**Aliens of Shanghai**

“Wow!” Yasmin exclaimed as she looked at the image on the viewscreen. A huge sweeping building that seemed to have been built without any right angles melded into a high cliff face that stretched into the darkness either side. The fantastic edifice itself was lit in shimmering neon brightness that was reflected in a deep, gently rippling lake. A waterfall appeared to cascade down the middle of the building, but on second look that proved to be another lighting effect. “What planet are we on now?”

“Earth,” The Doctor answered.

“Then what century? That’s… totally space age.”

“No, it’s not,” Ryan contradicted her with excitement in his tone. “I know this place. At least… I’ve seen it on TV. It was on Impossible Engineering.”

“I always wondered about that programme,” Graham remarked. “It says impossible, but then shows us things that have been built, so they obviously ARE possible.”

“They ought to bring their cameras into the TARDIS,” Yasmin commented. “Then they’ll know ‘impossible’.”

“Or not impossible, just unlikely,” Graham added. “But back to the point…. What did you say this place was?”

“It’s the Shanghai Intercontinental Wonderland Hotel,” Ryan answered. “It’s absolutely amazing. Part of it is underwater, the actual guest rooms, the poshest ones, where everyone wants to be, have windows looking out under the lake.”

“Nice,” Yasmin remarked. “And… are we staying here, Doctor?”

“We are,” The Doctor replied. “A little treat for you all. I’m just retro-booking our rooms and printing out our receipts. Why don’t we all slip down to the Wardrobe and pack for a luxury weekend?”

They did so enthusiastically. In a very short space of time they were back in the console room with luggage.

“Er… Doc….” Graham began. “Er…. Shanghai… is in China… The last time I looked China wasn’t a good place to be. Its where the coronavirus started..”

“Don’t worry, I checked,” The Doctor assured him. “I got in trouble once before about that sort of thing, so I make sure, now. This is 2026. That’s all over, now. Even the world economies are picking up. Hold on one second. I’ve only parked up here so you could enjoy the view of the hotel. I’m going to move us into the foyer, now.”

There was only the slightest sensation of movement before the TARDIS materialised in a quiet, unobtrusive corner where anyone looking at it would think it was an eclectic art installation. The doors opened onto a bright, airy room that actually looked as if it might have had the same interior designer as the TARDIS. An ever-changing light effect in the middle of the foyer was curiously reminiscent of the central console.

The ‘Fam’ settled onto long, curved sofas that would have looked good in the TARDIS while The Doctor approached the long, polished reception desk. The wall behind the desk looked at first glance like the stratified wall of the original quarry, but on closer inspection it was made of dull metal moulded to look like a natural feature.

The booking completed, a porter came to put their cases onto a trolley and they followed him to the lifts.

Because the hotel was built into the side of a quarry, the reception was in one of the two top floors clinging to the flat ground above. That meant that the lift went down, not up.

“This lift is inside the waterfall,” Ryan explained as they slid past a glittering blue-white lighting effect. “They showed it being built on the programme.”

That was exciting, but even more exciting was the fact that the lift kept going down a long way. They had been hoping for one of the underwater rooms. Those were what made this hotel different from any other.

Nobody had ever asked if The Doctor had any money, or where it came from if she did, but clearly she had enough. She had booked not just rooms but a suite with two spacious twin bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms and a drawing room featuring another huge curved sofa. There were two shimmering walls in the room, one with a massive aquarium replete with exotic fish, the other, the window looking out onto the water of the drowned quarry. By rights, that ought to have been a dark, murky outlook, but coloured lights illuminated it in an ever-moving kaleidoscope. Yasmin cuddled a big honey coloured teddy bear who came with the sofa and watched the hypnotic show until The Doctor reminded her that they had booked in late and the restaurants were serving dinner.

The hotel had several eateries, but arguably the most exotic was the seafood restaurant on the floor above the guest suites. Here, again, was a long glass wall displaying the quarry water light show as well as aquariums creating a continual sense of movement and colour.

