

BBC

DOCTOR WHO



BORROWED TIME

A DOCTOR WHO NOVEL

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THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE POWER



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About the Book

‘You want more time Mr Brown, of course you do. We all want more time. Let me make you an offer...’

Andrew Brown never has enough time. No time to call his sister, or to prepare for that important presentation at the bank where he works. The train’s late, the lift jams. If only he’d had just a little more time. And time is the business of Mr Symington and Mr Blenkinsop. They’ll lend him some – at a very reasonable rate of interest.

Detecting a problem, the Doctor, Amy and Rory go undercover at the bank. But they have to move fast to stop Symington and Blenkinsop before they cash in their investments.

A thrilling all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

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Borrowed Time

NAOMI A. ALDERMAN



*This book is for my brother, Eliot Alderman.
Because Doctor Who has always been the place
we share.
And for my cousin Samuel West, whose request
that I should write something for him to read
was where this book began.*

‘Compound interest is the most powerful force in the universe.’

Albert Einstein (allegedly)

‘Only in mathematics will we find truth.’

Cardinal Borusa

The view on the monitors was dark. Occasionally, a line of numbers scrolled past, faster than any human eye could have followed them. But mostly, it was dark. It was dark, in a sense, all the time. But then, 'all the time' is a relative concept. A lot can happen in a slice of time too infinitesimally small to be measured on any human scale. So, occasionally there was a burst of frenetic activity. But mainly, it was dark.

The monitors were mounted on the walls of the large, high room, facing in towards a central well, which was empty. Well, mostly it was empty. Occasionally, for an infinitely tiny period of time, it was more full than would have been possible if some very advanced trans-dimensional physics weren't being used.

If you'd stood in the middle of that empty central well for an hour, you would have been fine, on the whole. Bored, even. You would have stood there staring at the dark monitors, letting your eyes adjust to the gloom. You would have looked up at the huge glass domes still radiating a tiny amount of light, just enough to see by, and the enormous tall arched windows with their thousands of individual panes, and the curved marble walls and ceiling vaulting high above you and you'd have been impressed by the grandeur of the building but nothing more. You'd have tried to see out of the windows which are too tall for anyone of human stature to see anything from but the stars and the moons. You might have looked at those three blood-red moons for a while, appreciatively or apprehensively, depending on your temperament.

But in that hour, there would have been a single sliver of time. Let's round it up and say that it would have been one-hundredth of a second. In that sliver of time it would have seemed to you that all your senses were being hammered on at once. That, suddenly, the lights were too bright and too strangely coloured and the place was full of steaming, smelly bodies and there were angry shouting voices in a thousand languages you couldn't understand, and the monitors were alive with flickering numbers and letters and an image of a man in a tweed jacket bound hand and foot, and the thing would have been so overwhelmingly terrifying that you would have screamed out.

And found you were screaming in an empty, dark hall. You would have whirled around, sure that something terrible had just been done to you. Your heart would have been pounding, your pupils dilated, your skin prickling with terror. But the hall would still have been quiet, and empty, with only the thin grey light from the globes high above you and the blood-red moons outside the windows. There would have been nothing else to see, or touch, and no way to understand what had just happened to you.

Unless, of course, you'd been able to slow down time. And then you would have seen something else entirely.

Chapter 1

Mr Symington and Mr Blenkinsop entered Andrew Brown's life on possibly the worst morning of his career.

It hadn't been, up to that point, a particularly stellar career. Andrew Brown wasn't a high-flier, more of a low-glider. He wasn't a big shot, more of a small fry. He'd got a good degree from a good university and hadn't known quite what to do with himself after he left. The man at the careers service had dipped a digestive biscuit into his tea and pulled a flyer apparently at random from a pile next to him.

'Lexington International Bank are holding a recruitment day next week,' the careers adviser had said, failing to bite into his biscuit before it disintegrated, and then failing to catch it before it collapsed soggly onto the floor. 'Oh damn,' he said, trying to wipe up the mess.

'But I...' Andrew had said.

The careers adviser tried to scrape the biscuit up with some papers before apparently noticing that they were important and trying to scrape the biscuit off them instead. It seemed to Andrew that he'd half-forgotten him already as he said:

'Try Lexington, blue chip company, good place to work, worth a go.'

Andrew Brown wondered sometimes if his life would have been totally different if the biscuit had been a bourbon instead. They take longer to dissolve in tea.

