



# **Gatecrashers**

**Joy Wilkinson**



## Work 116791

It was exactly like a pizza parlour in Sheffield, except that there were no doors or windows, it wasn't in Sheffield, and there was a dead, grey, alien girl lying on the tiled floor. There seemed to be no way in or out, except for the TARDIS, whose systems had picked up a six-digit code that piqued the Doctor's interest as they shot away from 17th century Lancashire. Her initial analysis suggested it was a discount takeaway offer so she'd tracked its origins in hopes of collecting a Mega Family Meal Deal.

As it turned out, the code was something else entirely.

'Teleporting!' said the Doctor, sonicking a large oven emblazoned with the brand Pizza-Porter, followed by another string of six numbers. She opened the door and peered inside. 'You put the pizza in here, set the customer's coordinates, and *Ping!* off it ports, piping hot. Brilliant! No need for mopeds, or legs, or any interaction at all. Hmm, maybe that's not so brilliant.'

'There's been an interaction here,' said Yaz, interested in the physics of deep-pan transportation, but also aware that the Doctor was trying to ease the distress of the real

discovery. Sorrow swelled in Yaz's chest as she took in the dead girl's face, young but waxen grey. The whole body was drained of colour, at odds with her bright sparkly dress – and with the bright silvery blood congealed where her head had struck the tiles. Yaz homed in on darker grey patches on her arms: bruises, in a pattern she recognised from too many domestic violence cases back home. 'Looks like there was some kind of a struggle, someone grabbed her and she fell. A robbery gone wrong?'

'Doesn't make sense. What's there to rob here?' Ryan looked around the kitchen, shook a can and sprayed globules of yellow fat into the air. Even with his appetite for fast food, this was a step too far. 'Spray cheese! No one would die defending that. And there's no money here. It's all credits, like ordering through an app.'

'Maybe it was personal?' Yaz ran with it. 'She looks like she'd finished her shift and was going on a date. Maybe they came to pick her up and one thing led to another?'

'Her name was Iz,' the Doctor was clicking on a red band around the girl's wrist, like a high-tech step-counter, revealing its data and a logo: FreedomCo. 'We need to find out who Iz was, then we'll find out what happened to her.'

'Maybe she went mad.' Graham stared at the wall. He'd traced it all the way around the room, looking for hidden exits, listening for sounds from beyond, finding nothing. 'It'd drive me mad not being able to go outside. Not even being able to see out.'

## The Target Storybook

‘There could be something out there you don’t want to see.’ Ryan shuddered.

‘Result!’ The Doctor showed them a series of six-digit numbers on Iz’s wristband. ‘Coordinates for the places she has access to. Work. Home. Mall . . . Um, that’s all.’

‘Sounds about right for most of my mates in Sheffield,’ said Yaz.

Ryan nodded. ‘Plus a trip to Ibiza once a year if you’re lucky.’

‘Yeah, but that code would get wiped,’ said Graham. ‘Limited use, one-week-only.’

The Doctor was sonicking the wristband. ‘Perfect – unlocked the Plus-One function, so you two –’ she snapped the band around Yaz’s wrist – ‘can use this to check out her home while me and Graham take a trip to the mall in the TARDIS. You’ve memorised all the coordinates, right, Graham? Only kidding. It’s all in here.’ She tapped her head with the sonic. ‘In the sonic, I mean. I’m not Derren Brown!’

She grinned and headed to the TARDIS. Graham followed and crashed into her as she stopped, turned back, suddenly serious.

‘I’m being daft because this scares me. Graham’s right, this place is dangerous. This isn’t a locked room mystery – it’s a locked world, where girls can die and no one will know or care who did it because whoever’s in charge must want it that way. They want control. So they won’t like us. *Be careful.*’

**Home 114592**

Yaz and Ryan let go of each other's hands as soon as the teleporting process was over. They were cool with grabbing each other to escape from rampaging monsters, but somehow it felt awkward holding hands without the threat of imminent death.

'You all in one piece?' Ryan checked his particles were in order, while Yaz took in the room.

It was a small, sad cell of a bedroom, without even the luxury of a barred window.

Yaz sniffed the air, frowned, and then listened to the floor, as Ryan watched her, bemused. 'Careful, Yaz, you're getting like the Doctor!'

Flattered, Yaz shared her findings. 'Listen to the floor. You can hear the hum of the freezers, and smell the pepperoni. Bet you this place is above the pizza parlour, so ...'

'Iz's home and work are in practically the same place and she doesn't even get to have the fun of a staircase. This planet really sucks.'