“All this sophistication,” Graham commented as he helped himself to portions of lobster and crab from the shared platter delivered to their table. “And they call it Mr Fisher, like an ordinary chippy back home.”

“We had a Mr Fisher for maths,” Ryan commented. “He had a face like that bullet-headed fish that keeps swimming by and looking at us like our homework is late.”

“Oh, don’t anthropomorphize the fish,” Yasmin protested. “I love seafood, and its one kind of food without too many haram rules, so I can really enjoy. But I keep feeling guilty that I’m eating the relatives of some of those swimming about in the tank.”

“I'm pretty sure those are all ornamental species,” Graham assured her. “Eat up and don’t worry. Tomorrow we can try a different restaurant.”

“Chicken in a basket next to an aviary?” Ryan suggested. The joke got the appropriate level of groans and grins.

“You know I can’t help noticing,“ Yasmin said as they headed back to their suite after dinner. “It’s called the International hotel but most of the guests are Chinese. I only saw a few Europeans. “

“According to Wikipedia, that’s about right,” Ryan answered. “This is primarily a luxury getaway for Chinese people. “

“Rich Chinese people,” Graham said scathingly. “They're meant to be communist, but their new wealthy industrialist fat cats get the cream in places like this.”

 Ryan and Yasmin were surprised by such a comment from Graham. Though loyal to his old transport union he didn’t often express political ideas much beyond a working class scepticism towards the Tory government.

“Yes,” The Doctor agreed with him. “There are some odd contradictions about modern China. Unfortunately, it’s not something I can do anything about.”

The others nodded in understanding, or at least partial understanding. There were rules about what a Time Lord could interfere with, and The Doctor’s own rules about when to ignore those rules.

Sorting out China wasn’t within her remit, either way.

Everyone thought that going to bed with the soft lights playing through water beyond the window would be a unique experience.

And it was.

But when he woke up, early the next morning, Ryan wasn’t so sure about that. A venetian blind was down over the window. It was actually programmed to do that once everyone was asleep. Ryan looked at it and thought about the thousands of tons, or litres, or however water in lakes was measured, behind that glass. He knew it was specially toughened glass, well able to withstand the pressure, but all the same the thought made him feel peculiarly claustrophobic.

He dressed quickly and quietly, not disturbing Graham who was fast asleep in the other bed. He slipped out through the drawing room and into the corridor beyond. The quiet, fast lift brought him up to the levels above the water.

There were balconies and viewing platforms at the ‘ground’ level. The guest rooms here had their own private balconies. He wondered if he would have liked one of those better than the super-deluxe-top-choice suites with the underwater feature. He laughed at himself. If they had stayed in anything less than the ‘best’ he would have been regretting what he was missing. That was human nature.

He found a public balcony and stepped outside into the early morning air. Being in a high sided quarry, the sun had not yet made an appearance, but the sky was blue in the part of it he could see.

 A snatch of a poem came to him as he looked up at the sky, something about ‘the patch of blue we prisoners call the sky’. He wondered if people working in the hotel might feel that way after a while. He thought he understood what it meant, anyway. He felt much freer on the balcony, yet still curiously restricted by the scenery, cut off from the rest of the world nearly as much as a prisoner might be in the exercise yard.

“Don’t be daft,” he told himself. “This is a luxury hotel, THE luxury hotel to beat them all.”

Yet, that stray line of poetry – he wasn’t even sure where it came from – stayed with him and he reflected that even kings and queens had felt ‘imprisoned’ in their palaces and castles from time to time.

He was almost feeling sentimental about the freedom to leave his council flats to walk in any of the municipal parks and green spaces of Sheffield. A freedom, in fact, that he often eschewed in favour of slobbing out in front of the TV.

The smell of good quality coffee being prepared by somebody other than himself brought him back from his strange philosophical journey. He walked along the terrace with the hotel on one side and the quarry lake on the other until he reached an open French door. Inside was one of the hotel restaurants, this one, an ‘all you can eat’ buffet, was set up for breakfast, with an array of fruits, breads, cereals, and cooked food sending out alluring smells.