He tested well, that was the thing. Put him in front of a problem and he'd try to solve it. Put him in front of an exam and he'd try to ace it. Put him in front of a ladder and he'd try to climb it – without necessarily looking at what that ladder was leaning against or working out whether he really wanted to be up at the top of it. He'd sat down in front of the Lexington International Bank aptitude test and tried hard to solve every question. He'd worked hard at the corporate recruitment away-days on building a raft out of tyres and troubleshooting an imaginary failing business. He got on well with most people. He was an excellent team player – this had been noted on the letter Lexington Bank had sent him offering him a job.

That had been ten years ago, though, and he was still climbing that ladder. After starting as a graduate trainee, he now worked at Lexington International Bank as a financial analyst. Mostly, this meant that he read about companies, put some numbers about them into spreadsheets, and made random guesses about whether they'd make more or less money over the next six months. He sat in front of a computer for twelve hours a day trying to impress the people higher up than him so that they'd advance him one more rung on that imaginary ladder and give him the money that he'd convinced himself made it all almost worthwhile. The thing about the Lexington International Bank ladder was that it was very long, and climbing it was very exhausting, and so Andrew Brown didn't have a lot of time to think about whether he really wanted to get to the top of it – and besides, since so many other people were climbing too, the view from the top must be worth it.

So he kept going. He worked hard. He put his heart and mind and soul into it. There was an opening for a position

half a rung higher than he already was. With a promotion, he might get two hours a week of a secretary's time. He'd go to more important meetings, with more senior people, and have the opportunity to impress them, and if he did he might be promoted again and then... well, of course eventually he'd be running the whole office. It's important to have a dream: otherwise you might notice where you really are.

Today's meeting was particularly important. The new head of the London office, Vanessa Laing-Randall would be there. She was notoriously hard to please, but if he impressed her then his career would take off. Only one serious rival stood between him and that promotion: the always aggravatingly well-prepared Sameera Jenkins. She'd been snapping at his heels all year, she always had just one more fact at her disposal, had worked just one extra hour on a project. But he had her this time, he knew it. No one could have been better prepared than Andrew Brown. That promotion was his: he could taste it.

He woke up on the morning of the important meeting feeling well rested and calm. He could hear birdsong through his window, the quiet sounds of the suburban street outside and... wait a minute. Well rested? Calm? A sudden horrifying terror gripped him.

He sat up and, almost unable to bear it, forced himself to look at the 5 a.m. alarm he'd set on his mobile phone. The phone's face was blank. Dead. Had it broken? He looked again, a terrible hollow feeling opening up in his stomach. He'd forgotten to plug the charger in. It had run out of battery. Heart pounding, breathing hard, he leapt out of bed and dashed out to look at the clock in the hall. It was 6.45 a.m. Andrew Brown swore loudly, and at length.

But it was OK, it was all right. He'd intended to get into the office very early, by 5.45 a.m. to give his presentation another run-through, to check his photocopies were all in

order. He could leave now, eat his toast on the way to the station, and be at the office with half an hour to spare before the 8.30 a.m. meeting. It'd be fine.

He dashed back into his bedroom, stubbing his toe hard on the bedside table but that didn't matter, no time to deal with that blinding pain now, and oh God was his toe bleeding? Should he put a plaster on it? No time, put on socks, pants, shave quickly, but not too quickly wouldn't want to turn up with a lacerated face. Right, OK, shaved, now put on the suit he'd laid out specially the night before and... what the hell was that?

He blinked at his suit, laid out efficiently on a chair by his bedside table which now had a spreading water patch over the trousers. It took him a full thirty-eight seconds to realise that when he'd stubbed his toe on the bedside table he'd also knocked over his glass of water, which had fallen on his trousers.

Could he wear another suit? But this was his best one, the one his sister Sara said made him look both dashing and professional. Iron, then. Where did he even keep the iron? He looked in four different cupboards and found it. He switched it on. He touched it to see if it was hot. He burned his hand. He ironed his trousers until the wet patch disappeared. His phone rang. Had the meeting started early? Were they calling to find out where he was? He answered it as he tried, one-handed, to hop into his trousers.

'Andrew, it's Sara. I know it's early but I knew you'd be awake.'

'Hi, sis, I'm...' He had half a piece of toast in his mouth. He had one leg in his trousers, and was gripping the phone between his ear and his shoulder.

'Yeah, I know, Andrew, I know, you're really busy, you're running late...'

As he tried to manoeuvre his foot into the trousers, he lost his balance, collided with the ironing board, the iron

fell off onto the carpet and the phone bounced onto the floor. He managed to pull his trousers up, pick up the iron, sustaining another small burn to his hand, do up his belt and then put the phone back to his ear in time to hear his sister say:

‘So do you have anything to say to me, Andrew?’

