

The Forgotten Riddle—Part Four

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A Serena / Saedon Story  
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Abstract: Solving the riddle could be more than the friends bargained for as they become embroiled in a major civil crisis provoked by terrorists.

“You certainly don’t waste any time introducing yourself.” Saedon was lying on the floor staring up into Serena’s eyes which were mere inches from his own. Her pupils were dilated and her breathing was fast due to the excitement of the near miss. Her blond hair hung down and tickled his face. Though she was lying on top of him, she was not a heavy burden.

Serena was momentarily stunned by the thought of what had almost happened, and she found herself looking into the intense blue-green eyes of the stranger. At this close proximity, there was a whisper of another sophisticated mind, and she was perplexed. She tentatively reached out with her thoughts, but she felt as if she was pushing against a solid wall with her telepathic touch.

The corner of Saedon’s mouth rose in a half smile. “Should I thank you for saving my life? Or blame you for nearly killing me?”

The man’s words sank in, and she suddenly became aware her awkward position. She hastily rolled to the side and stood up. “Sorry. I thought I had bypassed the booby-trap.” She looked at Saedon, trying to figure him out.

Saedon climbed to his feet. “Hmm.” He walked past her and pulled the cell door back once again. The transmat pad was scattered around the room as small bits of metal and melted plastic. The centre of the cell floor was scorched and covered with carbon. “It doesn’t look like there’s much to salvage now.”

Some deep instinct told Serena her hunch had to be right. “You are a Time Lord.” She did not understand why she could not reach him telepathically, but she knew all the same what he was.

“And so are you,” replied Saedon. He turned around and smiled casually. “How do you do. I’m Saedon.”

“Serena.”

“So, what brings you to this primitive place, so far from the safety of home?” he asked.

“Same thing as you?”

“Perhaps.” Saedon cocked his head, listening to some distant sound. “I was beginning to think no one would notice that little explosion.”

Serena listened, and she too heard the sound of people coming to investigate.

Saedon quickly moved to the exit. He turned and said, “Meet me at the entrance to the Museum of Ancient History at nine in the morning.” With that, he slipped out.

Serena slowly walked to the door and looked into the corridor. Saedon was already gone.

“Wake up, Brogan,” said Amy. She herself had only just been aroused from a light sleep—even though she was tired, she had felt too uncertain of her surroundings to sleep deeply. A young woman had appeared briefly, instructing her to get ready to leave.

The boy was sound asleep in his cot.

Amy sighed. She shook him by the arm. “Come on, it’s time to wake up.”

“It’s too early,” he mumbled, still half asleep. “Leave me ‘lone, Meg.”

She did not correct him. “Sorry, Brogan, but you have to get up. We’re going somewhere.” She shook him again.

One eye cracked open. “What? What time is it?”

“Dunno. Well after midnight. Some woman just came by and said we were leaving.”

“Where are we goin’?” asked the boy, yawning. He sat up.

Amy shrugged. “Beats me. I guess we’ll find out shortly.”

The young woman returned a few minutes later. Amy recalled seeing her briefly when they had first arrived. She looked quite young, maybe nineteen or twenty. Her face was oval and pale, her nose narrow, her lips small. Her expression was one of innocence, accentuated by silver-framed glasses which made her eyes look big, and she wore a faded purple sweater and battered jeans. Her fingers twisted a silver charm which dangled from a long chain around her neck. She introduced herself as Megan, Mark’s sister.

“Oh, how is Mark doing? Will his wrist be okay?” asked Amy. She could see the family resemblance to the young man who had been a fellow prisoner in the police van.

“I think so. It was a clean break. But he’s not happy about it. He has to wear a cast for six weeks.” She escorted them out to the large open room where the vehicles were parked.

It did not seem like it was the middle of the night, for all of the activity. Andrea, Cam, and several others were bustling around, getting ready to depart. Megan left the two friends by the side of the green van and headed back to the living quarters.

Cam came up to the back of the van, carrying a large black case.

“What’s going on?” asked Amy. “Is there going to be a raid?”

“No.” Cam grinned. “Jail break.” He slid the case into the back and went around to the front of the van.

Andrea approached. “Good. I thought you might want to come along with us.” She did not give Amy a chance to ask any questions. “Looks like everyone is ready,” she said, looking around at the others. “Let’s go!”

Everyone converged and piled into the green van and a black one that was parked next to it. Cam and another man sat in the front; Amy and Brogan climbed into the back with Andrea along with two men named Ben and Gregory. Ben was a big man with a thick neck and bulging muscles who looked like a nightclub bouncer. The thin line of an old scar ran across the back of his shaved head. Gregory was his opposite. He looked out of place in

the Underworld surroundings. He was short with a receding hairline and long, thin fingers, and he was dressed in business clothes as if he had just come home from a day at the office.

Two women and a man climbed into the black van, ready to follow. All three were dressed in scruffy clothes, ready to slip into a crowd on the streets of the Underworld, but they had a determined and focused air about them.

“Are you freeing anyone special?” Amy asked.

“Not really,” replied the leader. “It’s just a group of prisoners at Sky City’s main jail, people who were brought in yesterday for misdemeanors and petty reasons. There isn’t much justice for people from the Underworld.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you’re an Underworlder, you don’t get a trial or fair hearing. If they catch you for anything, they ship you off to do forced labor. There are installations all over where Underworlders are forced to work. It’s essentially slave labor. No benefits, no pay. After a period predetermined by the supposed crime, they are free to go.”

“Even if they didn’t do anything?” asked Brogan.

“Doesn’t make any difference. It’s how this screwed up society gets the labor for things no one wants to do.”

“That’s awful.”

They followed a winding route through the city to avoid scouts and other patrols, and after about fifteen minutes of driving they reached their destination. Andrea explained that they wanted to carry out the operation away from their headquarters in case anything went wrong. They had picked a location which would be hard to trace and which provided multiple escape routes. It was a disused bus station, not far from some of the busier streets.

They pulled into sheltered area and parked. Ben and Gregory unloaded a portable transmat pad from the back of the van while Cam unpacked lethal-looking high power phasors from his black case. He slung one over his arm and distributed phasors to most of the others. Neither Andrea nor Gregory took one, and he did not offer weapons to Amy or Brogan.

One of the men stayed outside to keep watch while the others ducked into the building and found a good spot to set up. Gregory seemed to be in charge of the technical aspects of the mission; he set up the pad and spent several minutes programming it through a separate control device.

“What’s he doin’?” asked Brogan.

Andrea replied. “He’s setting up the coordinates and isolating the transmat from external interference. We want to make sure the Heavies don’t follow us back after the rescue.” She glanced at her watch.

“How are they getting into the jail?” asked Amy.

“A friend helped us sneak a transmat pad into the station. It’s in a closet, hidden in a supply box.”

Gregory stood up, a satisfied look on his face. He looked at his own watch and said, “We’re all set. As soon as the signal comes in at two, we can go.”

“Excellent,” said Cam.

A few minutes later Gregory’s watch beeped, and the transmat pad issued a brief warble.

Gregory smiled and pressed a button on his control pad.

A neatly stacked pile of toilet paper materialised on the pad.

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The group waited impatiently to see renewed signs of activity on the transmat pad after Cam, Ben and Gregory had dematerialised. Twenty minutes passed before the transmat pad hummed to life and the first figure appeared.

A young man stepped off of the circular pad. His eyes were slightly sunken and shadowed, like those of a dog which constantly suffers beating and never gets enough to eat. His chin was covered with a sparse beard and his hair was straggly and in need of cutting. He glanced suspiciously at the Minimalists.

“You’re free to go,” prompted Andrea, her voice soothing. “If you need medical assistance or food, they can help you,” she added, gesturing to the two women who had come in the black van. They had brought two boxes of food and medical rations.

The man was too suspicious. His eyes darted nervously over the boxes, but he did not go near them. Instead, he stayed as far from everyone as possible and departed through a side door.

Another figure appeared. This one was a middle-aged woman who looked like she had been wearing the same clothes for six months. She smelled like it, too, and Amy stepped back after she got a whiff of the woman’s terrible body odor.

“This a trick?” she muttered.

“No,” replied the Minimalist leader. “You’re free.”

