

Chapter Four – The Executioners

In the Main Laboratory of The Bunker, the screened image showed The Dome starting to disintegrate under the chemical onslaught. The unthinkable coming true before the eyes of the horrified Elite.

Kavell found his voice, 'How could the Thals possibly have found the formula to destroy our Dome?'

And Nyder, inevitably, answered, 'Someone has betrayed us'.

'Impossible', Kavell objected, 'Only a handful of us knew the formula. No member of the Elite would have given the secret to the Thals'. And now the academician spoke:

'Nevertheless someone has, and his treachery has resulted in the total annihilation of our people'.

This was the Chairman of the Mark Three Project; the ancient cripple ensconced in his wheelchair, crammed with sensory equipment and his life-support; he had been robbed of both legs and an arm in a missile strike, along with the sight of his eyes, and now a blue lens glowed in the middle of his forehead, though old age would have blinded him by now; he was an old, old man.

'Chairman' bore unfortunate irony, but Academician Davros was not known to acknowledge it, being possessed of an old-time patriotism, that excluded a sense of humour, and utterly devoted to the future of the Kaled People and the Mark Three Travel Machine (newly re-named with the anagram 'Dalek'), which he saw very much as one and the same. The old man's will stood as an inspiration to all around him; a hundredfold stronger than steel.

It was such a terrible irony, of the million or so souls that had lived in The Dome, only a handful of ministers and maybe a few of the more prescient civil functionaries, had any idea that General Gharman, 'Head of Scientific and Military Elite' was little more than a cipher, and that it was the old cripple that gripped The Elite in his single withered hand.

Ronson let out a little sob, but the others stood in stony silence as the Thal rocket dropped from the sky, shattering The Dome at its crumbling apogee, and then the fireball burst like a bloody flower.

After what seemed an age, the Chairman rasped, 'Switch it off'.

Someone did as required, and the picture of burning wreckage vanished from the screen. Kavell continued to stare. There on the screen had been the clear evidence that for a million Kaled people, the city they lived in, their homes and their very lives had been abruptly vaporised.

His family had been in there; the callous father, the mother that had cried out her shame while dragging him to the Children's Hospital, and the siblings that called him 'Muto'. He had never loved them, for he had been shown so little himself, but their envy at his Triple First and selection for The Elite had savoured of a bitterness so very precious; now even that was gone.

And his friends; for aside from those that were merely polite, not knowing his terrible secret - the transport drivers, canteen workers, comms technicians, and museum curators – Kavell had at length found the camaraderie of his own kind, but all these too, including two people very dear to him, were gone now, and forever.

The Kaled Dome was 'the greatest wonder of the world', even in his childhood it had long been proved impregnable, and now with the addition of the Caecal bonded polycarbide it had the strength of thirty foot reinforced concrete. Now the man that had devised that formula was speaking again:

'We shall avenge the annihilation of our people with retaliation so massive, so merciless, that it will live in history'.

It was the rasping voice of total madness. The single hand flicked at a switch set into the console on top of the chair, and a door slid open.

The door slid open. One had been waiting along with it's brothers, Two and Sixteen. They entered the Main Laboratory; several were waiting; soldiers in black, scientists in white, and Father.

One detected the *wrong thing* among them, the scientist that did not belong. One wanted to kill the *wrong thing*, but that was not allowed.

Father was talking, 'Let our vengeance begin with the death of the arch traitor, the Thal spy, Ronson!'

A thing began to shout, and the three brothers rounded on it, 'No', it shouted, 'Davros!'

Father shouted 'Exterminate! Exterminate! *Exterminate!*'

One and it's brothers fired; the traitor screamed. One heard it's pain and terror, and then the traitor was dead.

Father turned and addressed the scientists and soldiers. 'The Kaled Race is ended, consumed in the fire of war, but from it's ashes shall rise a new race, the supreme creature, the ultimate conqueror of the universe; The Dalek!'

