

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



# Doctor Who: Sick Building

Paul Magrs

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## About the Book

Tiermann's World: a planet covered in wintry woods and roamed by sabre-toothed tigers and other savage beasts. The Doctor is here to warn professor Tiermann, his wife and their son that a terrible danger is on its way.

The Tiermanns live in luxury, in a fantastic, futuristic, fully-automated Dreamhome, under an impenetrable force shield. But that won't protect them from the Voracious Craw. A huge and hungry alien creature is heading remorselessly towards their home. When it arrives everything will be devoured.

Can they get away in time? With the force shield cracking up, and the Dreamhome itself deciding who should or should not leave, things are looking desperate...

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

## About the Author

Paul Magrs has published nineteen books, most of them novels. His books for teenagers include *Exchange* and *Twin Freaks*. He has written four previous *Doctor Who* novels.

*Also available in the Doctor Who series:*

STING OF THE ZYGONS  
Stephen Cole

THE LAST DODO  
Jacqueline Rayner

WOODEN HEART  
Martin Day

FOREVER AUTUMN  
Mark Morris

WETWORLD  
Mark Michalowski



# Sick Building

PAUL MAGRS



*For my brother, Mark*



She was running through the winter woods because death was at her heels.

‘It’s on its way. It’s coming!’

That was what she heard.

There were rumours on the air. Mutterings and whisperings in the woods. Danger approaching. Something bad. Creatures were abandoning the forest. Creatures she would usually make her prey. So her daily forages for food had sent her farther and farther afield. And even there, the story was the same. Where was everyone going? What was all the panic about?

‘Get away,’ they told her. Even creatures that should have been terrified of her. ‘Get away from here, if you’ve got any sense. Get back to your den. Get back to your family. But even there you won’t escape. There is no escape. Not from what’s coming.’

She hadn’t understood. What were they screeching about? What had caused this wave of terror in the winter woods?

She could smell it herself, though she could make no sense of it. The air reeked of danger. She knew something bad was coming. And so she had stopped hunting and fled for home. Now she was cut, bleeding and starving. Fallen branches cracked and splintered beneath her powerful limbs as she ran. She pounded through the undergrowth, sending up flurries of snow behind her.

She was a survivor. She had to get back. She had left her home for too long. It was vulnerable. To the elements, to outside attack. To the thing that was coming for them all. Her cubs were there. She hoped they were still there. She allowed herself to think of them briefly – three, hungry as she was, calling out for her in the musky gloom of their

den. The thought made her redouble her efforts even though her muscles and sinews were cracking, almost at breaking point.

She had half-killed herself. Leaving this frozen forest that was her home, for the next valley. And what for? What had she learned there?

Nothing good.

It was the deepest part of winter. The air itself seemed stiff with ice. With each passing moment she could hear, even louder, the whispers and the hints that danger – and more than danger, certain death – was on its way. But she couldn't abandon her den. Her children were too young. If she tried to move them now, they would all surely die.

She had to be strong for all of them. But she was battered, bruised and bleeding. One of her long, curved teeth was snapped and splintered. Her savage claws were ragged and torn. Even so, all she could think about was her cubs. All she cared about was making them safe, any way she could.

Death was on its way.

And she was helpless in the face of that. 'Flee,' the smaller creatures warned her. 'Take your babies and run. Soon, there will be nothing here. Nothing can withstand what is on its way. We will all perish beneath that onslaught.'

'But... what is it?' she asked them.

None of them could describe it. None of them had a name for it. Something totally foreign. Something unutterably powerful and deadly.

So she ran. She turned tail to run home. She came howling through the winter woods, crashing through the densely packed trees. Wherever everyone else was fleeing to, she would join them. No matter where it led. Did they even know where there was safety? No one did. Maybe there was nowhere safe any more. But still she ran. Still she had to try. She had to find something to feed her

children. And then they all had to leave home. They had to face the worst of the winter together.

They had to survive, and that was all there was to it.