The woman smiled, revealing a mouth of discoloured and crowded teeth. She spotted the food without being told and wandered over to see what they had brought.

The next six arrivals had similar reactions to their unexpected freedom. A couple of them quickly disappeared into the night, but the rest were interested in the food and medical supplies. The seventh, a pregnant teenage girl, was in bad shape. She was ill, but not just from lack of nourishment. She was shivering and sweating, and it took Amy a minute to realise that the girl was suffering from drug withdrawal symptoms.

Andrea sighed and went over to help the girl.

“You got some Bubble?” asked the pregnant girl. Her voice was raspy and sharp.

Andrea frowned. “No. But perhaps we have something else that will help you.” She led the shaking girl over to the woman who was distributing supplies.

Brogan cocked his head and looked curious. “What’s wrong with her? Why is she asking for bubbles?” he whispered.

“I’m not sure,” replied his friend. She guessed that Bubble was the name of some sort of drug to which the girl was addicted, but she did not know how to explain the concept of drug abuse to the boy. “You know anyone at home who drinks too much ale?” Amy spoke quietly so the sick girl would not hear them talking about her problem.

Brogan paused in thought for a moment. “Rythan. He drinks more than the other men, and he often loses control of his words,” he said, frowning at his memory of serving the men at the inn.

“Well, there are other things besides ale that people consume in excess.”

“Why?”

“To change the way they feel, I suppose. It makes them feel different, maybe better or stronger, at least for a little while until it wears off. When it wears off they feel even worse than before, so they keep on consuming the bad substance, even though it is destroying them physically and mentally.”

They were briefly interrupted by the sound of another arrival. One of the other Minimalists greeted him.

“So she’s addicted t’ somethin’ called Bubble?”

Amy nodded. “Her addiction is so bad that it has made her ill because she didn’t have access to it in jail,” explained Amy, whispering.

They watched Andrea administer a shot to the weak girl. The girl swore but did not resist. She sighed as her withdrawal pains began to subside. Andrea led her over to a bench and sat her down.

Yet another prisoner from the jail arrived.

Andrea continued to talk to the pregnant girl. "Please, take this card and seek some treatment—do it for the baby," said the Minimalist leader. She slipped a small card into the girl's hand.

The girl stared blankly at the piece of paper. She nodded occasionally but never made eye contact with the older woman.

"Did Andrea give her some of that Bubble stuff?" asked Brogan.

"I don't think so—it was probably medicine to help her with her current craving, something to temporarily dull her addiction."

The transmat hummed to life again.

"But it won't cure her?"

Amy was about to reply when she realised that she recognised the latest arrival.

"Tai," she whispered.

The tall, exotic woman stepped off of the pad, rapidly surveying her new surroundings. She did not look like she belonged in the Underworld any more than in the sky city—even in the dim light she looked healthy, athletic and tan, like she spent a lot of her time outdoors.

Her gaze settled on Amy and Brogan.

"If you need food or medicine, we have some supplies," said one of the Minimalists.

Tai turned her gaze on the woman and raised an eyebrow. She said nothing to the woman but turned back toward Amy.

"Small world," said Amy.

The tall woman cocked her head and studied Brogan. "I see you made a friend." She noticed his yellow eyes and their silk clothes and began to put things together. "You were with that Time Lord in Shrinna," she murmured.

Andrea looked up from the pregnant girl and saw them conversing. She looked puzzled and stood up. "Is this your friend?" she asked.

Amy did not know how to respond. She recalled Tai's behaviour during their last encounter. She noticed her knife was missing, but the missing weapon did not make her look any less dangerous. "Well, not the one I was expecting."

Tai flicked her braids back and chuckled softly.

"I thought you said there were just three of you," said Andrea, her brow creasing.

"We're just acquaintances," explained Amy. She sighed and fell back on Saedon's cover story. "Andrea, this is Tai. She's an assistant to a freelance writer who contributes stories to various journals and magazines. I didn't know she was here. She's not the friend I was telling you about."

The other Minimalists watched the proceedings with some confusion; Andrea had not explained to anyone who Amy and Brogan were or that they were aliens, and no one else had noticed the boy's unusual eye colour in the low light and with the other distractions. The transport activated again, and they turned to assist the next arrival.

Andrea and Tai studied one other, sizing each other up, perhaps recognising something familiar in each other's eyes. "Well, I can see why they put you with the Underworld prisoners," Andrea said. "The Heavies are suspicious of anyone who doesn't fit in the mold. Is your colleague with you?"

"No. We were separated after being arrested."

"Hmm. We can do a little checking later to find out where they're holding him."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about that. He's probably already out of jail."

Andrea looked thoughtful. “Really. Must be resourceful.”

“Oh my God!” The first police officer had arrived at the scene and saw the dead guards. She was fairly young, probably assigned to the night shift because of her low status and short time on the force. She quickly looked around and saw Serena who was standing in the middle of the room with her arms crossed. “Who the hell are you? Put your arms up!” she cried, aiming her phasor at the Gallifreyan.

Serena sighed. She unfolded her arms and slowly raised her hands into the air, feeling silly and a little annoyed. “I’m on your side, you idiot.”

“Why did you do this?” asked the woman, still horrified and stunned.

“She didn’t,” said a new arrival. It was Sergeant Black from the front desk, whom Serena had met when she had first arrived at the station earlier in the evening. He was an older, more experienced person, with grey hair and a ruddy complexion. “Her name’s Serena, and she’s from State Intelligence. She’s working with Michael Klein on the mall bombing investigation.”

Two more men appeared at the doorway behind Black in time to hear his explanation.

“What are you doing down here?” asked one of them.

“I wanted to talk to one of the Underworlders. But they were already gone when I got here. And these men were already dead.” She lowered her arms and gestured towards the dead guards. “Someone used a portable transmat to free all of the prisoners. It self-destructed when I arrived. It nearly exploded in my face,” she added coolly, neglecting to mention that her own meddling had triggered the destruct sequence. She noticed a bit of dust on her jacket arm and brushed it off.

The last of the prisoners arrived, followed quickly by Cam, Ben and Gregory. Gregory had a smirk on his face as he stepped off the pad. He picked up the control device from the floor next to the transmat pad and tapped in a few instructions.

“No problems?” asked Andrea?

“Not a hitch,” replied Cam.

“And they’re not going to be able to do anything about it,” added Gregory. “I’ve enabled the self-destruct sequence on the pad we left behind. If anyone touches the controls, they’ll set it off.” He deactivated the portable transmat and lifted it up on its side to rest on its small black wheels.

“Good. Let’s get out of here before our luck runs out,” said Andrea.

Most of the remaining prisoners took the last of the food and headed out through different exits. The pregnant teenager continued to sit on the bench, oblivious to the others. Andrea gave the girl one last glance, shaking her head and sighing.

Amy and Brogan faced Tai, looking at each other cautiously.

The Minimalists collected their gear, removing the evidence of their activities.

Everyone returned to the vans, and no one asked any questions when Tai climbed into the green van with Amy and Brogan.

The skies were overcast in the morning, and the air was chilly. Serena sat on a bench in a sculpture park across from the Museum of Ancient History, her eyes closed as she meditated on the night’s events. She had stayed at the police station until nearly five in the morning, participating in the investigation of the jail break. They had called Klein back into work soon after the discovery, and after a few hours of exhausting late-night work, they had both agreed that it was a good idea to take the morning off to get some rest. This gave Serena the perfect opportunity to meet with Saedon.

Serena opened her eyes. She was surrounded by abstract stone sculptures and greenery. It was very peaceful and calm, making it easy to forget she was in a sky city. The leaves on the trees were just starting to change colour in the autumn temperatures, but the flowering plants in the garden were well developed and still bloomed here and there. Flocks of sparrow-like birds clustered in a few of the trees and occasionally flew down to the imported soil to scavenge for insects. An elderly woman walked a small furry animal along one of the paths, and the pet occasionally tugged at its lead and trilled cheerfully. The only detail to mar the tranquility was the overhead traffic which streamed by in defined corridors in the sky. Serena stretched and checked her watch; it was time to meet the strange Time Lord.