“Are you open for business?” he asked a waiter. It was still very early and nobody else was around.

“Of course, sir,” the man answered with just the right level of obsequiousness to a guest at a high class hotel. “May I bring you a pot of coffee… or tea, English or Chinese.”

Ryan had drunk Chinese tea on a planet that had been colonised in the twenty-eighth century by humans from China. It was ok. But coffee was what he REALLY craved. He took a seat near the window but in sight of the buffet. Coffee for one, served in fine bone china, was brought to him. He drank two cups before ordering another pot and then drifting towards the food.

There were a couple of buffet restaurants in Sheffield. He and his mates had gone to them occasionally and ‘pigged out’ on the freely available food swilled down with jugs of lager.

He felt that sort of behaviour wasn’t quite right for early morning in a place like this. He chose cereals and fruit and ate slowly, then went back to choose an English style array of bacon, eggs, mushrooms, all far above the quality found in most cafés offering an ‘all day breakfast’ menu. Again, he ate slowly, knowing he had the time to enjoy a long, leisurely breakfast.

The buffet filled with other guests as he breakfasted. Over his third pot of coffee he indulged in a little ‘people-watching’, sizing up his fellow hotel guests.

It was obvious after only a short time that there was something about the crowd who sat at a long, communal table near him. There were about twenty of them. Unlike the majority of the guests who came from China, these were all European, male and female in roughly equal proportions. They all had rather pale complexions as if they didn’t get out much and they all looked like they ought to visit the hotel’s beauty parlour and get a hair makeover. They were all dressed casually in t-shirts and slacks in plain shades.

They were very quiet. Not the quiet of hungover people who didn’t want to talk and blamed the birds for tweeting too loud, but the quiet of people with nothing to say, who ate because food was necessary to the human body, but without caring very much what they were eating.

What struck Ryan as he looked at them, was how alike they all were. Despite age and gender differences, they had a kind of bland ‘sameness’ about them. Even if he knew their names, Ryan thought he would have a hard time telling them apart.

Maybe they were some kind of religious group, having a ‘retreat’. Probably American. Who could tell THEM apart!

He was still watching when a man in a sharp suit came into the buffet and addressed the group at the table.

“Will the Volans party come to the education centre,” he said.

As one, the group at the table stood. They formed a silent crocodile and filed out of the restaurant.

Ryan stood up from his table and joined the line. He couldn’t explain, even to himself, why he did it. He was just very curious about these people with their unnatural behaviour. Maybe it was hanging about with The Doctor that made him just plain nosy. If so, it was her fault, not his, if he got into any trouble.

The crocodile went along a corridor and then up one flight of steps to the next floor. Then they quietly filed into one of the conference rooms that made the hotel ideal for all sorts of executive meetings. Rows of dark mahogany desks and comfortable leather chairs were set out, each with a computer monitor but no keyboard or mouse, only a set of lightweight headphones. The Volans party sat at the desks and put on the headsets. Nobody raised any objections when Ryan did the same.

As if on cue all of the screens came on. Ryan glanced around and noticed that each screen he could see was showing a slightly different presentation, as if they were custom made for each user.

Then he paid attention to his own presentation. It seemed to be a documentary about Italy. He didn’t quite understand why he was watching such a thing in a hotel in China, or why it was necessary for these twenty other people to be doing the same thing.

“Ryan!” Yasmin called to her friend as he crossed the hotel foyer. “Hi, where have you been? Graham said you were up before him. We thought you’d join us for breakfast, at least. It’s not like you to miss a meal.”

Ryan looked at her with a peculiarly blank expression and didn’t say anything at all for a long time. When he did, Yasmin yelped in horror.

“Doctor!” she yelled. “There’s something wrong with Ryan.”