One, Two and Sixteen turned towards Father, and he continued; 'The action you take today is the beginning of a journey that will take the Daleks to their destiny of total and absolute supremacy. You have been conditioned and programmed to complete a task; you will now carry out that programme'.

One's whole being filled with pride; it replied 'We obey!'

But the *wrong thing* had been allowed to survive; eventually there would have to be changes.

The Chairman's office was a shabby room; only the safe door, fashioned in the shape of the Elite badge and set high in the wall, distinguished it from a workshop. A bench had been stacked with a battery of monitor screens and communication keyboards; from this room was the campaign to be ordered. Kravos looked up from connecting the last monitor, 'Pardon me, sir?'

Gharman had entered silently, and was sitting down, his eyes blank. 'Ronson betrayed us'.

Kravos sat bolt upright; for a while, he couldn't think of anything to say, then he decided. 'Well, I'm surprised'.

'So was I, when I saw Nyder's dossier on him', Gharman replied. 'He'd been watching Ronson for some time; that's his job of course'.

'But Ronson, of all men!'

Gharman smiled bitterly, 'You recall that Armistice Movement, which your work at KYL was so effective against?'

'He was behind that?'

'Not exactly', Gharman shrugged, 'but he was in contact with all the organisers before they got started'.

Kravos shook his head, 'When did he hand the formula over to the Thals?'

Gharman spread his hands, 'About five years ago. It was the reason they decided to build the rocket in the first place. In fact, he may even have helped them design it; there were diagrams in his private files'.

‘But, how...’ Kravos faltered, ‘I mean that this place isn’t easy access, and he *never* went on leave...’

‘He had assistance’, Gharman said wearily, ‘Captain Tane’.

‘*Tane?*’

‘Never the ones you think, is it? Did you know they were both, ah – *light blue?*’

Kravos gulped, ‘Well, Ronson maybe, but Tane was Fundamentalist Orthodox!’

‘With a terrible secret’, Gharman replied, ‘And so open to blackmail. Anyway’, he inhaled heavily, ‘I’ll conduct an enquiry after all this is over. Is everything ready here?’

‘Yes, sir. I’m just waiting for the word’.

‘Good, good’, Gharman stared at the assembly of screens for a while in silence, then, ‘Will this work, Kravos?’

‘It can’, Kravos turned in his chair, ‘That’s certain; I trust the computer projections and my own instinct. I’d say that we have a very high chance of victory’.

Gharman gnawed his lip, ‘I used to think “When history is written...”, but after this, who will be left alive to read it?’

‘All I know’, said Kravos, ‘Is that I’ve just watched it happen; my father and mother, my sister nursing in the hospital, both my brothers – their unit was in barracks, they’d have thought themselves safe’. He looked very steadily at Gharman, ‘It’s for them that we do this; posterity no longer matters’.

Gharman’s face clouded, ‘The war killed all my family years ago’. He shook his head, ‘We’ve had enough of killing’.

Kravos weighed his words, ‘I don’t think you’ve ever been thought of as a glory-seeker, sir; if your work on the Mark Three Project is at a critical stage....’

‘Yes’, Gharman nodded slowly, ‘Of course. Thank you, Kravos’.

At the far end of the ancillary depot, armourers in black uniforms awaited One, Two and Sixteen. The first armourer picked up a hexagonal black bomb. ‘Take this’.

One extended it’s arm and pressed it’s hemispherical hand against the bomb, and sucked.

‘Don’t interfere with the mechanism’, said the armourer. ‘Set it, get fifty metres away and into cover; detonate then and only then’.

One said, ‘It is understood’.

‘Good. Proceed to the lift’.

One waited in the lift while Two and Sixteen were also issued with bombs and expressed their understanding.

At the bottom they were united with their seventeen fellows, waiting in the darkness before Bay Six; their task was to exterminate the enemy; the twenty of them were to kill one million Thals: it worked out at fifty thousand each.

Kavell sat at his desk in the Main Laboratory giving every appearance of diligent work on high frequency pulse code; Ronson's judicial murder had shaken the whole Scientific Corps, but only Kavell had had the wit to assay the contents of his desk before Security got to it.