She was almost home when something quite extraordinary happened.

She had reached a glade that she recognised. It was an open patch of frosted grass. There was a frozen stream and she was considering a pause to crack the ice and to slake her thirst. But before she could even slow down her hurtling pace, the frigid air was shattered by a loud and distressingly alien noise.

She flung down her powerful forepaws and thundered to a halt. Hackles up, she sniffed the disturbed air. Birds screeched and wheeled. Tortured, ancient engines were labouring away somewhere close. Was this it? Was this the approaching death that she had heard so much about? Had it found her already?

As the noise increased in pitch and intensity, and a solid blue shape began to materialise in the glade, the cat threw back her massive head and roared. Her savage jade eyes narrowed at the sight of the unknown object as it solidified before her, the light on its roof flashing busily.

Soon the noise died away. But there was a strange smell. Alien. And there were creatures within that blue box. She could almost taste their warmth and blood. And she remembered that she was starving.



MARTHA JONES STOOD back as the Doctor whirled around the central control console of the TARDIS. She had only been travelling with him for a short time, but she knew that when his behaviour was as frenetic as it was now, the best thing was to stand back and wait until he calmed down.

She was a slim, rather beautiful young woman with a cool, appraising stare. She wore a tight-fitting T-shirt, slim-cut jeans and boots. The outfit was a practical one, she had found, for racketing about the universe in the Doctor's time-spacecraft.

The Doctor's activities seemed to be coming to an end, as the glowing central column on the console slid to a halt. The deafening hullabaloo of the engines suddenly faded away. The Doctor picked up a handy toffee hammer and gave the panel closest to him a hefty wallop, as if for luck. Martha frowned and then smiled at this. Sometimes it seemed to her the Doctor operated more by luck than logic, yet still he seemed to get away with it. There was something irresistible about his enthusiasm and general haphazardness that just made her grin.

'Have we got there in time?' she asked him.

He whirled around now and caught her laughing at him. He raised a sharp eyebrow at her and pointed to the dancing lights of the console. 'Yes! Just in time! I think.' He

stopped. 'In time for what?' He ran his hands distractedly through his tangled dark hair.

'I don't know,' she said. 'You muttered something about saving somebody, or something. And getting there in time. Some awful kind of danger...'

'That's it!' he cried. 'I hadn't realised I'd told you so much about it already.' Now he was haring off round the console again.

'Hardly anything,' she protested. 'What kind of danger?'

His head popped up over the console and his expression was very serious, bathed in the green and satsuma orange glow of the TARDIS interior. 'The Voracious Craw,' he said, very solemnly.

'I see,' she said.

'Ooooh, they're a terrible lot,' he said, gabbling away twenty to the dozen. 'Each one is the size of a vast spaceship. They just go sailing about with their mouths hanging open, devouring things. Devouring everything they come across. They look just like, I dunno, gigantic inflated tapeworms or something. Only much worse. If your planet attracts a Voracious Craw into your orbit... well. I don't hold out much hope. No sirree. They just go... GLLOOMMPP! And that's the end of you. That's the end of everything. They're just so... voracious, you see.'

Martha gulped. 'My planet? They're heading for Earth?'

'What?' His eyes boggled at her. 'Are they?'

'You said...'

'Nononononono,' he yelled. 'I never said *your* planet. I said a planet, *any* planet. You really should stop being so... Earth-centric, Martha. I'm showing you the, whatsitcalled, cosmos here, you know.'

'Which world then?' she asked him, quite used to these rather infuriating lapses in his concentration.

A picture of a pale green, frozen world appeared on the scanner screen. 'This one,' said the Doctor, jamming his glasses onto his face. Every single facial muscle was

contorted into an almighty frown as he gazed at the implacable planet. 'We're in orbit. Around somewhere called... ah yes. Tiermann's World. Named after its only settlers. Never heard of it.'

'And this Voracious thing is headed towards it?'