They got him back to the suite without too much trouble, except that he wouldn’t stop talking, and the subject he was talking about and how he was saying it was bewildering. He sat on the luxury sofa beside the aquarium and, prompted by The Doctor, began his odd monologue from the beginning.

“L'Italia, ufficialmente la Repubblica italiana (italiano: Repubblica è un paese europeo costituito da una penisola delimitata dalle Alpi e circondata da diverse isole. L'Italia si trova nell'Europa centro-meridionale ed è anche considerata una parte dell'Europa occidentale. repubblica parlamentare con la sua capitale a Roma, il paese condivide i confini terrestri con la Francia, la Svizzera, l'Austria, la Slovenia e i microstati enclavi di Città del Vaticano e San Marino.L'Italia ha un'enclave territoriale in Svizzera - Campione - e un'enclave marittima nelle acque tunisine - Lampedusa: l'Italia è il terzo stato più popoloso dell'Unione Europea.“

“He’s speaking in Italian!” Graham exclaimed. “We understand him, because of the TARDIS, but he’s speaking in Italian.”

“He’s talking ABOUT Italy,” Yasmin noted. “Only… not like Ryan would usually talk about Italy…If he talked about it at all.”

“Pizza, pasta and Champions League football,” Graham summed up. “But he sounds like he’s swallowed the Wikipedia page.”

“He must have,” Yasmin agreed. “Ryan… isn’t thick… but I’m pretty sure he never knew that Italy had a territorial exclave in Switzerland. I didn’t know that. I wouldn’t even use the word ‘exclave’ in a sentence, even though I think I know what it means. And he’s not ‘with us’ at all, just chunnering on about Italian exports.”

“Yes….” The Doctor scanned Ryan with her sonic screwdriver and frowned at the reading. “He’s in there, somewhere. But it’s like something is overriding his personality.”

“Can you get him back?” Yasmin asked.

“Oh, yes,” The Doctor answered. “Pretty sure… quietly confident. I think so.”

That was always how The Doctor approached things, so nobody worried. They just watched as she adjusted the sonic so that it produced a pulsing blue-green light. It had a hypnotic quality that made Yasmin and Graham turn away from it, instinctively, but Ryan’s unfocused eyes were transfixed by it.

For a while it looked as if it wasn’t going to work. Then he blinked several times and shielded his eyes with his hand. The Doctor switched the light off and spoke to him gently.

“Dove sono?” he answered. “Come sono arrivato qui?”

“Still talking Italian,” Yasmin noted.

“Yes, but he’s talking like a normal person, now,” Graham added. “Not an Italy 101 lecture.”

“Do you know who you are?” The Doctor asked Ryan.

“Sono Luca Lorenzo,” he answered. “Vengo da Milano.” Then he shook his head. “No ... no, non lo sono. Sono…” He paused and shook his head as if trying to dislodge something from it. “I’m Ryan… Ryan Sinclair. I’m not from Milan. I’m from… from…. I’m from Sheffield. How did I forget that? How can anyone forget that they come from Sheffield? What happened to me?”

“That’s what we have to find out. What do you remember before you turned Italian?”

Slowly, Ryan described his morning, from waking with that sense of claustrophobia, to his philosophising on the nature of prisoners and the sky, to his extended breakfast, and then his curiosity about the quiet group at the table.

“Being a galactic nosy parker is definitely rubbing off on you,” The Doctor agreed. “You remember nothing after the video started?”

“Nothing,” Ryan admitted. “I don’t even know how I got back here. I thought I’d been dreaming… but what about… I can’t remember now. You know how it is with dreams.”

“A video that hypnotised him?” Yasmin suggested. “Into thinking he was Italian?”

“He didn’t think he was Italian, though,” Graham pointed out. “No Italian, surely, gabbles on about the country being an archipelago of the continent of Europe and all that stuff. They’d be more likely to get all uppity about their football being better than ours and their weather and olive oil…”

“Which probably ARE better,” Yasmin confirmed. “Especially the football.”