Ryan opened the wardrobe. It confirmed his analysis. The clothes were all the same – pizza parlour uniforms. 'She really didn't get out much. Tonight must've been a big deal, until it went wrong.' He shut the wardrobe; it was bringing him down. Making him angry. His life hadn't been much better than Iz's, until the Doctor showed up. 'We've gotta solve this, Yaz. Or what was her life for?'

Yaz looked under the single bed and found a pile of pizza napkins. She gasped. Ryan came to look as she leafed through them, reverent. Iz had drawn on them, but these were no doodles. There were alien faces, landscapes, and flowers, lots of flowers, twining around the rest of the pictures, intricately rendered in blue ink. ‘Beautiful!’

‘Wonder where she saw all that if she’d never been outdoors?’ Ryan marvelled.

‘She must’ve dreamt it.’ Yaz felt tears threatening to sting her eyes, but she didn’t want to dampen the artworks, so she placed them carefully back beneath the bed. ‘She might have been trapped, but what an imagination!’

‘Bad guys don’t like imagination, do they? Dictators lock artists up, or get rid of them. They’re dangerous. Iz could’ve been a rebel, planning a revolution?’

‘In that dress? I dunno ...’ Yaz looked around, one last time and noticed – even the wallpaper was hand-drawn. Tiny biro blue flowers, painstakingly marked onto the paint. ‘Let’s go and tell the Doctor what we know. See what she’s found out.’

### **Mall 382601**

White clouds drifted across a stunning golden sky, stretching away over rolling hills in the distance.

‘All simulated, just pretty pictures!’ The Doctor brought Graham back down to Earth, or whatever planet they were on, ending his reverie at the mall ceiling.



‘I knew that,’ he fibbed. ‘It’s very realistic though, best I’ve seen yet. And I’ve seen more than my fair share of simulated realities by now.’

The walls of the mall showed a mix of TV channels. Shoppers who weren’t staring in store windows stared at chat shows, news and adverts. On the news, Graham spotted ‘Ronan Sumners, Mayor of New Port City’. The Doctor followed his glance to a grey-haired, grey-skinned man beaming benevolently as he was interviewed. She had an innate distrust of benevolently beaming leaders, and mentally filed him away for future investigation.

‘So this is New Port? Give me the one in Wales any day!’ Graham watched the alien shoppers, going about their business in the mall – old folk dozing in the food court, toddlers rampaging through a soft play, bored teens hanging around. All grey like Iz, but otherwise eerily like the shoppers back in Sheffield, or any mall in the universe for that matter. But something – apart from the fact that it was essentially a giant prison – was troubling Graham as they made a circuit of the mall.

‘Not being funny, I love a bargain, but none of these shops sell dresses like Iz was wearing. That was proper fancy boutique get-up. And there ain’t none of that here.’

‘I never had you down as a fashion guru, Graham.’

‘Charming!’

‘But I’m liking it! Go on?’

‘Well, malls normally have levels – lifts, escalators – but this one doesn’t.’ Graham looked up at the clouds again. ‘What if there was a whole other world above that ceiling?’

‘Fashion guru and town planning genius. Come on!’ Inspired, the Doctor bounded up to a bored grey sales assistant at the counter of a clothes shop. ‘If I wanted to get a really posh frock – not saying your shop’s frocks aren’t fancy, they’re very nice, if you like frocks – but I mean even fancier, where would I go?’

The sales assistant frowned, mildly diverted. ‘The Black Zone. If you could go there. But you can’t or you wouldn’t be asking.’

‘We might be able to,’ Graham chipped in. ‘A girl we know worked in a pizza parlour and she went there.’

‘She’s lying. No one gets to go unless they’re born there or they win the lottery.’ The girl peered closer at the Doctor’s coat, intrigued. ‘What zone are you two from?’

‘No zone. All zones. To be honest, I find the concept of zones is usually unhealthy.’ The Doctor leaned in, matching her curiosity and raising it. ‘I’ll tell you how to make a coat like mine, if you tell me everything about this “lottery”.’

### **Work 116791**

Ryan paced in circles and Yaz sat on the counter, looking down at poor Iz, imagining her life trapped here, as they waited for the Doctor and Graham to come back.

‘Want to play tiddlywinks with the frozen pepperoni?’ said Ryan. ‘I guarantee you’ll beat me.’

‘Tempting, but no, thanks.’

‘Well, I can’t stay here. It’s doing my head in. Let’s go and find them.’

Yaz suspected it was a bad idea, but the inertia was getting to her too. She could feel her limbs stiffening like Iz’s must be. This place was like a living death.