He considered the military to be a blunt lot, lacking finesse, and was equally aware that some academics could be woefully lacking in worldly understanding; Kavell considered himself rather better placed than most to see what was going on, but Ronson's journal was giving him serious pause for thought.

It didn't look like a journal - that was the joy of it; what looked like a protocol cassette was actually a data file and, while it was very sensibly encrypted, Kavell's triple first in Communication Science had included a semester of cryptography, and he'd excelled at it.

Anxious not to draw attention to himself, he had remained long after work period had ended, and was now alone in the laboratory, save for Gharman, working in equal silence at the far corner.

He glanced up as the door opened, but rapidly lowered his eyes back to his work; it was the Chairman, heading (thankfully) for Gharman's desk, and holding out a piece of paper. He spoke.

'That outlines the chromosomal variations to be introduced into the embryo Daleks. To be implemented at once, Gharman.'

Gharman took the sheet, and read, 'Davros, this will create enormous mental defects'.

'Not defects', snapped the Chairman, 'Improvements.'

Gharman sounded bewildered and tired, 'You mean creatures without conscience, no sense of right or wrong, no pity; without feeling or emotion'

'Correct', came the reply, 'Now see that my orders are carried out – without further question, Gharman'.

Gharman made no further question; he simply clicked his heels and marched away, but someone else was entering the laboratory: Nyder.

'The Daleks are in position; they only await your orders'.

The Chairman's voice was smugly triumphant, 'I see no reason to delay any longer'. He pressed a single switch.

From the front of the group, One ordered 'Advance'. The twenty glided forward into the mine. There was no light, but each bomb was fitted with a lamp.

It was a secret journey, none but the twenty themselves saw their progress through the miles of echoing galleries. Each of them knew exactly the route of their journey, and they glided on and on for silent hours. Occasionally, strange creatures got out of their way, but the only things of interest that One saw were the bodies of two Kaled soldiers; they had been shot.

When they reached the bulkhead, the twenty were delayed while Fourteen used a special tool to open the lock, then they glided into the foundations of the Enemy Dome.

Here the fifteen that were carrying bombs had to deploy them, and this took a long time because each charge had to be placed exactly according to Father's plan, and the infrastructure extended over a wide radius. When all the bombs were set, the twenty regrouped.

Two said, 'Squad Jast will take over the atmosphere plant and introduce bacteria into the air supply'.

Six said, 'Squad Caan will go to the reservoir and poison the water'.

Eleven said, 'Squad Sec will enter Surveillance Control, and relay all fixed cameras to the Bunker'.

One said, 'Squad Thay will destroy the internal communications system'.

Eleven said, 'I will give the order to detonate'.

One said, 'That is incorrect'.

Eleven said, 'I command Squad Sec; we will have the best position in Surveillance Control'.

One said, 'I command Squad Thay. We will be in the Communications Tower. I will give the order'.

Two said, 'That is correct'.

And all the others, except One and Eleven echoed 'That is correct'.

And each squad went to a separate lift to begin their work.

Led by One, Squad Thay took the lift to Level Six, where they had to get to a special junction box in order to isolate the security system to the Communications Tower. Father had explained that this was the most dangerous part of the mission, because if they were seen by the Enemy on an open corridor, the alarm might be sounded.

As they were nearing the box, a group of six Enemy came lurching towards them in a very uncoordinated way; but the squad shot them all down, so that they could get on with their work. Five had been equipped with a special tool for cutting and welding.

Then they went in the lift to the control room at the top of the Communications Tower, and when the door opened they saw Enemies inside and killed them all.

One took charge of the main console. On it there were glass containers of thin, pale yellow liquid that the Enemy had been ingesting.

One used the console to monitor the work of the other squads. When Squad Caan had discharged their cylinders of poison into the reservoir, they descended and deployed in hidden vantage points, and when Squad Sec had relayed the cameras, they did likewise. Squad Jast took the longest time, as they had to heat the volatiliser to facilitate the proper breeding rate of their cylinders of bacteria within the ventilation system.