“He was talking like somebody who was being taught from scratch about Italy,” The Doctor confirmed. “But not by somebody who really knew about what it is to be Italian. That’s a big clue. Ryan, can you remember where this classroom is?”

“Kind of,” he answered. “It was definitely on the floor above the buffet restaurant… with the same view from the window….”

“Good enough,” The Doctor decided. “Come on, Team.”

Nobody questioned the summons. The Team trailed after The Doctor from the sub lake level up to the light. They came by the same open air route to the buffet restaurant where the lunch service was in progress.

“See that lot at the long table,” Ryan pointed out. “It’s the same lot as earlier.”

“Interesting,” The Doctor said. “Who's up for light lunch and some educational material to follow?”

Graham was always up for lunch. He found the irregularity of meals the one drawback of life with The Doctor. He filled his plate from the lunch menu and hoped the strangely silent group would take their time over their meal.

The Doctor was hoping for a lengthy opportunity to observe them, too. Under the pretence of filling her plate at the salad bar she walked past the long table three times, taking subtle readings as she did so. The general chatter of other diners and soft ambient music covered the shrill noise of the sonic screwdriver in analysis mode.

“None of those people are Human,” she said when she got back to the Team.

“They LOOK human,” Yasmin pointed out. “But… I mean…. YOU look Human, Doctor… but you’re not…. And… lots of people we’ve come across on other planets LOOK human, but they’ve never even heard of Earth.”’

“This lot have,” Graham noted.

“They ARE like us, aren’t they?” Ryan asked. “I mean… they’re not… you know… lizards in skin suits or....”

Ryan trailed off awkwardly, wondering if that was a rude question, but it seemed like The Doctor had already thought of that.

“No. I checked. They’re not Zygons or Krillitanes and they’re too slender for the usual skin suit wearers I’ve come across. I expect a close look at their hair follicles or fingernails would show up something a bit different, but they’re the common pattern of humanoids across the galaxy. They could pass for natives of this planet.”

‘So…. Is it an invasion?”

“From a high class hotel in China?” Graham queried. “Seems an odd way of doing it.”

“I once came across aliens taking over people’s bodies at Gatwick airport,” The Doctor answered. “That’s what worries me. Have this lot kidnapped humans and taken their identities in some way?”

As earlier, the group were called away by an announcement.

“Volans?” The Doctor repeated with one of those puzzled creases in her brow that her friends easily recognised. “Volans…. Volans….”

“That’s what he said before…. At breakfast,” Ryan said. “Does it mean anything to you?”

“It’s a name given by Earth astronomers to a constellation in the southern sky. Its full name is Pisces Volans, because it resembled a flying fish…. at least to the imagination of the chap who named it.”

“Like Disco Volante… Mr Largo’s yacht in Thunderball,” Graham commented.

“Same Latin root, yes,’ The Doctor answered. “In this case I’m thinking it’s a clue to where this lot might be from, but that’s still only part of the picture. Come on. Let’s follow them.”

“Do you think we should be doing this in daylight?” Graham asked as they shadowed the Volans party at a safe distance. “Maybe we should come back for a snoop after dark.”

“We’re paying guests of the hotel. We can go where we like any time,” Yasmin answered. “Isn’t that right, Doctor.”

“Quite right,” The Doctor answered. “Just enjoying all the facilities.”

Again, the group filed quietly into the conference room. The Team followed and quietly found seats at the back.

“Don’t put the headset on, and close your eyes when the video starts,” Ryan warned. Yasmin and Graham took his advice. The Doctor didn’t. She adjusted the headset and sat back ready to be educated.

“Don’t worry. Nobody hypnotises me.”

It wasn’t exactly hypnotism, she noted as the presentation began. It was more like a very intensive and penetrative education programme. She remembered what they called a ‘brain burst’ technique at the Gallifreyan equivalent of a ‘prep school’ before the Prydonian Academy. Hundreds of hours of dry, dull information was sent direct to the brain in seconds. “Burst’ was the word for it. There were eye-wateringly painful seconds before slow realisation that the information received would NEVER leave the brain even if it was filled with a lifetime of memories and experience.