The Doctor stabbed a long finger at a grey blob that Martha had taken to be a featureless land mass. 'There it is. Circling the world. Chomping its way through continents.'

'But it's huge!' she cried.

'And, according to the instruments, it's heading towards the only human settlement on that whole planet. They've got about thirty-six hours.' He whipped off his glasses, jammed them into the top pocket of his pinstriped suit and flashed her a grin. 'What do you reckon to whizzing down there and tipping them off, eh? They might not even know they're about to be gobbled up by a massive... flying tapeworm nasty space thingy.'

His hands were scurrying over the controls again, before she could even reply. The vworping brouhaha of the ship's engines drowned out any thoughts she might have aired at this point. Instead Martha peered at what she could see on the screen of the Voracious Craw, and imagined what it would look like from down on the surface. What it would be like to gaze up into the mouth of a creature that could eat whole worlds...

She was jerked out of her reverie by the Doctor tapping her briskly on her shoulder. 'C'mon. We've got vital stuff to do, you know. People to warn. Lives to save.' He paused and stared at the console for a moment. Martha wasn't sure if she was imagining it, but the constant burbling noise of the myriad instruments sounded somewhat different. 'Hmmm,' said the Doctor. 'She doesn't sound very happy. Too close to the Voracious Craw. It doesn't do to get too close to one of those. They can have some very strange and debilitating effects.'

‘Oh, great,’ said Martha.

‘We’d best get on,’ the Doctor said. ‘The TARDIS will be OK. I hope.’ He patted the controls consolingly, and then hurried out.

Martha followed him down the gantry to the white wooden doors of the TARDIS. She was bracing herself for what they were about to face out there, but at the same time she was exhilarated. Wherever they wound up, it was never, ever dull. Literally anything could happen, once they stepped through those narrow doors and into a new time and place.

The Doctor was striding ahead and she knew that his eagerness was not just about saving the human settlers. He was also quite keen on seeing this Voracious Craw about its terrible work. ‘They’re quite rare, these days, you know, our Voracious pals,’ he said, grasping the door handle. ‘Even I haven’t seen an awful lot of the nasty things. Not properly close up, anyway.’ He grinned jauntily and stepped outside onto the frozen grass of the glade. ‘Ah,’ he said.

Martha stepped past him. ‘What is it?’

He nodded at the bulky form of the female sabre-toothed tiger before them. She was ready to spring. Her low-throated growl made the very air tremble. She was baring her fangs and one of them, Martha noticed absurdly, was broken. Her glittering green eyes pinned the time travellers to the spot and there was no malice nor enmity there. Just hunger.

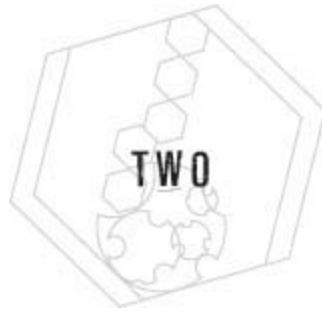
‘Whoops,’ said the Doctor. ‘Should’ve had at least a glance at the scanner before we stepped out. That was you,’ he glanced at Martha. ‘Distracting me with all your chat.’

She shushed him. He’d make the creature pounce, she just knew it. ‘Do something!’

‘Um,’ he said. ‘Right.’ Then he stepped forward boldly. ‘Good morning. I do hope we’re not disturbing you, calling in unexpectedly like this...’

The sabre-tooth threw back her head and gave out the most blood-chilling cry that Martha had ever heard. There was real pain and desperation in that sound. It was savage and yet eloquent. And Martha knew, suddenly, that they were both going to die.





THEY WERE RESCUED by the blundering arrival of a young human male.

He was wearing heavy plastic coveralls against the weather, and he was loaded down with bagfuls of sophisticated camera equipment. He was so preoccupied with checking the display on one of these devices that he wandered straight into the space between the Doctor and Martha and the beast that was about to spring at them.