In the meantime, One's subordinates worked hard to re-patch the domes intercom systems through another channel to a blockhouse near the rear trenches. They patched in special lines of code so that only the brothers could use the domes intercoms, and the Enemy could not.

As Squad Jast were deploying, One saw on a screen that the Enemy were having a victory parade. One was very angry. Father had told them all how cowardly, lazy and stupid the Enemy were, but One had not realised that they could be so proud. They did not deserve to be proud. One knew what they deserved.

Their leader was talking to them all; One heard it say 'A thousand years of war, and now it's over. Let us show that while we are ruthless in war, we are magnanimous in victory; all political prisoners are to be released, charges against them dropped'.

And with very great relish, One said, 'Detonate'.

In the Main Laboratory, Kavell stood among his fellows, as the Chairman described his Golden Vision of the Future:

'The beginning; only the beginning. From this moment, all other research must cease. Absolute priority is to be given to the building of my Dalek force. Absolutely nothing must delay this glorious project.'

Ronson had foreseen this; the Daleks would destroy the Thals, then assume total predominance. Far from being the saviours of the Kaled People, the Daleks were the most dangerous threat of all.

Such a cruel irony; Kavell was affected not only by the dead man's insights, but his prose style as well, and the sheer ingenuity of his codes, but in life, he had known him hardly at all. Deeply afraid that his perversion might be discovered and used against him, Ronson had not been a man to make friends.

He had known that he would be killed, writing, 'My crime is too heinous to bear. I alone am culpable in Ana's murder, and soon they will finish me'.

He had screamed at the end, as at the truths still untold. At least he had not gone quietly to eternal night.

The first explosion destroyed the foundations of the fuel oil store, while firing a shaped charge into the heart of the central tank and igniting it. The resulting fireball ignited all nearby buildings and caused rivers of burning oil to flood all adjacent streets.

Now the executioners began their work, and the Enemy had made it easy for them. The brothers fired salvo after salvo into the parade, which began to panic and run, but there was no escape.

The second explosion undermined and then set fire to the recycling depot, causing thick black smoke, this triggered the sprinkler system, showering the Enemy with poisoned water.

One ordered, 'Commence re-routing of communication system'.

Seven said, 'I obey'.

The third explosion destroyed the main power station, which supplied electricity to all parts of the dome. This meant that the only lighting would be supplied by emergency circuits; these were to be disabled last as the brothers needed light to work by.

One said, 'Complete re-routing'.

Fifteen said, 'Completed'.

'Destroy the controls here'.

They fired into the control banks, destroying the communications system for the whole dome. Then they used their own power to take the lift to ground level.

The Enemy were dying, some from the bacteria in the air, some from the poisoned water, some burning to death, and relatively few at the guns of the brothers. One addressed the rest of the squad, 'You will remain here to destroy the enemy. I will go to the block house alone'.

'We obey', they replied.

One turned away and glided through the smoke-filled street, to the main entry port, hearing the final bomb detonate far below. By means of Father's limitless ingenuity, the Enemy Dome, far from being a sanctuary, had become a death trap.

Outside, it glided along the edge of a trench on the way to the block house.

It was a new work period, but still Ronson's journal kept Kavell from the tedium of pulse code; he looked up, nervously, at a movement, and saw Gharman beckon him over. Kavell picked up his clipboard and walked circuitously around the lab, very aware of the guards with machine guns.

'I wonder if you'd have a look at this' Gharman purred, 'I'm having a problem with the Dimensional Thought Circuit'. But as Kavell sat, he hissed, 'We must stop the Daleks, Kavell'.

Kavell tried to keep his voice calm, 'I don't want to get involved'. The one hope that had sustained him so far was that the military would eventually take charge, because even their brutish stupidity did at least try to keep their own side alive, yet here was a general begging him for help. 'You saw what happened to Ronson', panic was rising in his throat, 'Davros wouldn't hesitate to have us killed if he thought we were plotting against him'.