‘OK, we’ll just go and look, stretch our legs, then come straight back.’ Yaz clicked through the codes on the wristband, searching for the ‘Mall’ – but she must have pressed the wrong switch, gone the wrong way, because suddenly the wristband vibrated slightly, as if she’d hit her 10,000 step target, and another code flashed up.

‘Ryan?’

He peered over her shoulder. Read the new six-digit code and the word: ‘Party.’

He looked at Yaz, eyes widening. She knew what he was thinking, and spoke first: ‘We’ll go to the mall, find the Doctor and Graham, then we can all go to this code.’

That wasn’t what Ryan was thinking. ‘What if it’s gone by then? One of those codes for a limited time only, and if we wait, we’ll miss the party.’

‘Iz went to that party,’ said Yaz, ‘or she was going to. Whatever happened to her is what led to this.’

Ryan grabbed a napkin and pen. ‘We can write down the code and leave a note for them, but we’ve got to go now. We might be too late already.’

## TARDIS

‘We should go get Ryan and Yaz.’ Graham had no clue how the TARDIS worked, but he had a very strong intuition that the code the Doctor was inputting was not the one for Iz’s work.

‘We will. Very soon. But it’s not like they’re going anywhere.’ She focused on her calculations of the last two digits. ‘And we need to get to the Black Zone, fast, before any evidence of what happened to Iz is cleaned up.’

‘Are you trying to figure out the winning lottery number so we can get access too?’

‘Sort of, but that’s not quite how it works. She said everyone’s Home code goes into the lottery draw and one is selected at random. That person is then sent another special six-digit code that entitles them and their lucky Plus-One to access the prize.’

‘A fabulous showbiz party and a whole new life in the Black Zone. I got that bit. I just tuned out at the numbers.’ Graham blushed, and moved swiftly on. ‘So, if we can’t get that special code, how are you going to get us there?’

‘That girl reckoned we were right, about the Black Zone Mall being directly above the Grey Zone Mall. So if the codes are based on the physical coordinates of each location – and it’s safe to assume they are, based on the proximity of Iz’s Home code to her Work code, which indicate she lives right on top of her Work – then it’s really not that hard to figure out what the code must be to move us up to the floor above.’

Graham took a moment to compute – a moment longer than it took the Doctor to finish inputting the code – and the TARDIS set off. Briefly.

‘You’ve taken us upstairs, right?’ Graham caught up. ‘Basement to ground floor.’

‘Ground floor to penthouse,’ she grinned, rather pleased with herself. ‘Come on.’

### **Outside 393602**

Her grin froze as they stepped out of the TARDIS into a broken cityscape. It looked like Sheffield might if it had been bombed and abandoned for a century. Empty streets. Cars smashed up, rusting. Lawns overgrown. But this city wasn’t abandoned. Some of the old buildings weren’t crumbling and the windows and doors were bricked up to make them fit-for-purpose in the new regime. Newer buildings were dotted around the landscape, custom-built with sheer blank walls. Impenetrable fortresses. There was a huge one right next to where they’d landed, the size of several aircraft hangars.

‘Ah, *that* must be the mall,’ the Doctor kicked herself. ‘We went sideways not up. That’s annoying!’

‘What’s that?’ Graham stepped forward to point out a strange building on the horizon, a hybrid of old industrial and gleaming high tech, as if Apple had refurbished a steelworks.

‘Don’t!’ The Doctor pulled him back. She pointed to the roofs of the bricked-up buildings, where inverted black

satellite dishes stood mushroom-like on their stems. ‘Force-field generators, protecting them.’

‘From what?’

‘From the teleporting system. Can’t you sense it?’

Graham tried, but got nowhere, so she tried to describe what was setting her nerves jangling. ‘It’s like when a space shuttle – or a car – just misses you by an inch, a nanometre. All around us right now, there are invisible superhighways whooshing bodies from this code to that code. Constantly moving. A skyful of Spaghetti Junctions! That’s what’s smashed up those cars and buildings. Anything without a force field could get hit at any moment. It’s a mad system, never seen anything like it before. Normally teleporting only exists in cultures that have become very advanced, but here it’s like the teleporting came first and the rest of the world has been made to adapt around it. It’s even more dangerous than I thought.’

‘So we should get back in the TARDIS?’ Graham edged towards the door.

‘We should – but you’re right. That building is interesting.’ She eyed the horizon. ‘Looks like some kind of power plant, maybe for the teleporting system.’ She was tempted to calculate a code for it, but Graham put his foot down.