‘I, um...’

‘I’m waiting.’

‘I really am very late, actually. I really have to... I’m really sorry, I have to go.’

‘So you don’t want to wish me Happy Birthday or anything?’

‘I...’ Andrew looked at the place on the carpet where the hot iron had made a dark burn. He sighed. He should have remembered. He’d meant to send flowers. And a card. He’d meant to buy a present.

‘I’m sorry, sis, I’m really sorry. Happy Birthday. I’ll make it up to you, OK?’

‘Yeah, yeah, sure. And I’ll tell your niece and nephew you’ll definitely see them before they’re 40, OK?’

He looked at his watch. It was 7.03 a.m. There was a train at 7.11 a.m. that would get him into the office a full twenty minutes before the meeting was due to start. The station was a ten-minute walk away. He ran. After five minutes, the station was in sight! There was a train at the platform! The train was early! He put on a burst of speed. But as he hurtled through the barrier, the train pulled away from the station. He checked the sign. That wasn’t the 7.11 a.m. It was the delayed 6.48 a.m. The trains were running twenty minutes late.

He called his office from the payphone at the station, and tried to make things better. He left messages but no one picked up. They wouldn’t postpone the meeting for him. When he finally got onto a packed train, his heart was pounding ceaselessly. He gripped the rail he was clinging

to as if he could make the train go faster just by mentally commanding it to.

From the station he ran all the way to the office. His best, ironed suit was sticky with sweat. He realised his shirt couldn't have dried properly when he last washed it, because the sweat was making it smell of mildew. He kept on running. When he saw that the lifts were jammed, he even ran up the stairs to the seventh floor. He arrived, sweating and panting, and smelly and with a stain on his crotch that he realised looked suspiciously like something wet had been there.

He was just in time to see Sameera Jenkins, flawless, elegant Sameera, come to the end of her presentation. To hear the round of applause from his boss, and his boss's boss and Vanessa Laing-Randall herself. It was all Andrew Brown could do not to burst into tears.

He did try to give his presentation. Even after they told him that really the meeting was over. There was no more time. He persuaded them to give him just five minutes to show what he'd done.

But he hadn't had enough time to try out his presentation on the computer in the conference room. The slides didn't work properly. Where he'd thought there'd be a chart of Fiscal Growth there was only a note saying 'Fiscal Growth chart goes here'. Where he'd hoped for a burst of rousing music to finish off his presentation, the computer used the wrong sound file and there was a long loud slow low note. It sounded like a fart. He felt tears starting in his eyes and thought nothing could possibly be worse than showing his emotions in front of all these senior people – not to mention Sameera Jenkins, smirking like a cat – so he thanked them, in a strained voice, for their time and walked back to his desk.

He sat at his desk and stared blankly at his rows of files, seeing nothing but the pitying faces of the people round that meeting room table.

And then, without his ever subsequently being able to remember how it had happened, Mr Symington and Mr Blenkinsop were in his office.

They were two middle-aged white men, dressed in neat, identical black wool suits and white shirts with a faint blue pinstripe. One of them wore a dark green tie, the other wore a dark blue tie. They had the kind of totally ordinary, clean-shaven, innocuous faces that you'd forget the moment they left the room. Andrew Brown hadn't heard them knock, or invited them in. But he forgot that as soon as they were there. They seemed like the kind of people you didn't have to invite in. They probably belonged everywhere.

'Good morning,' said the slightly shorter, thinner one with the dark green tie. 'I'm Mr Symington. This is my associate.'

'Good morning to you, Mr Andrew Brown,' said the slightly taller, stockier man with the dark blue tie, 'I'm Mr Blenkinsop.'

'Good, er, morning,' said Andrew Brown.

'Although, in fact, we hear you've had a bad morning, Mr Brown,' said Mr Symington.

'Yes indeed,' said Mr Blenkinsop. 'We're sorry to mention it, really, sorry to bring it up at all, but you know, Mr Brown, we all have a bad morning sometimes.'

'Couldn't have put it better myself, Mr Blenkinsop,' said Mr Symington. 'Bad mornings are a very common event. That's why the service we offer is so valuable.'

'Service?' Andrew couldn't help himself asking.

'We're glad you asked, Mr Brown, very glad indeed,' said Mr Symington. 'Aren't we, Mr Blenkinsop?'