This wasn’t quite as intense, since it was being disseminated through eyes and ears rather than direct brain connection, but it was still quite powerful. She noticed that it was something of an upgrade on the ‘lesson’ Ryan had received this morning. It was attempting to explain more subtle aspects of how to be a citizen of an Earth society – in this case, French - explaining about street café culture, French ideas about religion, sport, their opinion of other countries in Europe – especially Britain, the French ‘attitude’, in short.

It still fell short of explaining what it is to be a citizen of a place like Paris, but it might be enough for somebody to get by without raising any suspicions while learning to integrate into the society. It was the sort of thing she might have found useful when she first visited Earth as a very young Time Lord, a VERY long time ago, and made many social mistakes that singled him out as a stranger.

The presentation took about an hour. When it was over, the Volans group quietly filed out of the room. Team TARDIS stayed in their seats. The man in the sharp suit who seemed to be in charge looked at them and his expression turned to alarm as he realised they were not part of his group.

“We need a word with you, sunshine,” Graham said to him. “Do us all a favour and don’t do anything stupid.”

Unfortunately, he did something stupid. He ran. Yasmin and Ryan were first to fully react, chasing after him at once. Graham and The Doctor followed.

The chase took them up stairs – all fifteen floors to the top of the building. Graham, though fitter thsn he used to be, was flagging by the time he had run up four of them.

“Graham, take the lift,” The Doctor called down to him. “You might be able to head him off.”

Graham knew The Doctor had told him that so he wouldn’t have to admit he couldn’t run all the way. As she carried on up the stairs he found the lift and summoned it. It was on the lobby floor and took what seemed an eternity to arrive. But that was just the universal ‘sod’s law’ of lifts. They were always as far away as possible and seemed to stop at every floor.

Graham emerged at last onto the sunlit rooftop garden too late to do anything like ‘heading him off’. The chase was over, but the drama wasn’t. The instructor, for want of a better title, was hanging over the edge of the glass walkway that ran part of the way around the quarry for the edification of guests without vertigo. Ryan and Yasmin were each holding one of his arms while The Doctor was hauling him back up.

“Come on,” she said to him as he was set down on relatively solid ground away from the edge. “Let’s all have a drink. We deserve it.”

There was an open air bar on the roof. The view over the lake-filled quarry and the surrounding countryside was spectacular. The bar was quiet just now because the noonday sun was just a bit too hot for anything more than the proverbial mad dogs and Englishmen. They sat under a shade and the waiter brought a jug of iced lime cordial.

“Just the thing after a lot of running about,” The Doctor proclaimed. “To say nothing of unprepared abseiling. Why did you run?”

“You’re… you’re from the Shaddow Proclamation,” the Instructor stammered.

“No. We’re not,” The Doctor told him. “I’ve got their phone number, and if I don’t like what’s going on, I’ll be reporting you to them. But you’ve got one chance to explain yourself and your operation.”

 “Our planet was destroyed,” the Instructor began. “The survivors have travelled far, looking for a suitable planet to make our home….”

“Destroyed, how?” Graham asked. “Was it a war, or… what?”

“Tectonic instability,” the Instructor answered.

“Try again,’ The Doctor said coldly. “If it was as simple as that you wouldn’t be scared of the Shaddow Proclamation. You could have gone to them for help relocating. Why did they turn you down?”

“They…. said we were homeless through our own fault. The… tectonic instability… was caused by dangerous deep exploration by our scientists… trying to tap the core of the planet as an energy source.”

The Doctor sighed.

“How many planets have I seen… how many really clever, advanced societies, who come up with THAT one. It NEVER works. So… how did you lot escape?”

“We were all working on the planet’s moon…. When the cataclysm occurred, we were able to get into our space ships. They were not really intended for travel beyond our solar system, but our technicians managed to convert the warp shunt technology to allow us to cross the great distances of the galaxy.”