‘You couldn’t get us upstairs in a mall, there’s no way you can get us over there safe, and we need to get back to the others. Anything could’ve happened to them.’

## Party 993366

The first room, where Yaz and Ryan ported in, was small. It was around the size of a large changing cubicle in one of Graham's fancy boutiques. It had a full-length mirror and coat hooks. On one of them was a crumpled pizza parlour uniform. On the floor was a cheap pair of trainers, worn down, kicked off. Iz had been here not long ago, changing from her old self, getting dressed up to party. Yaz couldn't imagine what would make her go back.

'Maybe she was gonna turn back into a pumpkin at midnight and—' Ryan broke off, noticing something unusual, for this world at least. 'Hang on – is that – a door?'

The mirror was exactly the size of a door and around its edges was a very slight gap.

Yaz's reflection grinned at Ryan's reflection as she realised he was right. Her hand reached out and pushed. The door opened into—

The second room, which was bigger, more like the corridor that leads into a cinema screen or theatre. Dark walls and plush red carpet. A roped section to one side.

'For the press, I bet.' Yaz flashed back over all the hours she'd wasted watching broadcasts live from the red carpet – or maybe not wasted now it had helped her figure this out. 'She got all glammed up, then posed for her photo here.'

'Why would they take her photo? She was just a girl from a pizza parlour.'

‘She used to be, but now she was special. She must have won a prize – for her art maybe? A talent contest? That opened doors for her. Literally. Got her this invite, and they took her photo to show the world – dreams can come true!’

‘I guess the party was down there.’ Ryan peered down the dark corridor. It was silent. Unsettling. They had definitely missed the party, but he knew that they still had to look. There could be a clue, or cleaners they could grill. They had to know the truth.

Ryan and Yaz went cautiously along the red carpet, towards a door that had no intention of hiding. It was big and grand and framed with ornate gold. They held their breaths, went in.

It was tiny, like an elevator, with barely enough room for both of them. The door closed behind them. There were no doors in front. It was totally sealed and lightless like a coffin.

Suddenly the coffin dropped.

Ryan yelled out, panicked. ‘Port us out of here! Port us out!’

‘I’m trying!’ Yaz stabbed at the wristband. No codes flashed up. ‘It’s not working!’

She grabbed his hand. They gripped each other tight, as they plummeted down.

### **Work 116791**

Pizza orders were racking up when the Doctor and Graham returned to the parlour. The Doctor scrolled through the staff protocol on the till, where customer demands flashed



red. ‘It’ll trigger an alert to HQ and someone will come out to see what’s up.’

‘That’s a good thing,’ said Graham, crouching by Iz, to take his mind off worrying. ‘They could tell us what might’ve gone on.’

‘More likely they’d clean up, stick her in the freezer and carry on,’ the Doctor mused. ‘That’s what this world is. Everyone in little boxes, minding their own business.’

‘Says the woman who lives in a box!’

‘That’s the opposite of this place. That’s about going anywhere, everywhere. Getting to know people. Helping them. This place – it’s all about keeping you in your place. Speaking of which, what’s keeping Yaz and Ryan? Surely Iz’s home can’t that big!’

Graham spotted something under the counter. The pizza napkin note, blown under when Ryan and Yaz teleported out. He retrieved it, recognised Ryan’s scrawl.

‘They’re not at her home. They’re here.’

## **TARDIS**

‘It’s not working.’ The Doctor tried the code a third time.

‘You sure you’ve got the numbers right? His handwriting’s shocking.’

‘It’s not that. The place exists, but it’s been blocked. It’s as if the teleporting doorway to that location has been locked.’ Her brow furrowed at the data the code was throwing back at her. She raced around the console. Graham’s worry rocketed.

‘Doctor, wherever Iz went to, it wasn’t any party. We can’t let Ryan and Yaz—’

‘I know. I’m trying – we can’t port there because they’ve blocked it. But if I can use all the codes we’ve already got – Iz’s and the outside and all the customers’ codes – maybe I can figure out exactly where it is and we can find another way to get there.’

‘A way that’s not the TARDIS?’

She nodded, her fingers racing across the console, so much slower than her brain. Hands were irritatingly inefficient in many ways, but they still had their uses. So did feet. Hers stopped dead as the map zeroed in on the Party coordinates and beamed out a holographic image of the location. Graham recognised its hulking mass.

‘The power plant. That’s where the party is?’

‘And the nexus of the energy given off by the superhighways. The teleporting core.’