The teenager's head jerked up at the sound of the Doctor's voice. 'Get back!' he yelled, as the sabre-tooth pounced. Martha found herself darting forward and grabbing the boy by his fur-lined hood and wrenching him to one side, where they both landed, full length in the frosty grass. She whipped her head around to see what was happening to the Doctor. He had flung himself straight at the tiger and then darted off in the other direction, giving several whooping cries in order to distract it.

Martha knew there was no time to waste. She was back on her feet and helping up the teenage boy. He was dazed and staring at her in shock. He was clutching his knapsack and, from the way it had crunched underneath them, most of his equipment was useless now. His face was pale and somehow arresting. Martha followed his gaze and saw that the Doctor and the sabre-tooth had gone very still again.

Near-silence had fallen in the glade. What had happened? For one heart-stopping second she had seen her friend fall under the vast, savage bulk of the forest creature. But now, seconds later, here he was, standing and staring earnestly into the tiger's eyes. The tiger was passive and mesmerised. The Doctor was speaking in a very low, persuasive voice.

He heard Martha step forward. 'Don't come any closer,' he warned her gently. 'She's calm, but anything could break her mood. She's hurt and frightened. Stay over there, Martha. We're just having a little chat...'

Martha and the boy exchanged a mute glance. So he could talk to the animals now, could he?

'See to your children,' the Doctor was saying. 'Do your best to get them to safety. You don't need to harm us. Look after yourself. Hurry. There isn't much time.'

The flanks of the great beast were heaving with fury and anguish. But, as the Doctor spoke to her, she was calming. She growled, low in her throat and it was almost a purr.

'Go now,' the Doctor told her. 'We must all use the time wisely.'

The great cat turned on her heel and padded towards the trees once more. She spared them one more glance and Martha felt herself stiffen with fear. If that thing had decided it was going to kill them, they wouldn't have stood a chance. She held her breath until the cat had been swallowed up by the trees, and the crackling and snapping of frozen undergrowth had faded away.

The Doctor turned to his companions with a colossal 'Whewwww! Blimey!!' of relief. 'I'm glad that worked out. Could've been a bit messy otherwise.'

'It was a sabre-toothed tiger!' Martha gasped. 'On an alien planet?'

The Doctor gave a carefree shrug. 'They crop up everywhere. Maybe it's a world of prehistoric beasts. Dunno.' He fixed the teenage boy with a sharp stare. 'And

you are?’ Before the boy could reply, the Doctor shouted at him: ‘You could have been killed, bursting in like that! Couldn’t you see the danger? It was about twelve-foot long! Couldn’t you watch where you were going?’

The boy was trembling with delayed shock, Martha could see. He brushed his long black hair out of his eyes and faced up to the Doctor’s angry scrutiny. ‘I... didn’t see it. We don’t come out here much. I’m... not... used to it out... h-here.’ Suddenly he looked much younger and very, very scared. Martha judged that he couldn’t have been much more than fifteen. He was looking around the wintry glade with sheer terror and confusion. Martha was secretly pleased that she was dealing with being in this place so much better than this apparent native. Here she was on an alien world and – besides the sabre-tooth encounter – she was cool as anything.

The Doctor’s voice dropped and became kinder. ‘What’s your name, and who are you?’

‘Solin, sir—’

‘Doctor. And this is my friend, Martha. We’re here to help you.’

‘Help me?’

The Doctor nodded firmly. ‘You, your people. The human settlement here.’

‘My family,’ the boy said. ‘We are the only people here. Under the dome. In Dreamhome. There are only three of us.’

‘Three!’ the Doctor smiled. ‘Well, that should make things a bit easier.’

Solin’s face was creased with puzzlement. ‘But I don’t understand... Why would we need your help? We have everything we need in Dreamhome. Everything we will ever need. That’s what Father says.’

‘Hmm, he does, does he?’ smiled the Doctor. ‘Well, you saw what that sabre-tooth was like. She’s got wind of something. Something really, really bad is on its way.’ The