'That we are, Mr Symington. Because you see, we represent a consortium, Mr Brown, that's right, a consortium of like-minded businesspeople, people with time, as you might say, on their hands. People who have

more of it than they rightly know what to do with, isn't that right, Mr Symington?'

'Certainly is, Mr Blenkinsop, it certainly is. Yes, you see our colleagues – that is to say the consortium of highly leveraged businesspeople we represent – are able to make you an offer today which is beyond your wildest dreams. That's right. Quite literally, beyond the wildest dream you have ever dreamed, even after a dinner consisting only of Brie, Camembert and Wisconsin Sharp Cheddar.'

The two men laughed in perfect unison.

Mr Symington continued: 'How would you feel if you could get an extra hour any time you liked? That's right, an extra hour to play golf, to polish up that report for your boss, to spend time with your girlfriend or indeed boyfriend – we don't want to appear prejudiced, do we, Mr Blenkinsop? – or just to sleep late? Think what that could do for you – an extra hour! Can't you just imagine it, Mr Blenkinsop?'

'Why, yes I can, Mr Symington. Just think of it. Every businessman or businesswoman knows that, sometimes, an hour before breakfast is worth three hours in the afternoon. Take today, for example. Wouldn't you happily, eagerly, give up the rest of the day just to have had two extra hours this morning? Imagine if you could manage your time like that!' Mr Blenkinsop nudged him in the ribs sharply. 'There'd be no stopping you climbing up the career ladder then, would there, Mr Brown?'

Andrew blinked at the two men. There was something a little odd about their appearance – not their clothes, which were ordinary, conservative business suits – but their very being. They were fuzzy at the edges. When he tried to focus on their faces, they became blurred. It really was a most disturbing sensation.

'Look,' he said, 'I've got so much work to do, and the day's gone horribly wrong already. Do you have something to sell me? A book on time-management, is that it?'

Mr Symington and Mr Blenkinsop smiled at each other and turned back to Andrew.

‘Better than that.’

‘Far, far better than that.’

‘Mr Brown, we can loan you time.’

‘That’s right, Mr Brown. We can lend you as much time as you need. As much time as you can handle. As much time as you could ever desire.’

‘We can lend you enough time to get all your preparation done for this morning’s meeting. The time to spend with friends and family. The time to get ahead of... what’s her name, Mr Blenkinsop?’

‘Sameera Jenkins, Mr Symington. Nasty little upstart. Unlike our friend Mr Brown.’

‘Deserves what’s coming to her, if you ask me. And Mr Brown will give it to her. He just needs a little help. Now of course, Mr Brown, that time will have to be paid back.’

‘At what we think you’ll agree,’ muttered Mr Blenkinsop, just a little too fast for Andrew to fully catch, ‘is a very reasonable rate of interest.’

‘Imagine what it could do for your career. All the time you want, Mr Brown, at the touch of a button.’

They paused. The men turned to Andrew and looked at him, as if daring him to call them liars. And suddenly, Andrew Brown felt very angry. Here he was, on the worst day of his life, and these two jokers were playing him for a fool.

‘Loan me... What on earth are you talking about? Look, how did you get in here? Who are you? You’d better show me some identification, or I’m going to call security!’

‘He doesn’t believe us, Mr Symington.’

‘They so rarely do, Mr Blenkinsop.’

‘I think a demonstration is in order, Mr Symington.’

‘Certainly is, Mr Blenkinsop.’

And from his back pocket, Mr Symington produced his demonstration. And then everything became very clear

indeed to Andrew Brown.

Chapter 2

The sunset, it seemed to Amy, had been going on for about five hundred years. She stared at it some more. Rory's arm was around her shoulders, they were snuggled up together on a picnic blanket. They were on a beach covered with white-gold sand. Tiny blue-green iridescent crabs scuttled at the water's edge. Fifty-first-century Earth had certainly cleaned up since her day – there was no litter anywhere in sight. Out at sea, a dolphin occasionally crested the surface of the ocean, leaping for the pure joy of being alive. The sunset was ochre and amber, a glorious warm light spreading across the sky and reflected ripplingly in the water. Even the scent of the place was gorgeous, all coconut and tropical flowers. It was, as far as she knew, literally the most romantic place in space and time. And she was bored.

'How long has this sunset been going on now?'

Rory flinched.

'The whole point is not to think about time, Amy. Just –' he breathed in deeply and breathed out slowly – 'relax. Drink it in.'

Amy wriggled her shoulders. Stopped staring at the sunset. Stopped watching the tiny crabs frolicking at her toes. Turned instead and stared at Rory.