd bumped into her at a party (now he was very rich, he always seemed to be at parties) and she'd instantly spotted how miserable he was. Elena was everything that Harrison wasn't. She was confident, glamorous and demonstrative. She'd wrapped him in a hug and said how sorry she was that he seemed so down. This surprised him. After all, he thought, I don't look that bad, do I? 'This is one of my greatest friends,' she'd announced to two bankers and an aspidistra, 'The poor darling needs cheering up.'

Paris had followed, much to Harrison's bemusement. He didn't actually think that Elena was one of his greatest friends. She'd always seemed very nice, in a hugs and scarves indoors way, but he remained unconvinced that she had actually ever given him a second thought. She was beautiful, intense and exciting. Harrison was more of a punctuation mark, and not one of the ones that invited comment.

'Come see me in Paris, darling,' she'd enthused, 'And I'll show you Life.' He hoped, he really hoped, that her offer wasn't to do with his money. Was she hoping for marriage? He'd nervously raised the subject over dinner on his first night and she'd looked, for a moment, disappointed and cross. She'd reached over the table and tapped him on the nose (she was the kind of person who tapped people on the nose, whether or not there were wine glasses in the way). 'Harrison, yes, you have an awful lot of money. But you have no excitement. *Rien*. Why should I marry to be bored?' Harrison felt both relieved and a little disappointed, but she laughed that wonderful laugh that said that everything would be all right.