Gharman returned, 'Then we must make our plan so he won't suspect anything'.

'The troops will stay loyal to him'. As he said it, Kavell realised - with Nyder on his side, Davros simply didn't *need* Gharman.

'That's not important', Gharman urged, 'If the whole of the Scientific Corps act against Davros, he *can't* proceed. We can then demand that the Dalek Project is halted'. Kavell met Gharman's eye as the rhetoric continued, 'His whole concept is monstrous; it's evil and immoral'.

At last, when force, fear, bullets and guns fail you, appeal to morality. Kavell asked tonelessly, 'What do you want me to do?'

'Spread the word. Convince those that waver that it is vital the whole Dalek Project be ended'.

'I'll do what I can'. Kavell returned to his desk, spotting Nyder stalking into view in the tail of his eye. As Kavell sat down, the odious man marched past, and Kavell could not help but suspect that he had overheard.

To Kravos, there was a distinct irony in that he could calmly sit and watch the Mark Three Units going systematically about their work, ending a million lives, while he had developed quite such an extreme reaction against just working with children. It had seemed funny at first; after about ten years running the Youth League, he found that his hands tended to shake before he visited a local section.

His medic had prescribed a mixture, but the condition had persisted and worsened; the prospect of meeting children sometimes led to uncontrollable trembling and periods of terrified hysteria, baffling the medic, who swore he'd never seen anything like it, and after four increasingly miserable years of this, Kravos had resigned on grounds of ill health.

It was only when he'd been medically checked to join the Elite, that the MO suggested shell-shock – and that made no sense; by that time Kravos had not fired a shot in anger for fifteen years.

His eyes still fixed to the battery of screens and keyboards, Kravos heard the door hiss open and the soft whirr as the Chairman returned once more, to ask 'What progress?' in a tone of proud and fascinated parenthood.

'Still within the predicted parameters, sir', Kravos murmured. 'Since you last looked, Unit Three has been destroyed, and Unit Eight disabled, so in all that's just four lost outright, so far'.

'What happened to Unit Three?'

'I've ascribed it as accidental, sir. There may have been damage to the gyros or the traction control, but the result was that an explosion sent it rolling into a lift shaft, and then the lift fell on it'. He paused, in case of rebuke, but since none came, continued, 'A proper damage report will entail extensive excavation'.

'And Unit Eight?'

'Damage to the eyestalk, sir. It's not life-threatening, and I'm still looking at fifty percent sight, but...' he turned his head towards the Chairman, 'It sounds...'

'What?'

'It sounds, well', Kravos frowned, 'To me it sounds frightened, sir. Scared'. He flipped a switch and the voice of Unit Eight was loud and clear.

'Vision impaired; I cannot see! Vision impaired; I cannot see!' To Kravos it seemed not merely scared, but hysterical, and to his surprise, the Chairman was conciliatory.

'That is... unexpected, but together, Kravos, we shall affect a remedy', but now he became staccato, businesslike, pre-emptory – 'How many of the Thals remain alive?'

'It is impossible to be accurate at this stage, sir, but...'

'How many? Estimate!'

'Between five hundred and four hundred and fifty thousand, but many will be dying, ill or wounded'. He checked back through the continual update, 'The water treatment plant has failed, flooding all subterranean levels with black water and raw sewage; that should have drowned two hundred thousand, at least. The main ammunition magazine has exploded but, as forecast, with no very significant result, however...'

'Well?'

'The rocket silo, sir', Kravos glanced back again, 'Reevus found that the detonation of the rocket had actually caused quite specific areas of structural weakness, and after the demolition charges blew, there was a sustained series of collapse as a chain reaction – all in areas that the Daleks had vacated. It was incredible. We couldn't have expected better if we had designed the superstructure ourselves'.

'We did'.

'Of course', Kravos gulped, 'Your design of the detonation matrix and sequence was ingenious; I never cease to marvel...'

Nyder strode in, 'Kravos, I require your considered advice'.

Kravos swung round like a puppet. 'On what matter, sir?'

'How would you describe General Gharman's level of morale, Kravos?'