She came out of the park and saw him standing on the steps of the museum, watching her with a thoughtful expression. As she approached, he smiled suddenly. “Good morning,” he called. “Fancy an old-fashioned history lesson?”

Though she was naturally suspicious of Tai, Andrea felt an instinctive trust for Amy and Brogan, and when Amy said they needed to talk privately, she had allowed them to move into one of the larger rooms once they had returned to the base. The room contained several cots as well as a small table with four portable chairs. Brogan opted for one of the cots, curling up in an old green blanket. The two women were more interested in talking, so they took seats at the table.

The boy did not know what to make of the strange woman. She was gorgeous, and he was certain he would never be able to forget her. He thought of some of the prettier girls in his village and decided they were homely by comparison. She looked strong and daring enough to tame a wild kadack single-handed, and he did not fail to notice her other physical attributes, even though he was still prepubescent. He compared her to Amy and Serena. Amy seemed like a sister to him. She was certainly his favorite new friend—she was very nice and seemed to care a lot about the people around her. She had pretty eyes and hair, but she would never be gorgeous like the tall woman who sat across from her. On the other hand, Serena was a little scary with her dark clothes and chilling gaze. He definitely preferred her in her quieter moments. He shivered to think of how easily she had dealt with the men who had attacked them at the standing stones. She had a cold beauty about her which was nothing like Tai’s fierceness. He thought briefly about Andrea who was also pretty in spite of her drab garb. He liked her. He recalled the determination and despair in her haunting brown eyes.

Tai and Amy seemed to be engaged in a sort of stare down. Tai finally broke the ice when she said, “Saedon is going to love this. You knew he was a Time Lord all along.” A faint smile played on her lips.

“Well, the two of you weren’t exactly on the level either. Innocent researchers? Ha!” countered Amy.

Tai smiled. “So, who is this Time Lady? It’s not exactly common for them to venture away from that isolated planet of theirs.”

“Her name is Serena. She’s an archaeologist who wanted a little hands-on experience.” Amy did not think there was any harm in telling Saedon’s companion this much. “What about Saedon?”

Tai looked off into space. “Oh, I think he just got bored and left.”

Amy chuckled. Gallifrey did sound a little dull. It was a wonder more Time Lords did not take off to explore. Of course, Tai was probably lying. Serena had mentioned that Saedon was not in the TARDIS databanks. Either he was lying about his real name, or there was a lot more to his mysterious background.

Brogan yawned. It was getting hard to keep his eyes open. He vaguely wondered what time it was.

Amy continued. "I think we should drop this charade," she said, taking a chance. "You and I both know we're after the same thing. The answer to this Gallifreyan puzzle."

Tai looked skeptical. "Why should we? We've been doing just fine on our own."

"Up to now, maybe. But just look at this place. We're not just dealing with one foolish priest or some undisturbed shrines. This place is a ticking time bomb. This society is nearing the edge of the abyss. That little rescue they staged tonight was nothing compared to this afternoon's activities. They set off a bomb in a shopping mall. Killed and injured a bunch of innocent people just to make a statement. Who knows what they'll plan next, or how we'll get caught in the middle. I like Andrea, but I know she intends to use us as pawns."

"What do I care?"

"Do you see a TARDIS anywhere around here?" Amy hazarded a guess that their TARDIS had gone ahead without them. "You're going to be stuck here unless we solve the riddle. These people don't have any contact with spacefaring races. And judging by the way things are going, as advanced as they are they are more likely to kill each other than develop proper space travel."

Tai frowned. Saedon had mentioned something about them having to solve the riddle to get back to the TARDIS. It was also true that the puzzle was getting progressively more difficult. Perhaps it would be wise to join forces, at least for the moment.

Amy had another thought. "Besides, if we don't manage to catch up with our Gallifreyan friends for a time, wouldn't it be nice to make some progress on our own?"

Her suggestion hit its target. It would probably have resonated with most of the people who have spent any length of time travelling with a Time Lord. Tai certainly felt close to Saedon, but it was very tempting to think they she might be the one to come up with the answers for a change. "Fair enough. We work together." For now.

Brogan could not stay awake any longer. He drifted off to sleep, missing the rest of the conversation.

"The eye of the Sphinx," murmured Serena as soon as they entered the room with the artifacts from Queen Nassi's burial chamber. The symbol which the natives called the manka stared back prominently from the wall.

"Yes. The great symbol of the Pythia," remarked Saedon.

The museum was very quiet, as there were not yet many visitors. For the moment, the two Time Lords had the exhibit to themselves, and the guard was two rooms back.

"Of course, it could be a coincidence," said Saedon. "But I rather think we are looking at a piece of the puzzle."

They exchanged glances. "The riddle to end all riddles," said Serena. She stepped closer to study the tablets and pulled a small scanner from her pocket. It did not detect anything unusual.

"There must have been more," said Saedon. He related the history of the tablets and of the burial chamber excavation. Serena looked hopeful until he told her that the dig site had been buried under tons of rubble.

"We must assume that the technology is buried but intact. Perhaps we can use their transmat technology to find a way in."

"That's just what I had in mind." Saedon smiled. "They keep all of the records of the original excavation at the University of Sky City. I thought we might call in there and have a look before heading down to the surface."

After they finished their brief tour of the Dubian collection, they left the museum in search of the university. Fortunately, there were tourist maps in the museum lobby showing all of the more important destinations in Sky City.



“Perfect. They have a public air bus transport system,” said Saedon. “There’s a stop nearby.”

As they walked through the sculpture park to the bus stop, Serena asked, “So, why were you in the jail last night? Why did you come down to the basement?”

Saedon did not see any advantage in lying. “I went down to rescue my companion, a young woman.”

Serena sighed and thought of the Doctor and his many companions.

“We were arrested for trespassing not long after our arrival. Rather absurd, but these people are quite paranoid.”

“With good reason. There’s a band of terrorists on the loose. I became separated from my friends when we accidentally stumbled into a bomb scene.”

“Oh?” Saedon raised an eyebrow. “You’re not alone then?”

Serena felt guilty for telling him about her companions. She remembered Amy’s warning that he was not to be trusted, but she felt like she had a connection with him. “A woman and a boy.”

“So we have two common interests. To solve the riddle and find our friends.”

“I suppose so.” Serena was troubled. She wondered why she had not found any record of him in the TARDIS databanks, but she felt too awkward to ask him directly about it. She did not think he had figured out that he had already encountered one of her friends. She decided to try the indirect approach. “It’s very rare to find another Time Lord out in the universe. The High Council is so touchy about interference.”

“Too true. But they do make exceptions from time to time.”

Serena nodded. “What was yours?”

“Maybe they don’t know I’m gone?” he suggested playfully. He smiled mischievously. “My turn. How did you discover the old riddle?”

“Completely by accident. I was studying some old ruins and triggered the transport mechanism by mistake.”

“Ha!” cried Saedon. “That’s how that silly human woman ended up on Percantha!” He looked quite pleased with himself.

Serena felt like an idiot. She had walked right into that one.

Morning arrived too quickly for Amy. The sound of movement disturbed her restless sleep and she opened her eyes. The room was dark, though a little light came in from underneath the doorway at the far end of the room. She thought she could see a shadow moving back and forth in front of the door.

She stretched. Between the sleeping in a cot and yesterday’s tumble in the police van, her muscles were stiff and sore.

“Oh good. You’re finally awake.” Tai’s voice pierced the darkness. A moment later, the room filled with fluorescent light as Tai flicked the light switch.

“What time is it?” Amy lifted her arm to look at her watch and then remembered that she had left it in the TARDIS as part of the effort to blend in on the non-technological worlds they had been visiting.

“I’m not sure,” replied Tai. “Maybe eight or nine.” She cocked her head as if listening to noises in the corridor. “There’s been activity outside for about an hour, but no one has come for us.”

Amy swung her legs out of the cot and sat awkwardly in the dip of fabric. Brogan was snoring softly, oblivious to their talking. “I wonder what they have planned for today,” she muttered.

“I hope they have some food. I’m starving.”

“Don’t expect much. Last night’s stew was pretty bad.” Her stomach rumbled and she hoped that breakfast was better, as she had not been able to eat much of the dinner. She

pulled herself out of the cot and knelt by Brogan to wake him. She shook him gently, feeling sorry for dragging him into such a chaotic situation.