Now Graham’s mind was racing to all kinds of dark places, while in reality he knew they were stuck. ‘How the hell are we going to get there?’

The Doctor was a step or ten ahead. ‘I believe your local term is “Shanks’s pony”!’

### **Outside 393602**

The Doctor stuffed her backpack with supplies from the pizza parlour and the TARDIS. Graham got his head around the full insanity of her plan.

‘You want us to *walk*, all the way there, through the spaghetti junction of invisible, deadly superhighways that you just told me under no circumstances to go near?’

‘Yep! Precisely. Unless—’

‘We can use a force-field generator?’ Graham asked hopefully.

‘Climbing onto these death traps to get one would be more dangerous than walking. Nah, I was going to say – unless you can get that moped working?’

Graham was so dumbfounded by her suggestion that he suddenly found himself picking the moped up from where it had been left many years ago, right by where the TARDIS stood now. It wasn’t like a moped from Sheffield, but Graham could find his way around operating most modes of transport, apart from the TARDIS. He flicked a few switches. The engine grumbled, annoyed at being stirred from its long slumber, but with a few more flicks and a couple of kicks, it was humming.

The Doctor was thrilled, even though he warned her: ‘We’re still going to get killed. Just a bit faster, that’s all.’

‘Not with this!’ She pulled something from her pocket. Graham hoped it was some kind of mini force-field generator, but it was a backscratcher. The telescopic kind that pulls out, to scratch those hard-to-reach itches. The Doctor extended it fully and taped it to the front of the bike, horizontally, like a very weedy lance with a little hand at the end.

‘That’ll give us a bit of warning if we’re about to hit something. And this’ll help too.’ She pulled a canister from her backpack. Spray-cheese.

She sprayed a blast in front of them and watched the globules settle. Most dripped to the ground like thick buttery rain, but the distant drops sizzled as they hit a highway.

‘There you go. I’ve got your back. Well, front. What I’m saying is: we’ll make it.’

‘You want me to drive this thing while you sit behind me spraying cheese?’

‘Exactly! But I’m happy to swap if you’d rather be on cheese duties?’

There was no time to argue. Graham got on the moped, revved it up and set off, weaving his way across the wasteland as the Doctor perched pillion, letting out a constant plume ahead, from can after can. The horizon was further than it seemed. Much further than the cans and the backscratcher would last – its metal fingertips were already bitten down by the sizzle of the superhighways. Graham gripped the handlebars, thought of Ryan and Yaz, and kept going.

### **The Core 300875**

Ryan and Yaz couldn’t hold hands any more. They were locked in separate boxes now, even more coffin-like, despite the cushioning beneath them and the clear lids. With every code, their lives seemed to have got more restricted, leading to this moment.

The grey man returned. He had stunned them as soon as their elevator hell-ride stopped, locked them up in their boxes in this stark white room, and taken a fluid

sample from the base of their skulls. He used a bio-tech device, half-syringe, half-insect, its proboscis rigid and sharper than any needle. Even though they were stunned, they felt the sting as it punctured. Yaz wanted to scream as it probed deep. Ryan wanted to be sick. But neither dared move a muscle as its drinking-straw tongue foraged through their brain tissue, seeking out its nectar. Just a sip to begin with. So the grey man could scan the contents and see how much they could supply. Now he had the results.

‘What exactly are you?’ He gazed at them, fascinated, impressed. They’d clearly passed his test with flying colours. ‘You both have higher levels than any Gornt. You could keep the system running for weeks. I could actually take some time off at last!’

‘Higher levels of what?’ Yaz demanded through the glass – then figured he might respond better to gentle bribery. ‘Tell us what you’re doing and we’ll tell you what we are – and where you can find more of us.’

The grey man considered, clearly tempted.

Ryan pushed, ‘Go on, I bet you’re dying to tell someone how clever you’ve been, dreaming all this up on your own. It’s all a secret, isn’t it? That’s why there’s the party, the photos, so that no one knows?’

‘And that’s why you’re alone.’ Yaz added the final shot, that really got to him.

‘Being alone is good,’ the grey man snapped. ‘I’d be alone all the time if I could. It boosts my levels.’

## The Target Storybook

‘Are you sure?’ asked Yaz, realising provocation worked best of all. ‘Because you said our levels were high and I hardly ever get a moment to myself!’