Looking from Nyder to the Chairman and back again, Kravos replied, 'I would prefer not to, sir'.

‘Thank you’, Nyder replied, ‘That’s what I wanted to know’.

Kavell had decamped his desk, in favour of the more private Communication Workshop on Level Three; Ronson had made careful suggestions of which colleagues might be appalled rather than inspired by the Chairman’s vision, and Kavell had been surprised at their gratitude to be able to share their fears, and desperation to act on them. One of the military had even approached *him*, asking to *help*; now that Corporal Rusk was guarding the door.

‘He’s a brave man’, Kavell commented to Parlim, his first recruit, and now enthusiastic lieutenant.

Parlim smirked, ‘I was always given to understand that soldiers were meant to be brave’.

‘I think they are told that all scientists are meant to be clever’, Kavell returned without humour. He looked at his list, ‘Have any other military followed his example?’

‘I think he’s something of a loner’, Parlim said, ‘His unit was the Twenty-Seventh Armoured. They got wiped out in the Cadomar Ambush two years ago – he was in a field hospital when it happened’. He took off his spectacles and started to polish them. ‘I don’t pretend to understand the military mind, of course’.

‘How do you know him?’

‘I don’t’, Parlim continued polishing, ‘I checked his record – just for caution – he’s of a good family’.

‘Military?’

Parlim smiled, ‘No. His grandfather’s brother was Academician of Classical History’.

Kavell felt uncomfortable. ‘Until the University closed’.

‘Sadly yes’, Parlim replaced his glasses. ‘He was among the protesters that were beaten and then humiliated in Grand Square. Ink poured over his face, then forced to sweep the subways’.

‘What a waste’, said Kavell bitterly, ‘Now what do we have for Dangerous Intellectuals?’

Parlim risked a chuckle, ‘Nyder and Tane’.

‘Tane’s dead; Nyder shot him’.

‘And that is why academicians were not allowed guns!’

‘Was the University such a waste of resources?’

‘I doubt it’, Parlim replied, ‘I was only a young man then, but I seem to recall that the surfeit of Philosophy was deemed ‘unpatriotic’, and History downright seditious. I had applied to study, but it closed before I could interview; you can imagine how annoyed I was, having to remain at Instruction Centre to get my classification’. He smiled wryly, ‘Nyder was in the penultimate University intake, but it closed before he graduated’.

‘Historian or philosopher?’

‘Neither, shall you guess?’ Parlim teased, ‘No? Nyder was an artist; imitative of the classicists, I gather. Showed some promise, apparently’.

'So he might have gone on to do something worthwhile'. Kavell shook his head, 'You know, I cannot think of any man alive now I would trust less'.

'Or hate more?' Parlim asked, 'Or is "hate" too harsh?'

From outside the door came a shout, 'Who goes there?'

'Frentan; friend!'

'Be known and pass, friend'.

And the door opened admitting Frentan, flushed and excited. 'Kavell, Parlim; I have the names of thirteen more that have declared their opposition to the Dalek Project...'

'The Mark Three', Kavell muttered.

'And six men of the Second Unit Guards have declared for us!'

Kavell jumped up, 'Do you have names for them?'

'Yes, yes', Frentan exclaimed, 'But there's more; Gharman has been approached by *Nyder!*'

Kavell felt his stomach drop through the floor.

Kravos was still in the Chairman's office; he looked up gratefully as Lieutenant Selman came in with a tray for him from the canteen. 'Good, I was starting to think this wasn't ever coming'.

'Hope it's still hot, sir', replied the young man, 'Might I know what the score is?'

Kravos scowled, 'What?'

'Sorry, sir. I was just wondering how those Dalek things are doing against the Thals'.

'We've lost another two', said Kravos. 'Unit Six was trapped in flood water, and Unit Nineteen was blown up by Thal partisans', he took a mouthful of stew, which tasted slightly better than usual, 'There's not been any co-ordinated resistance, and the firepower of those things is incredible'.

'And the armour, I understand, sir'.