Tai banged on the door. "Hey! Anyone out there?" she cried. Her voice was very loud and traveled easily through the old building.

Brogan opened his eyes when he heard the shout. Bleary eyed, he looked up at Amy and yawned.

There was a sound outside and the door opened. "Good morning," said Andrea.

Amy was surprised to see the Minimalist leader greet them personally. The woman had dark circles under her eyes but did not act tired. "Morning."

"I was just getting ready to go out on rounds with Fife. I thought you might like to go with me. But would you care for some breakfast first?"

Brogan sat up and turned his head. "Definitely." He grinned.

Andrea led them to a meeting room a few doors down. There was a box of pastries which Andrea identified as fried puffs. In principle they were similar to doughnuts, but they were greasier and the dough was not set all of the way through. A liberal coating of castor sugar made them palatable. There was also a hot drink called bracka which tasted surprisingly good. It was not like coffee or tea but Amy thought it contained some caffeine.

"What kind of rounds do you do with Fife?" Amy asked casually.

"As Minimalists, we don't spend all of our time planning destruction," Andrea replied with a half smile. "We put some of our resources and energies into more constructive goals. Fife leads us on that front. Several years ago he became frustrated with the empty promises coming from the religious orders operating in the Underworld, and he decided to try implementing some actual improvements."

"Sounds like an uphill battle," remarked Tai.

The leader nodded soberly. "It certainly hasn't been easy. But we have to try everything we can think of. A few of our programs are working. The one we are visiting today is actually having some success. It's a work assistance program run by and for the community. We try to provide some direction and organizational assistance, and we draw upon our support network in Sky City for teaching volunteers and technological assistance. The program had a rough start, but this year we had a breakthrough. I've been studying the operation for a few months now and we are hoping to export the success to other ground cities around the world." She spoke with great enthusiasm, and her eyes seemed to brighten a little.

Amy still had doubts about the effectiveness of any assistance program in such a depressed atmosphere, but she kept them to herself. "Sounds like an interesting project."

"Here we are. The office of Doctor Maya Dreisher, Director of Archaeological Studies for the University of Sky City. I took the liberty of arranging an appointment for us. We're to be archaeologists from Plateau City, one of the smaller sky cities on the planet. We're doing a study on the Karru culture which is local to our city's area and had a great deal of influence on the Dubian civilization." Saedon kept his voice low, and a faint smile played on his lips in anticipation of playing his newly created role.

Serena nodded, admiring his resourcefulness.

Saedon suddenly took on a serious, business-like expression as he opened the door to the director's office.

The director's assistant looked up from his computer. "Can I help you?" He was a thin man with a receding hairline who was in his early thirties. A brass nameplate identified him as Yuri Mischoff. His work space was immaculate. All of the files and papers next to his computer were neatly stacked, and every item on the desk looked as if it had been placed with geometric precision.

“Good morning,” the Time Lord replied. “We have an appointment. I’m Dr. Saedon Smythe, and this is my cousin, Dr. Serena Smythe.”

Serena stifled a chuckle when she heard the new spin on the old “Smith” alias, not to mention Saedon’s usage of the word “cousin”. “Smythe” rolled off of his tongue like it was something important and dignified. She absentmindedly wondered which House he belonged to on Gallifrey.

“Ah, yes,” replied the assistant. “Dr. Dreisher is expecting you.” He pressed a key on his desk phone and spoke into the receiver. “Your ten o’clock appointment is here.” He put down the receiver and, indicating the inner door, added, “You can go right in.”

Saedon thanked him and the two Gallifreyans went in to meet the director.

Dr. Dreisher was the opposite of her organised assistant. Her office was cluttered with a variety of artifacts and archaeologically themed art. Her desk was covered in papers and journals which overwhelmed the computer at one side. At first glance, the doctor herself looked a bit overwhelmed. She was in her mid-forties, had grey streaks in her loose brown curls, and dressed in a multicoloured silk suit. However, her hazel eyes were keen and enthusiastic, revealing an intelligent woman who loved her work. She greeted the two visitors and they shook hands all around, making introductions.

“So you’re planning a study of a site near Plateau City?” prompted Dr. Dreisher.

“Yes,” replied Saedon, “our researches have led us to study an area on the lower plateau. Some preliminary excavations have led us to believe that we may have found a new site to explore.”

Saedon had picked just the right topic to catch the director’s interests. New archaeological discoveries were becoming increasingly rare these days, and there had not been any really big ones in nearly fifteen years. “Oh? What sort of site?”

“We think we may have discovered the lost tomb of the Karru King Sushul, the father of Nassi.” The Time Lord had done his research well. The missing tomb was a famous legend.

The director’s jaw dropped. Archaeologists had been searching for that particular site for years without success. A moment later her initial astonishment faded as her logic and reason kicked into gear. “What makes you so certain? This isn’t the first time someone has made that claim.”

Ever prepared, Saedon pulled out a small computer disk from his pocket and handed it to the woman. “Serena and I have composed a paper describing our analysis and how we reached this conclusion,” he explained, improvising. “It also includes the results from our preliminary study at the site. We’re expecting publication in a few months, but I thought you might like to see it. We’ve already secured funding for a full dig, but we’re waiting for the paperwork to go through with the government. Unfortunately, the site is located at the edge of a corporate farm, so we’ve only had minimal access up to now.”

Serena quietly listened and watched. Saedon’s performance was excellent. At the moment he looked as exasperated as if he really was a frustrated archaeologist. She wondered what he had put onto the disk at such short notice—or if it was a pure bluff.

Dr. Dreisher nodded sympathetically. The government controlled all of the land outside of the cities, and she had gone through the bureaucratic nightmare of securing access on numerous occasions. She took the disk and set it next to her computer. “So what can I do for you?”

“We’d like to get access to the materials from the excavation of Queen Nassi and King Lyros’ burial chambers. We’d like to review the original materials for links to the Karru culture. We understand that you have additional artifacts and video recordings from the excavation which aren’t on display at the Museum of Ancient History.”

“Yes. Well, that shouldn’t be a problem. I’d be happy to approve your access.” Their request seemed reasonable enough. The two strangers looked sincere, except they seemed a little young. “Just a moment,” she said casually, turning to her computer. She copied their names from her daily calendar into a search engine and waited to see if they were who they said they were.

Serena guessed at what the director was doing, and she began to feel a little nervous. She was about to say something, but then she saw the calm look of patience etched into Saedon’s features. It made her feel silly: of course he had set up full backgrounds for their identities as archaeologists. She had done the very same thing to get into the police department. She was so accustomed to relying upon her own cleverness that it was difficult to let go of the reins.

Dr. Dreisher’s search confirmed her guests’ story. They had received their doctorates from Plateau City’s university only three years earlier and had each spent a year doing postdocs with Dr. Asha Weekes. She had met the old doctor on a few occasions at conferences, but she did not know much about his particular interests or activities at the smaller university. The Smythe name also popped up on several papers concerning the Karru—though never as the lead. They were legitimate, and the director decided to grant their request for access to the university’s artifacts. “I’ll just send for one of my doctoral students to take you down to the basement vault where everything is stored,” she stated at last. Her phone beeped. “Yes? Okay. Also, could you arrange for Tanya to take the Smythes down to the vault?” She hung up the receiver. “I’m afraid I have another appointment now. But Yuri will take care of you. I’ll be tied up all morning, but I was wondering if you would care to join me for a late lunch?”

“Certainly,” replied Saedon, rising. “We can discuss our discoveries in greater depth.”

“Good. See you then.”

Fife glanced up briefly when Andrea and the others came into the work assistance centre. He was sitting on a crate in front of a group of children, reading a book. He nodded and smiled in acknowledgement before returning to the story.

Andrea smiled. “We try to do everything we can to help these people. Often it includes providing day care and education for the younger children. Please, look around,” she added. She walked away to talk to someone, followed by two of her Minimalist colleagues who were apparently serving duty as body guards.