‘Impossible!’ he dismissed her, but their plan had worked and he couldn’t help opening up. ‘Sperantium is the chemical that fuels our imaginations. It peaks in our youth, the precious years when we are still physically constrained, but our minds are ranging at their widest, when the impossible seems real, as though you can break boundaries and go anywhere in your head.’ He spoke as if giving a well-rehearsed lecture – he must have imagined this moment often. ‘I found a way to harvest sperantium and use it in the world. So we can move through space as fast as you can in your imagination.’ His grey eyes lit up with wonder and pride, showing them a warmer side – a glimpse of how he might have started out, before the coldness and cruelty kicked in. ‘The fuel reserves taper off in later years, but isolation can help to restore it. That’s a happy side effect of my system. That it creates more fuel to keep it running.’

‘Your system sucks!’ Ryan punctured the happy moment. ‘You lock people up, use them as fuel and for what? Just so’s you get to play with your stupid toys?’

The grey man sighed, shook his head. ‘One would think that, with your levels, you wouldn’t have such a limited perspective. My system keeps them safe. When people could go wherever they liked, there was chaos – hate, pollution, terrorism. Our world was too big. We got lost. Now our world is smaller, simpler, safer. Only a few have to die so that the rest can live in peace. And even fewer after today, thanks to you two.’

‘Three. What about Iz?’ Ryan asked. ‘The girl you killed – from the pizza parlour?’

Finally a flicker of recognition. ‘I didn’t think she knew anyone – she didn’t bring a Plus-One, unfortunately. But I didn’t kill her. She had some kind of panic attack at the photoshoot and ported back. I thought perhaps she had an inkling of what was to come, but I don’t see how. I tried to retrieve her, but – she fell.’

‘So you just left her there to rot?’ Yaz cut in, disgusted.

‘She’s no use to me dead. The sperantium instantly dissipates. Her company would deal with the body and report back to me and then she’d be replaced and no one would care. Most people will think she’s living happily ever after in the Black Zone.’

‘What’s the Black Zone? Death?’

The look on his face answered her. ‘That’s enough questions. You’ll find out soon enough. It’s time to top up the system.’ He took out a brace of the insect syringes.

‘Wait! We haven’t told you yet – where to get more of us.’ Yaz flashed a panicked look at Ryan, seeing they were both heading straight for the Black Zone.

‘You don’t imagine I believed that you’d tell me the truth, did you?’ the grey man chuckled. ‘I can get my answers from your autopsies.’

The bugs’ spindly legs tapped, eager to feed. Yaz and Ryan kicked against their prisons, but there was no way out. The syringes plunged into the access tubes behind their skulls. They felt the sting—

Suddenly everything went black. Loud and black and then very light, as the wall fell away, revealing the Doctor and Graham, in a huge swirling cloud of smoke and dust. They'd blown the room wide open.

Ryan and Yaz were safe in their boxes, protected from the explosion, but the man was thrown back hard onto the ground, unconscious. The Doctor recognised him straightaway, even without the benevolent smile.

'Ronan Summers, Mayor of New Port City.' She pointed a finger at him. 'I just knew it!'

Graham eased out the wriggling syringes and stamped on them, just to be certain. 'Normally I'd never harm a fly.' He shuddered. 'But these are seriously grim.'

'Tools, that's all. Non-sentient.' The Doctor sonicked the locks, letting Ryan and Yaz out of their boxes with only an itchy bite mark. They filled her in on Iz, sperantium, the whole messed-up system, so that by the time Ronan came to, he blinked up to see the Doctor standing over him, filled with righteous fury.

'You want people with imaginations?' she glowered down. 'You have to set them free. Let them see things, go places, meet each other and understand how it all works so they can make it better than you managed to. That might mean risking some chaos, danger. But it's worth the risk. And it's not like your way has paid off. That blood leaking from your skull will kill you, unless you give this up and let me help.'



Ronan raised a hand to his skull and felt the sticky wetness – silver liquid leaking out where his head hit the white marble floor. He looked up at the Doctor, with disdain, and breathed one word: ‘Terrorist.’

Quick as a flash, his hand reached for his wristband – quicker than a flash, the Doctor got there with her sonic. It pulsed, as Ronan ported out. Not to his chosen destination, but to one of the codes the sonic had stored. Iz’s Home, Work, Mall, or—

‘Uh oh, that’s really bad.’ The Doctor had recognised the code. ‘I forgot that was in there.’

Graham didn’t recognise it. None of them did, so she had to reveal his destination.

‘The Pizza-Porter. Hopefully it won’t automatically switch on.’ She pulled a face, implying it probably did. A horrible image, Ronan heating up like a deep pan. *Ping!*

‘You offered to help him, which was more than he deserved,’ said Yaz.

The Doctor nodded, grateful for the reassurance.