'Quite formidable, yes. They had to use *Heavy Armour Piercing Hi-Ex* to stop Unit Nineteen; bullets just bounce off', Kravos reached to the nearest keyboard and switched channels, 'Unless you can get a shot straight down the stalk of the eye; that's what did for Unit Fifteen'.

'That's fancy shooting, sir'.

'Yes, and of course, it can shoot better. They're highly accurate. The Thals really are finished. The war is over, Lieutenant'.

'Perhaps the end of all wars, sir?'

'Yes, we can but hope', Kravos took another mouthful, by way of implication that he'd like to eat in peace.

'What happens next, sir?'

'Pardon?'

'What happens next? I mean, what can we do now? If we've won, and the whole world is ours, what are we going to do with it, sir?'

'He's gone to *meet* him?'

Frentan wattled. 'You heard me quite clearly, Kavell!'

'How could he be so *stupid*?' Kavell could barely contain his anger, 'Frentan, what did Nyder *tell* him?'

'He said that Davros was becoming a megalomaniac!'

Parlim beamed, 'Oh, he's realised! You see, he's such a noticing fellow'.

'Shut up!' Kavell snarled, still furious with Frentan, '*Where* are they meeting?'

'When I saw him he said he was going to the Detention Level...'

'Detention? So he'll be handy for the cells, I suppose!' Kavell ran from the room; he had to stop Gharman.

Kravos heard the door open, and spoke without looking up. 'Unit Eleven has just deactivated. Straight off the screen without any obvious cause. No damage report'.

'Who is the duty officer?'

Kravos jumped up to attention. It was Nyder, looking alarmed.

'Major Raste, sir'.

'Raste?' Nyder paused, composing himself. 'Late of the Fourteenth Infantry, yes; Raste is to be relied upon'.

'Yessir', Kravos stepped across to the desk, 'Shall I put a call...'

'Yes, at once'.

Kravos pressed a button and spoke, 'Major Raste: Duty Officer to Davros's Office at once'.

'Immediately!' Nyder snapped.

'Immediately', Kravos added, and released the button, turning back, 'Something has occurred, sir?'

'Yes'.

'May I know what?'

'Be quiet, Kravos!' Nyder snarled, 'I'm thinking, and cannot do so above your inane interruptions!' He was silent for a moment, and Kravos looked back to the screens of massacre. Suddenly - 'Kravos, can I trust you?'

Kravos jerked round, 'What?', and suddenly, Nyder was at his throat, thin fingers locked in a steely grip around his neck, the thumbs pressing down.

'If I cannot trust you, Kravos, I'll kill you now!'

The room and the twisted, mad face were blurring out of focus; Kravos tried to nod, and suddenly the pressure was released. He fell, coughing on the desk.

'You sent for me, sir?' said a voice. Raste.

Now Nyder. 'Yes, Major. I have placed General Gharman under arrest on a charge of treason. I am assuming full acting command of the Scientific and Military Elite'.

Kravos struggled upright, 'You can rely on me, sir'.

'Be quiet, Kravos', Nyder had not even turned. 'Raste, I want the Main Laboratory cleared, and an A3 Monitor Unit installed, ditto two X5 tables. Three dissidents have been arrested, and their interrogation begins at once'.

'Yessir'.

'And security around them has to be absolute; do you understand?'

'Yessir'.

'Right, Major, get on with it, and Kravos...'

'Sir?'

'Carry on'.

He marched out of the room, Raste on his heels; Kravos stood rooted to the spot, his hands shaking.

The word in the canteen was that Nyder had tricked Gharman and then arrested him; it was technically mutiny, but nothing could touch Nyder now. Returning to Level Three, Kavell passed a group of soldiers moving two inclined benches on wheels; he caught up with the officer in charge and asked, 'Lieutenant, do they mean to torture General Gharman?'

The young man looked at him curiously, 'The general's locked up, and he'll be treated properly. This is for the interrogation of dissidents, and it's hardly torture'.

'I know what it is, thank you, Lieutenant'.