It was not as bad as Amy had expected. They had converted the basement rooms of one of the large apartment buildings to serve as meeting rooms for the work assistance program. This room was one of the larger ones. The walls were whitewashed and the lighting was bright, contrasting sharply with the squalor outside the building. Poverty was very evident, however. There was not much furniture, just a few rickety chairs. They mostly improvised with plastic crates and plywood. Aside from the cluster of children surrounding Fife, there was another group of men and women waiting in line at a makeshift table. Two volunteers staffed the table, answering questions, signing people up for training programs, and providing leads on jobs. Amy noticed the battered portable computers used by each volunteer. The lack of advanced technology in the Underworld contrasted sharply with Sky City. No one had cell phones or other technical gadgets down here. Most of them wore simple clothing, ill-fitting and patched. It was no wonder Andrea had chosen her drab attire. Blending in was her way of seeking acceptance among the people she was trying to help. She walked down the line, chatting with the people, trying to give them encouragement and words of advice. They seemed to like her. Their expressions brightened and hope shined in their eyes when she spoke.

Amy noticed that one of the volunteers was wearing a lapel pin like Andrea's. It was unusual to see any jewelry here, and she wondered if it had some sort of significance. When Andrea finally returned, she asked, "What does your pin mean?"

"We had them created for the Minimalist cause. We award them to members of the movement who practice the Minimalist lifestyle," she explained, smiling. "They serve as a reminder to the people of what we are striving for."

She asked a few more questions about the movement and Fife's program, and Andrea began to explain. Brogan and Tai became bored and each wandered away.

Tai moved around the room, studying the people. She paused to listen to Fife who was describing some sort of fairy tale. He was an entertaining story teller. He tried to do the voices of the characters—amusing to hear with his naturally deep voice—and his facial expressions were expressive. Something in his manner reminded her of another, simpler time in her life, and she became as entranced as the children.

Brogan walked towards the exit. He could hear the sound of laughter and young voices coming from one of the other rooms. No one seemed to mind, so he stepped out into the hall.

The noises were coming from one of the rooms nearby. He quietly walked over to it and peeked inside. There were many youngsters, ranging from ages nine up to the mid teens. They were playing games. Two young adults were also in the room, apparently trying to keep things from getting out of hand. They seemed to get along well with the children, occasionally joining in the jokes. The children did not seem as wild or scary as the ones he had seen on the streets.

"That's our new youth program."

He jumped. Andrea and Amy were standing behind him.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," said Andrea. "You can go in, if you like."

The young boy smiled. "Okay, Amy?"

"Sure. Andrea's just going to show me some of the other things they're doing."

He nodded and slipped into the room.

"I thought she'd never leave us alone," said Saedon. They had spent the first hour of their visit to the vault chaperoned by Tanya, one of the archaeology students. He and Serena had been reading through the materials and looking at some of the artifacts from the burial chambers of Queen Nassi. Tanya was extremely inquisitive and had been asking them a barrage of questions about their project, which the two Time Lords tried to avoid answering. Eventually she had grown bored with the quiet pair and had excused herself.

Serena was also relieved to see the young woman leave. They had not had a chance to discuss anything in private since they had met with Dr. Dreisher, and she was unable to communicate with Saedon telepathically. "Found anything yet?" she called. She was standing in the storage room where they kept the artifacts from the excavation. The room was environmentally controlled to help preserve the materials.

"Nothing useful here," he replied. Using a high resolution electronic pad, he browsed through the notes of the lead archaeologist.

"There's nothing useful here, either." She came out of the storage room and closed the door. It sealed with a hiss. "Let's watch the video again. There was something odd about the burial chamber."

Saedon found a box of disks and selected one, which he popped into the computer. He tapped a few instructions on the computer keyboard and an image of the chamber and the excavation team appeared on the large flat monitor attached to the wall above.

The central figure in much of the video footage was a egotistical man named Dr. Bremman. He was the lead archaeologist on the project, and he was constantly barking out

orders and talking down to his team members. He was of average height and muscular build, with a short dark beard and large, slightly bulging eyes.

He turned to the camera. “We’re removing the memorial tablets this afternoon. Our sponsors decided it wasn’t feasible to open up the site to tourists, judging by the condition of the surrounding area, so we’re moving everything to the museum. A specialist is coming by later this morning to evaluate the grave and figure out the best way to move the remains. We’ve had to tighten security since we started moving the artifacts. Just this week we’ve had two incidents with the protesters. They don’t seem to grasp that we’re moving these things for the betterment of society.”

Someone interrupted the man, and he turned away from the camera. The cameraman turned to pan over the entire chamber.

“There. Stop,” murmured Serena. “There’s something odd about the structure of the chamber. Something about the geometry and the surfaces. Do you see it?”

“Yes. You’re right. Let’s see if they took some more detailed notes on the chamber itself.” He used the computer to search through the records. “Here we are.” A three-dimensional construction of the room’s layout appeared on the screen.

“That’s no good. That shows the dimensions but leaves out the details. Anything else?”

“Not really. There are some close-up photographs, but it doesn’t appear that anyone bothered to record the surfaces in any great detail.”

“I suppose it wasn’t important to them.” Serena sighed. Bremman’s team was motivated more by the money provided by their corporate sponsorship than by the desire to expand their knowledge. “Well, at least they didn’t try to blast the grave open. How thick did they say the stone was?”

“The stone slabs covering the Queen’s grave were nearly a meter thick. The walls and ceiling were the same; only the narrow entrance was open to the rest of the tomb structure,” said Saedon, recalling the notes he had read. “The stones were also made of a particularly hard mineral. It took them two weeks just to drill a few small holes for the fiberoptic camera. The drill bits kept breaking. Apparently the cost to remove the stone without damaging the remains was prohibitive, so they left the body alone after they had confirmed that there wasn’t anything else in the grave.”

“I suppose that’s a good thing for us then—there’s a good chance the tomb survived when that section of Sky City collapsed.”

Saedon put another disk into the computer. “Let me just copy the notes pertaining to the location of the tomb.” He made a few selections on the computer. “We’re going to have to retrace Dr. Bremman’s steps and find some way to correlate the old maps to the present day. I fear that most of the natural and manmade landmarks he referenced have changed. He also provided a grid reference, but it doesn’t seem to match the satellite marking system they are currently using—part of the reason why they aren’t quite sure where the tomb is anymore.”

“Maybe it was intentional,” Serena hypothesized. “Maybe they obscured the location to keep it hidden from those protestors, or from other archaeologists.”

“Hmm. Quite possible.” Saedon finished his download and cleared the computer screen. “Shall we be going?”

“We’re not going to stay for lunch with Dr. Dreisher?” asked Serena naively.

Her colleague chuckled. “It’s likely to turn from lunch into the grand inquisition if we stay. If she has a chance to read the paper on that disk, she’s not going to be happy.”

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Brogan was thoroughly enjoying himself. The other children had quickly accepted Brogan's presence and did not object when he joined their game. The only moment of awkwardness was when the girl next to him noticed his yellow eyes. He remembered Amy's suggestion to explain the colour as a birth defect, and this was readily accepted by the impoverished kids. Unusual birth defects were not uncommon in the Underworld.

Another group of children came in, boys and girls in their mid teens. They did not join in the games but sat down around a large table at the end of the room near the door, talking and laughing. They did not take any notice of the other children, and the adults left them alone.

Brogan's turn in the game went by a few times, and while he was waiting for the next round, he took another long look at the teenage group. There was something that troubled him about a couple of the boys. They were joking around conspiratorially and staring at one of the prettier girls across the table. She was talking to a third boy and doing her best to ignore their glances.

Andrea, her two bodyguards, and Amy walked by the open door on their way back to the main room. They did not come in, so Brogan figured they were not ready to leave yet. He returned his attention to the game.

"So how come we haven't seen you in here before?" asked the girl next to him.

"I was rescued from the p'lice." He remembered Amy's advice on how to explain himself. "I come from a diff'rent city." He was glad he did not have to explain about being from another planet.

"Oh. You gonna stay here?"

"I don't think so," he replied simply. He looked up, thinking about the riddle and the trouble they were having in finding the solution. His gaze settled upon the teenagers again, and again he felt an inexplicable uneasiness. One of the boys stood up and began to circle the table, eyeing the pretty girl. Brogan had the sneaking suspicion that he was about to pick a fight with her friend.