The Doctor nodded as if that made a kind of sense.

“So, you’ve come to Earth…. And set up a programme to educate your people… to teach them to behave like humans… sort of.”

“A few at a time. Spread out in different parts of your world…. Especially those parts where the population was reduced by a disease in recent years.”

“What….” All the humans looked at him in sudden alarm. “Wait a minute….”

“Your lot didn’t cause the virus to kill off humans and make room for yourselves?” Graham asked.

The Instructor looked shocked and affronted by the very idea.

“We are a peaceful people,” he said. “We would never…. No. The idea… is unthinkable.”

“He’s telling the truth,” The Doctor assured them. “Coronavirus was a purely Earth problem. But… you realise the pandemic, as bad as it was, didn’t reduce the population THAT much. Earth is still close to dangerous overpopulation. How many of you are there?”

“Twenty thousand,” The Instructor answered. “Most of them in cloaked ships on the dark side of your moon. We have not yet been able to integrate more than a thousand.”

“That’s all?” Ryan asked. “That’s less than the people who died of the virus. Way less.”

“I know,” The Doctor agreed. “But even so… there are procedures. We did it with the Zygons. But they negotiated with the world governments. This lot are just sneaking in.”

None of her newest friends knew anything about the Zygons, of course. They had no idea what she was talking about.

Besides, the world governments only co-operated because the Zygons would have been quite capable of taking the planet by force otherwise. This lot had no such bargaining chip. The world governments would probably say the same as the Shaddow Proclamation.

“Look… if he’s telling us the truth.…” Yasmin began. “You ARE telling us the truth, aren’t you?”

She looked at the Instructor with the full force of her police training. That didn’t actually include mind reading, but she always thought she had a good sense of body language and facial ‘tells’. She was sure he was genuine.

“If my gran hadn’t been able to emigrate to England, she might not have survived the fighting on the border. You all saw that when we were there. I know immigration is a huge issue everywhere. I understand. But….”

“Yas….” The Doctor began.

“No, Doc,” Graham told her. “This is one time when it’s not up to you. You’re a… best mate… to the human race, to Earth, but you’re not one of us. You don’t get a vote. We’re the humans here. I vote yes. Yas, Ryan… what do you think? Should we let them keep coming?”

The Doctor began to speak again, then changed her mind. She remembered how she had tried this with a small group of humans and the Silurians, and it had ALMOST worked. Maybe this time….

“I say, yes,” Yasmin said at once.

“When I got mixed up in your session and started talking Italian….” Ryan said cautiously. “It was just a mistake… Because I shouldn’t have been there and my brain wasn’t ready… that sort of thing?”

The Instructor nodded.

“Well.. okay… no harm done. I say, yes, let them come. As long as they don’t mean to start drilling our planet’s core.”

“We were not miners,” the Instructor assured them. “Most of them are students… From our university campus on the second moon. I was a tutor. That’s why I was able to design the education programme.”

“It’s not a very good education programme,” Ryan commented. “But as long as you’re not planning to do any damage to OUR planet….”

The Instructor repeated his promise that their intentions were purely peaceful.

“I WILL be checking up,” The Doctor said. “In case you ARE lying to us. If your people are trying to cause any trouble, I also have connections with the Judoon. Not always the best connections, but you know they will be able to single out each and every one of your people wherever they are… if it became necessary. So, make sure you all pay your taxes and stay within the law. Don’t draw any attention to yourselves. Don’t make me have to make that call.”

“That was always the intention,” the Instructor assured her.

“All right, then. Sorted. Fab. No problem.”

“As simple as that?” Graham queried.

“As far as I’m concerned, it is,” The Doctor answered. “And I don’t know anyone else who ought to have any say in the matter. Now…. I’m told this hotel has a pool and sauna, somewhere. I think it’s time we fully availed of the facilities. Come on, Team. Let’s get our togs and go swimming.”