'It does no damage at all', said the young man, 'The torments and agonies are all created in the mind, leaving the body intact; after all, it's the mind that's resisting'.

Kavell winced, but the lieutenant continued, 'Do you mind if I speak to you for a moment, sir?' he addressed the men, 'Keep going with that lot, I'll catch you up'.

'Very well', Kavell stopped, 'What is it, Lieutenant?'

'Lieutenant Selman, sir. I need to talk to someone about what's going on'.

‘Very well’.

Now Selman looked scared, ‘I’ve seen something of what’s happening in the Thal Dome; total extermination of the Thals’.

‘That is what we were fighting for’.

‘But how can we survive?’

‘Lieutenant...’

‘Hear me out, please. All of our women are dead; unless we take some female Thal prisoners now...’

‘We can’t do that’.

‘Because it’s illegal?’ Selman demanded, ‘Racial purity cannot matter now!’

Kavell shook his head, ‘The reality is that we cannot do anything to make it *impure* – we cannot breed with Thals – it cannot be *done*’.

‘But that means there’s no hope, Selman said desperately, ‘It means we’re finished!’.

‘Yes, we are’, Kavell replied, ‘We’re finished, and I’m busy’.

It was time for his rest period, but Kravos took the lift to the Detention Level, where he went to one of the cells; it was guarded.

‘Frake, isn’t it?’

‘That’s right, sir’.

‘Just go and do something else for five minutes, Frake’.

‘Can’t do that, sir’.

‘Yes, you can’, Kravos told him, ‘What do you imagine I’m going to do? Go away, Frake, and that is an order’.

‘*Just* for five minutes?’

‘Five minutes’.

Without another word, Frake marched off around the corner. Kravos took out his key, unlocked the door, and went inside. Gharman looked up, ‘Kravos - what? They sent *you*?’

‘Nobody sent me, sir. I just thought you might appreciate a drink’. He produced a spirit flask, and offered it. Gharman took it guardedly, unscrewed the cap, and filled it. He held it out, ‘Have one with me’. There was a thin veneer of challenge in the words.

‘Thank you, sir’, Kravos took the cap and drained it at a swallow, before returning it. Still Gharman eyed him warily, but he filled the cap once more.

‘Why am I still alive, Kravos?’

'Just luck, I think, sir', Kravos admitted, 'As far as I know, the dissidents Ronson released have returned to us, and are under interrogation now'.

'So my execution is postponed for *them*!' Gharman laughed out loud, 'I must presume this must be the Chairman's idea of a final insult!' He gulped down the spirit.

'It could take a little while, sir, I understand that one of them is proving intractable'.

'I can guess which one! I spoke to the guards that brought them in the first time. The tall one nearly gave Tane a seizure', Gharman chuckled, 'I'd have paid to see that.'

'I'm concerned about Commander Nyder, sir', Kravos said, aware of his indiscretion, 'Just after your arrest, he tried to strangle me'.

Gharman smiled wryly, 'And failed, apparently'.

'Raste came in'.

'Well, he's one of Nyder's few admirers, so his illusions are probably best left intact'.

'I understand you've never really got along with him, sir'.

'Raste? No', Gharman refilled the cap, 'He's burned too many books for my liking. He's a lout'. He knocked back the spirit. 'Why did Nyder attack you?'

'He said he didn't trust me'.

'No', Gharman smiled sardonically, 'No-one ever trusts a man he has deceived'.

'But he appointed me! If he didn't trust me, why did he do that?'

'I don't know. Maybe in his pale-blue way he finds you decorative', Gharman shrugged. 'Tell me; how many of the Thals remain?'

'Less than ten thousand, sir', Kravos stood up, stung by the slur, 'I must go; even with the interrogation, I might be missed. Enjoy the drink, sir'.

'Kravos, just one thing, the Daleks...'

'Sir, please...'

'Once those things have done their work in the Thal Dome, you must cause them to auto-destruct'.

'What?'

'Kravos, if you let the Daleks back inside this bunker, they will kill all of us'.