Even so, Yaz could sort of see why Ronan would call her a ‘terrorist’. The Doctor was everything he’d built this world to insulate against – a free-thinker who wouldn’t be boxed in, and who happened to have an old stash of Nitro-9 cans in her backpack. She got busy on Ronan’s computer, pulling up his maps of the city. ‘We need to find his TV studio and send out a warning so that no one else gets hurt. Then we’re going to do some demolition!’

## Everywhere

The last blast shattered the great wall of the mall and hundreds of Gornt emerged, blinking into the open. It was safe outside now. The Doctor and gang had blown the core and the superhighways were all gone. The only danger now was the people, and they didn't look so dangerous. They looked—

‘Beautiful!’ Yaz gasped.

As the alien sunlight touched the Gornt, their skin blossomed, changing colour from grey into blue – a shimmering, intricate pattern, like a full-body tattoo of flowers.

‘Iz knew – she dreamt this!’ Ryan marvelled once more, at the girl he never knew. Maybe she'd imagined him and the others too, strangers from way across the universe who'd come here to be the friends she never had, fighting for her death to mean something. He put his arms around Yaz and Graham.

‘Her sperantium levels must have been off the scale!’ Graham smiled, moved. ‘Imagine how much more she could've done and dreamed of, given the chance.’

The Doctor nodded, watching the Gornt bloom. Now they could smash down the rest of the walls and go as far as their imaginations would take them. She had no idea what her own levels were, at her age and after all she'd seen, but it gave her hope.

She closed her eyes and imagined where they could go next.



# **Journey Out of Terror**

**Simon Guerrier**



We had left Vicki behind!

In all the time I travelled with the Doctor, this was the worst moment. Oh, our lives were constantly in danger but this was our mistake. Losing a child is a schoolteacher's nightmare. And I simply hadn't checked. I'd fled into the TARDIS, desperate to escape that awful, haunted house – and the Daleks.

I remember the desperate sense of relief, just to be back inside the ship. My head and heart pounding, I was in no state to talk to the others so I went to get us all cups of water from the TARDIS food machine. My hands shook at the controls but I composed myself, and breezed back into the main control room to hand out the water. The Doctor and Ian were busy with some contraption the Doctor was building, all wires and complex circuits.

'Where's Vicki?' I asked, glancing round. That's when the awful truth hit.

'But I thought she was with you!' the Doctor snapped at me.

'We left her in that madhouse,' said Ian, stunned.

'You have to take us back,' I told the Doctor.

Ian took my hand. ‘Barbara,’ he told me, his voice breaking, ‘the Daleks were right behind us. They must have killed her.’

The poor girl, in that dreadful place alone. What she must have felt, realising we had abandoned her. And then—  
‘No!’ said the Doctor. His face was stern, his eyes glimmering. ‘I won’t accept it!’

I wanted to believe him, I so wanted to believe. ‘Ian is right, though, isn’t he?’ I said. ‘You can’t take us back. The time mechanism of the TARDIS is broken.’

The Doctor didn’t answer but brushed us out of the way of the table top of controls. His fingers danced nimbly over the handles and levers. The round column of glass in the centre began to turn. Lights flickered, and from the depths of the ship underneath us there came a rumble like an oncoming storm.

‘Whatever you’re doing, the ship really doesn’t like it,’ Ian protested.

But I understood. ‘You can bypass the time mechanism.’

‘That really would be impossible,’ said the Doctor as he worked. ‘But did I not observe that our last destination was *not* within time and space?’

Had he? I turned to Ian, who only shook his head. ‘You said you thought the house was some kind of dream.’

‘Very much more than that,’ said the Doctor, fussing over the controls. ‘It was solid, tangible. Indeed, those creatures were even a match for the Daleks!’

‘I saw Count Dracula,’ I said. ‘And Frankenstein’s monster. Characters from stories.’

The lights around us dimmed, and the growl of the TARDIS engines became ever more strained. I held on to the control panel for support, and the Doctor put a hand on top of mine. He smiled at me so kindly. ‘Yet you still believed, didn’t you, my dear? You entertain the most extraordinary ideas in the dark corners of your mind. I mean, not just you – the whole of your species. Monsters, demons, creatures of the id. Occasionally, in times of stress, these dreams can surface and have formidable power. The remarkable thing is what happens when enough of you believe in the *same* extraordinary things!’

The room was getting dark now and eerie, the Doctor’s bony face lit only by the panel of controls. I shivered with sudden cold. ‘You mean if we share stories, we combine those forces.’