"Hey, it's your turn."

"Oh." He rolled the device, barely noticing the numbers that came up. Something was definitely about to happen. He suddenly realised why he did not like the look of the two teenage boys. He had seen them on the street the day before, and one of them had actually made a nasty face at him when he was riding in the van. This same one stood up now, but instead of joining his friend, he casually crossed to the other side of the room where he had a good view of the doorway.

The first trouble maker walked up to the girl and leaned over, whispering something to her.

She stood up, knocking her chair back, and pushed him. Her eyes flashed with anger.

Her friend also stood, and the antagonist turned around and used several expletives. An instant later, a full fledged fight broke out.

The adult monitors jumped up and ran over to break up the fight, but their presence only aggravated things. The situation rapidly became a brawl. The other children around Brogan ran over and circled the group, egging them on. The shouts and fighting grew even more frenzied.

The other teenager, the one who had sneered at Brogan, stayed out of the mess and kept an eye on the door. *What is he up to?* the boy wondered. He stood up, wondering what to do.

Andrea's bodyguards ran through the door, followed by Andrea. "What's going on here!" she cried. They looked at the crowd, their backs to the watching teenager. Andrea nodded to her men, and the bodyguards pushed in through the circle to try to break up the fight.

The teenage boy sneered and slipped something out of his pocket.

Brogan looked from the object to the teenager's eyes and to Andrea, who was oblivious of the activity behind her. The teenager slowly moved to Andrea, ready to strike her from behind. Brogan did not recognise the device he carried, but he knew that it had to be a weapon. All at once he dashed across the room and knocked the teenage boy away from the Minimalist leader. The weapon slipped out of the teenager's hand when they hit the floor.

"You son of a..." spat the teenager. Brogan had him pinned momentarily, but the older boy was much stronger. They struggled.

"Brogan!" cried Andrea, whirling around.

"He was trying to—" Brogan's words were cut off as the teenage boy freed one arm and whacked him in the face. He tumbled over, and the older boy scrambled to his feet and ran out of the room.

The fight began to break up behind them as the instigator was knocked unconscious by a lucky punch.

Andrea knelt down to look at the object the teenage attacker had dropped.

"Jackson!" she cried.

One of her body guards disentangled himself from the mob of children and came to her side. "What is it?"

She pointed at the weapon. "A shocker." She moved over to help Brogan up. "You just saved my life," she said simply.

Her rescuer was still dazed. He reached up to his now throbbing nose and felt a little blood. "Huh?"

"He had a shocker. They're illegal, but a frequent weapon of choice down here. They use it to shock the unsuspecting victim into unconsciousness."

"Or death," added the body guard. "The setting was up to the highest level," he added, turning the weapon over.

"What happened?!" cried Amy as she came to the doorway.

Maya Dreisher watched the door close as her last morning appointment left. Her watch said it was just before twelve. She remembered she had promised to meet the Smythes for a late lunch, so she decided she had just enough time to peruse the paper Saedon had left for her on the computer disk.

She read through the abstract. It was little more than a summary of his earlier comments, so she continued reading. As she read, her brow creased. "That's nonsense," she muttered. She read further. "Hmm, that doesn't sound quite right." Her countenance darkened further. At last she finished reading, and a large frown settled on her face. Saedon's paper might have fooled a careless reader, but upon closer inspection it looked as if he had carelessly strung together a series of theories with random data. If this was any example of their scientific work, the two Smythes were unqualified to lead an archaeological expedition.

Maya looked up the phone number for Dr. Asha Weekes on her computer and placed a call. Someone named Chloe answered. "Hi. This is Dr. Maya Dreisher from the University of Sky City. I'd like to talk to Dr. Weekes."

"He's not available at the moment. He's at a conference in High City," replied Chloe.

"Hmm." Maya had another idea. "Is there someone there who has worked with Dr. Weekes in the archaeology department for several years? Someone who might know some of his recent students?"

"Sure. You've come to the right place. I've been Dr. Weekes' assistant for about ten years."



“Perfect,” replied Maya, a look of satisfaction settling on her face. “Do you know Saedon or Serena Smythe? Did their doctorates and postdocs there?”

“Smythe? That name doesn’t ring a bell,” replied Chloe. “You sure they were with Dr. Weekes?”

“Positive. They show up in your records database, too.”

“That’s impossible.” The sound of keyboard clicking came across the phone line. “That’s odd. I see their names here, but I’m sure they weren’t here a week ago. There certainly haven’t been any Smythes in the group in the last ten years!” Chloe sounded annoyed at the discrepancy in her database.

“They must be lying. Thanks Chloe. You might want to have your database checked—they must have hacked into it.”

“I’ll do that. I’ll let Dr. Weekes know you called.”

“Thanks.” Maya ended the call and stood up from her desk, wondering what the two strangers really wanted. She stalked out of the room, readying herself for a confrontation.

Ten minutes later, she flung open the door to the basement vault. She was about to demand an explanation, when she saw that the only occupant was Tanya. “Where are the Smythes?” she snapped.

Tanya looked up from the computer, where she had been browsing through the notes from various archaeological expeditions. “I don’t know. I think they left about an hour ago.”

“Damn!”

“You’re getting too well known, Andrea,” said Cam. He was driving them back to the headquarters, cutting their excursion short because of the attack.

“I know.” Mild annoyance filled Andrea’s voice; this was not the first close call she had had with would-be assassins. She found it frustrating to keep herself surrounded with body guards when she made public appearances. She was also mad at herself for her own risky behaviour. Her own instructions to the body guards to break up the fight had nearly led to her own demise. *If Brogan had not been such a quick thinker*—she left the thought unfinished and turned to look at the boy. Aside from a bloody nose, he seemed to be unharmed. He was so young and yet so unselfish, not at all like the other children she knew. She mused about his future and the sort of man he would become. She also thought about the future of the Minimalists and who would pick up the fight after she was gone.

Tai quietly observed the others. She seemed unusually thoughtful.

Amy looked at her young friend with sisterly concern. The Underworld was a dangerous place for a child, especially one from a primitive planet. “I’m sorry we got you into this,” she murmured.

“I wouldn’t have missed this adventure for the world,” replied her friend, his voice slightly nasal. He still covered his nose with a cloth from a medical kit. Despite everything that had happened, he was still very optimistic. “I’m just glad that boy didn’t hurt Andrea.”

“Me too.”

“I just knew he was up to no good.”

“Oh?” She had already heard an account of the fight and Brogan’s part in stopping the attack on the Minimalist leader, but her friend had not yet offered his own view.

“Aye. The one boy picked a fight while his friend watched the door.”

Andrea frowned. “It wasn’t just a chance attack,” she said quietly, realisation setting in.

“What?” Cam was only half listening. Most of his concentration was going into navigating through the dangerous streets.

“You say he was waiting for me?” Andrea asked Brogan.

“Aye. They stirred up trouble on purpose. They knew you’d come in.”

“It was a setup.”

“Maybe they just took advantage of the opportunity when you turned up,” suggested Cam. “Not many people knew you were going to be there today.”

“Maybe. But who put them up to it?”

After their visit to the university, Serena and Saedon prepared for their first trek down to the Underworld. They split up for a few hours to get ready. Saedon was to secure transportation, while Serena took on the task of visiting the library to download additional maps of the surface. They arranged to meet in front of the police headquarters at two in the afternoon.

Promptly at two, Saedon pulled up in front of the headquarters in a sleek blue aircar. It was not flashy on the outside, but the inside was sumptuous with leather seats and a sophisticated dash board.

Serena climbed in, her expression cool and unreadable. If she carried any gadgets or supplies, they were hidden in the pockets of her dark velvet jacket. She had briefly talked to Klein, explaining that she would be away for a day or two following her own leads. Though he had looked a little disappointed, he had not argued with her—it was not his place to question a State Intelligence agent.

Saedon guessed her errand. “Why do you continue to waste time with the officials?”

His colleague cocked her head and raised an eyebrow. “You never know what will prove useful,” she said. She did not mention that she had actually become interested in following Klein’s progress with solving the case.

He made no further comment as he set the aircar in motion.

Back at the Minimalist base, the group returned to the meeting room where they had eaten breakfast, and Andrea and Cam excused themselves for a few minutes to make their afternoon plans. The young woman, Megan, brought the trio a tray of sandwiches and left them alone. They were hungry, so food took higher priority than conversation, at least for a few minutes.

Amy picked up one of the sandwiches. It was made with thin slices of wheat bread spread with some sort of dark paste. It did not look very appealing. She smelled it and thought it might be similar to peanut butter. She took a bite. It was indeed some sort of nutty paste, but it had a slightly sour note which she did not like. She tried to ignore it, as she desperately needed some nourishment.

Brogan finally decided to discard the bloody cloth he had been holding to his nose. His nose was red and swollen, but he did not complain about it. He sat down, immediately taking a sandwich and gobbling up half of it before pausing to make observations upon the taste. He seemed to like it and made some incomprehensible but appreciative comment with a full mouth.

“So, was Andrea’s tour interesting?” asked Tai. Her words rang with faint sarcasm, and she wore a slightly bemused look on her face. She took a bite of her own sandwich.

“I suppose so,” replied Amy, annoyed by Tai’s sudden air of superiority. “I didn’t really care that much about the work program, but it was useful to get to know Andrea a little better.” She remembered that Tai had spent most of the time in the main room. “And you? Was Fife’s story good?” she asked, returning a little of her own sarcasm.

Tai shrugged, completely unfazed. “Not bad. But he had even better things to say afterwards. I got him to explain a little about that symbol they put on the stadium.”

“Symbol?” Amy was momentarily bewildered, as Tai had not explained about the stadium.

“You know,” she paused, savouring her small triumph. She had actually made some progress on solving the riddle. “The thing from Gallifrey.” Tai traced the symbol of the Pythia on the table with her finger.

“The eye o’ the Sphinx,” volunteered Brogan, in between sandwiches.

“Oh, of course.” Amy tried to ignore the smug look on Tai’s face. “So why do they use it all over the place?”

“Originally it was the symbol for an ancient and famous Queen. They call it the Manka, and they use it to represent their local sports team, the Manka Cats.”

“So it has some connection with the past, some Queen.” Amy tried to think. “Is it on a shrine, or in some famous place?”

“Yes. Fife said it marked the Queen’s tomb which is buried somewhere beneath the city.”

“That must be where we’ll find the key to the riddle.”

“Aye. Where is the tomb?” asked Brogan.

Tai shook her head. “That’s the problem. Archaeologists uncovered it about four hundred years ago, but it was covered again and lost when part of the sky city collapsed two hundred and fifty years ago.”

“Oh.”

“He said they still have a lot of artifacts in a museum up in Sky City.”

Amy shook her head. “I have a hard time believing they were able to remove the Gallifreyan technology. If I had designed this thing to last for a long time, I would have made it difficult to take apart. Think about the cathedral on Percantha, or the old building in Shrinna. The technology was built into large, probably immovable blocks of stone. I think we’re going to have to find the missing tomb.”

The three munched on their sandwiches, silently contemplating the difficulties of finding the tomb. At last, Amy spoke again. She lowered her voice and said, “I think we should be careful how much we tell Andrea. We should be careful not to let her know about the advanced technology which might be hidden in the tomb.”

Tai’s eyes narrowed. “She will exploit anything she can to aid her cause. Including us.”

Amy nodded.

The young boy was too naïve to understand. “She seems okay t’ me,” he said.

“I know. But you must be careful how much you tell her,” explained Amy. “She’s very desperate to help the people in the Underworld, and she doesn’t care if she hurts other innocent people along the way.”

Brogan nodded slowly.

“I don’t like the conditions down here either, but the ends don’t justify the means,” Amy added. “There are other ways to fight back that don’t endanger innocent people.” She rubbed her chin thoughtfully. “We’ve already explained that we are amateur archaeologists, studying their ancient culture. We’ll tell her we’re interested in this ancient Queen and the area’s history before these modern cities existed. She doesn’t have to know about the Gallifreyan part.”

“Okay.”

The door opened, and the Minimalist leader came in. “We’re going out again, in an hour. I have something else to show you, if you’re up to it.”

“Sure,” Amy replied. “What’s that?”

“I’ll explain on the way.”

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Saedon brought the aircar through the corrosive brown haze which obscured the surface and Underworld city. As the car descended, the corner of his mouth turned up in a smile and he remarked, "Interesting architectural style." Above the brown haze, the soaring buildings and support structures consisted of concrete, steel, glass, and other sophisticated materials. The architecture was modern, practical, durable. However, below the dismal cloud cover a second style of building became visible. Low buildings were scattered in between the taller structures, and these were made of everything from concrete to brick. The shorter buildings were old and deteriorating, with many broken windows and graffiti-covered exteriors. They were practical but ugly. Saedon noticed something odd about the bases of the taller buildings. There were no windows or doors on the structures which rose up to Sky City. At ground level they were like fortresses, taking up space in the lower city without serving any function other than support. It was an obvious security measure, intended to make it more difficult for people in the Underworld to get to Sky City.

He spotted a low rooftop and brought the car down to hover at a standstill. "So, do we have any landmarks to work from?"

His Gallifreyan colleague pulled a slim electronic reader from an inner coat pocket and called up the various data they had collected. "Dr. Bremman's records referenced a river. There is still a waterway, although they appear to have altered its course in more recent times. Let's start from there. It's roughly 3 kilometres due west."

Saedon brought the vehicle back up into the air and followed the car's built-in compass. He tried to fly them at an inconspicuous altitude, observing the decrepit ground vehicles they occasionally saw on the streets below. They flew over low rooftops and skirted the taller buildings which soared through the brown clouds into the sky. At last, as they cleared a particularly large structure, the waterway was visible. The banks were reinforced and sculpted to follow a straight line. While it might originally have been a normal river, it was now so controlled as to look manmade. There was also little greenery near the water. There were a few hardy weeds clinging to the edges here and there, but nothing large grew nearby. No doubt the authorities keep the area clear of foliage to make the controlled waterway easier to maintain. The water itself did not look healthy. Despite the fact that the water flowed smoothly and without turbulence, the water was cloudy enough to obscure the river bottom. The surface was also shiny and reflected a sickly rainbow, a sign of oily residue. Saedon wondered if anything could possibly live beneath the surface, and he was disgusted to think that the natives used the foul water for their drinking water supply.

"Now, there is supposed to be a water storage pond," said Serena. "Follow the waterway about a kilometre." She gestured in one direction, and Saedon turned the aircar. A large rectangular pond quickly became visible which was enclosed by a chain link fence. Serena frowned. She was having trouble correlating the older records with the newer ones. "Now I'm not quite sure if this is right, but I think the burial chamber was supposed to be within a two kilometre radius of the pond."

"Assuming they didn't move the pond."

Serena nodded. "And there's a notation in Dr. Bremman's notebook that suggests it was on the western side of the river. Which correlates with the records of the city collapse. They failed to detect erosion along the riverbank, and several buildings collapsed in a sort of domino effect. The whole area had to be rebuilt." She looked across the river and over the pond. "This isn't going to be easy. We're going to have to search a substantial area. I have a scanner which we might use to detect Gallifreyan technology, but its operating range is limited." She tried not to think about the other possibility, that her scanner might not be able to detect the technology at all if it was shielded.

"It'll probably be easier to narrow the search on foot," suggested Saedon. "Why don't we begin over there." He nodded towards the opposite side of the riverbank, near a tall concrete wall.

“I’ll map out a search grid.”

Saedon brought the aircar down near the riverbank and they climbed out. He had a remote control for the vehicle, and while Serena planned out their search pattern on her electronic reader, he programmed the car to return to a garage he had rented in Sky City. He did not think it would be secure in the Underworld if they left it unattended, and it would be easy enough to recall when they were ready. He pressed a button on the remote and the car flew off on autopilot.

“We’re going to have to find some way to get on the other side of this wall to complete our search.” Serena looked up at the concrete wall which rose nearly thirty metres into the air. They could not see much of the other side from the ground, just a few tall support structures which rose up into the murky haze.

“What’s in there?” asked the Time Lord.