‘Exactly! You nurture it and it grows. When enough people all believe the same thing, it can achieve existence.’

In the fading light, with the thrum of the engines, it seemed almost possible. But I’d always been the more credulous one on our adventures.

‘You’re talking about a realm of make-believe,’ Ian scoffed.

‘A land of fiction,’ the Doctor nodded. ‘I have heard tell of such domains, but to actually venture into such a place ...’

‘Where the normal rules don’t apply,’ I said. ‘So we wouldn’t need the time mechanism to go there. Then how do we move through it?’

‘Cross our fingers and wish,’ said Ian, with a smile.

I scowled at him. ‘Ian, this is a chance to save Vicki!’



‘Sorry.’

‘Chesterton is right,’ said the Doctor. ‘In his own cynical way. We make ourselves receptive to these cumulative forces. I have programmed the conceptual geometry. The telepathic circuits are aligning. Now we add that wish. Concentrate, both of you, on what it is we most desire.’

He placed his hands over two discs inset into the panel before him and solemnly closed his eyes. I did the same, and wished.

Nothing happened. I glanced at Ian, who shrugged. The Doctor’s lips were moving, speaking silent words. Still nothing happened. Ian was going to say something but I shot him a glance. He raised his hands in surrender, turned and walked away. And, in the gloom, he immediately tripped over.

So much for dignity! I felt like such a fool as I lay there in the semi-darkness. But that’s why I tripped over the book.

I’d forgotten the battered old hardback, found in one of my voyages into the TARDIS interior. Now, seeing it again on the floor, I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand on end. The dust jacket showed three peculiar robots, single-eyed hemispheres with spindly arms and legs, moving through the cosmos. Above them, the garish title: *Monsters from Outer Space!*

It wasn’t the book that made my blood run cold, but the thought of when I’d last seen it. Time was difficult to judge in the TARDIS, but I’d been looking through that book perhaps that very morning, or the previous day. The memory made me utterly ashamed.

## The Target Storybook

As Barbara helped me to my feet, I showed her the book.

‘I was reading it earlier,’ I said. ‘Vicki came over and asked what I thought. I couldn’t tell her that I barely understood a word.’

‘Is it badly written?’

‘It’s the knowledge it assumes on the part of the reader. Scientific concepts well beyond our time.’

Barbara nodded. ‘But Vicki grasps them with ease. She’s a child from the future.’

‘I was ashamed of my ignorance. So I fobbed her off, shifted round so she couldn’t read over my shoulder. Made it clear I didn’t want her hovering around.’

Barbara started to tell me not to torture myself, that she’d been cross with Vicki for some minor mishap, too. I was no longer listening. Idly flicking through the pages of the book, I’d found a comic strip. And in the scratchy-looking pictures—

An awful shiver ran through me, what my mother used to say was someone walking over your grave.

‘Barbara, look – it’s us!’

There we were, on the printed page. Barbara, the Doctor and I – and Vicki, too. A story, with the four of us its heroes!

The panels showed us being discovered by a family of astronauts – mum, dad and awkward teenage daughter – who accused us of being stowaways and endangering their mission to save Earth!

That was just the first page and I wanted to read on but Barbara – the real Barbara – took the book from my hands.

‘We’re wearing the same clothes,’ she said. ‘Your polo neck, my jumper.’ What was more, Vicki looked just as we’d last seen her – a cowl-necked top like Barbara’s, and her hair in bunches. Barbara shook her head in wonder. ‘It’s exactly what I wished for.’

‘What can it mean?’ I said. ‘We’ve never met these people.’

‘Oh, I should say it’s perfectly obvious,’ mused the Doctor, his eyes open and alert. ‘These things haven’t happened *yet*.’ He lifted his hands from the control panel and came over to join us, donning his spectacles to examine the book.

‘Now this is most interesting, most interesting indeed. The likenesses here are very striking, the composition realistic. As if it’s sketched from the life.’

I found myself glancing round. ‘You mean we’re being watched.’

‘They must have one of those machines,’ said Barbara, gesturing to the huge, round computer bank by the interior doors. The Doctor’s Time and Space Visualiser was like a giant television set for viewing any moment in history. Barbara shuddered. ‘Someone watches us, then copies it down in a book.’

‘Perhaps they do,’ said the Doctor. ‘But this could be something else.’

‘You mean, we’ve arrived in your land of dreams?’ I asked. ‘We’ve become fiction ourselves?’

‘I rather think we have,’ said the Doctor with glee. ‘This is a most encouraging sign. If the scenes depicted in this book really took place, but we are yet to experience them, then it