“I’m not sure. There is very little detail on the map for this area. It doesn’t even show the wall—just a few buildings and roads.”

The wall extended for some distance in both directions. “Well, I suppose we can follow it around. There must be an entrance somewhere. At worst, we can always use the aircar to get in.”

“There’s plenty of area to search on the outside first, anyway,” Serena added.

“So, where are we going?” asked Amy.

Cam had driven Andrea and the three off-worlders to another empty warehouse. He did not seem particularly happy about it, either. He glanced around with a paranoid expression as they crossed the wide floor of the building, occasionally muttering under his breath. Amy thought he was annoyed with Andrea’s order to include the strangers in their trip to the warehouse.

Andrea, on the other hand, seemed to be revitalized and invigorated. She seemed to have dismissed the earlier attack and was now eager to show the three strangers something important. “Patience,” replied the Minimalist leader.

Tai looked around and contemplated making an escape, while Brogan took in the new environment with all of his usual curiosity.

At last, they reached a set of large double doors at the far wall. Cam unlocked them and pulled them open, revealing an inner sliding door. He pulled on a bar which caused the door to slide up and out of the way.

Amy realised she was looking at a large cargo lift. They stepped onto the oversized platform, and Cam pulled the outer doors shut before closing the sliding door. The lift controls were electronic, but they looked old, like they belonged to the technology from an earlier generation. Cam operated them and the lift began to slowly drop. Chains above and below the carriage clanked, but the ride was smooth.

After they had dropped only about thirty metres, the lift reached the bottom. Cam opened the sliding door and they stepped out into a large storage area. Big crates and old equipment littered the floor, and there were several cluttered work benches. The area smelled of dust and grease, and the air was cool.

Andrea turned on a small torch and led them through the maze of crates and equipment until they reached an unassuming metal door. It was not locked. They entered a small power room, but all of the equipment was either dormant or partially dismantled. At the back, there was a narrow passageway which led into a small, dark room. She aimed the torch at the floor, and a small circle of light revealed a large oval grate. “Here, would you hold this for me, Brogan?”

“Aye,” replied the boy. “What is that?” He took the torch from her and aimed it at the floor.

Andrea and Cam knelt down and lifted the grate up and away from its hole. "Sewer access."

Amy groaned softly. "We're going down there?"

"Yes." Andrea lowered herself into the dark hole and disappeared down a metal ladder, which they could now see. "Toss the light down," she called, her voice echoing slightly.

Brogan dropped the torch to her.

They were in near darkness for only a moment, with only a faint light coming up from the hole. Cam turned on a second torch, reilluminating the small room.

"You next," instructed Cam, pointing the light at Brogan.

The boy eagerly followed.

Cam gestured at Tai. "Now you."

She shrugged and acted indifferent. After she had disappeared below, Cam nodded at Amy.

Amy sighed and lowered herself into the hole. The rungs of the ladder were cold. She carefully climbed down the ladder and reached the bottom after a moment. It was about fifteen feet below the ceiling. The air was dank but thankfully it did not smell of sewer gases.

Cam quickly came down the ladder, surefooted, as if he had come this way many times before. "Watch your step," he muttered. "It's slippery."

Amy turned to follow the others.

Andrea led them about fifty metres down a dark, slippery tunnel. The tunnel was not a sewer itself, but some sort of maintenance corridor. They passed several sewer access points along the way until Andrea paused before one of them. "Here we are." The cover was round and had a wheel-shaped handle. Andrea gave it one short turn and pulled the bulky cover open. The faint smell of rotten eggs wafted out. Without hesitating, she climbed through, beckoning the others to follow her.

"Better and better," muttered Amy.

The sewer tunnel joined the maintenance corridor at a perpendicular angle. Everyone except for Brogan had to walk hunched over. The tunnel led downwards at a gentle angle, but there was no water. It turned sharply right after a short distance, and they walked at least one hundred metres before their tunnel intersected with another. They turned and reached an obstacle.

Andrea paused. In the shadowy light, her grey clothing made her look like a wraith. "A few hundred years ago, part of Sky City collapsed. The impact of the rubble was so intense, that everything underneath was destroyed. In some places, even the sewer lines caved in. We're in one of these old lines now. It took them several years to clean up the mess, and after they had finished, the government took over part of the land and gave it to the military. In turn, the military redeveloped the land and established a base. They never bothered to rebuild or repair most of the sewer lines. They didn't need the same capacity. They simply surveyed what remained, capped off the few that were still open, and forgot about them." Her voice sounded eerie and dramatic in the tunnel. There were no other sounds.

"Then a couple of years ago, a member of our group stumbled upon this line. When we realised that there were still some intact lines going underneath the military base, we knew it could be very useful to have a secret back door into the base."

"It doesn't look like you were successful in getting through," said Tai.

"Oh, but we were," replied Andrea, smiling. She fumbled with something in her pocket, and suddenly the obstruction vanished. The torch light shone down into the tunnel, revealing an open passageway.

“It was a hologram,” murmured Amy. She also thought she could hear sounds and voices coming from up ahead. “And some sort of sound damping device.”

Brogan’s eyes were wide with astonishment. “That’s amazing.”

“It gets even better. We were able to make some minor repairs,” explained Andrea, “and we now have access to several lines underneath the base. We use these artificial blockages to keep out unwanted visitors. Occasionally some bureaucrat orders inspections of the remaining lines, so we have to be careful.” Andrea started walking again, pausing only to reactivate the hologram. As they followed the tunnel, the voices and other noises became louder. “Last month, when we were trying to reopen another tunnel, we discovered something else. Not a sewer tunnel, but some sort of stone cavern.”

“Artificial, or natural?” asked Amy. She was beginning to wonder if Andrea and her league had somehow stumbled upon the very thing she and her friends were looking for.

“Perhaps you can tell us. You did say you were archaeologists, didn’t you?”

“I’m not getting anything,” murmured Serena. She examined the readings on her scanner, but there was no indication of unusual energy readings or advanced Gallifreyan technology. “Perhaps we’ll have better luck on the other side of this wall...” she murmured, tapping in a few extra codes on the device and concentrating on the readings.

“Hmm. That may not be our only problem any more,” said Saedon. He had been peering over her shoulder, reading the scanner, until something in the air caught his eye.

“What?”

“Look.”

A black hovercar was quickly approaching them. There were red lights flashing on the roof, and it sported a heavy duty phasor cannon. It dropped to the ground in front of them.

“That can’t be good,” said Serena. She pocketed the scanner.

A male voice came from the vehicle, amplified through a loudspeaker on the roof. “Stop what you’re doing and put your hands on your heads!”

Serena and Saedon had no choice. They calmly obeyed the instruction.

The black hovercar landed and two men climbed out of the vehicle. They were dressed in dark green fatigues with military insignia, and they were heavily armed.

A second black hovercar came into view and joined them. It hovered without landing, like a bird of prey waiting to pounce on a field mouse.

“What are you doing out here?” barked one of the men. He was a large, well-built man, with a blond crew cut and a chiseled face. The muscles in his jaw flexed as he sized up the two Time Lords, trying to determine if they were dangerous.

Serena fell back on her false identify. “Investigating a crime.”

“This is a restricted area. You have no authorization to be here.”

“I have every authorization,” she said, bluffing. “I’m with State Intelligence.”

“State Intelligence, hmm? Show me your credentials.”

“My code name is Serena. That is all you require,” she replied coolly.

“And what of your friend?”

“His identity is irrelevant. He is assisting me in my case.”

Saedon raised an eyebrow but remained silent. Serena seemed to be coping well enough with the military police.

The second man spoke. “They don’t look like Underworlders. Maybe she’s telling the truth. Let’s take them inside for questioning. We can verify her identity.” He had dark hair, also cut short, and he was as muscular as the other soldier, though in a more athletic manner. He handcuffed Saedon and bundled him into the back of their car. Saedon did not resist.

The first man walked behind Serena and forcefully guided her arms down behind her back so that he could handcuff her. He snapped the cuffs so hard that they hurt her wrists, but she restrained herself from crying out. "Hope you're telling the truth," he whispered in her ear, his lips curling up in a sadistic smile. "For your sake."

To be continued...