

The Forgotten Riddle—Part Five

by Christy Devonport

A Serena / Saedon Story
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Abstract: Will the friends finally solve the riddle? It won't be easy. The conclusion...

Serena and Saedon silently gazed out of the hovercar windows as the soldiers took them back to their base for interrogation. Serena no longer attempted to reach Saedon telepathically; his mind was closed to her. Instead she focused her attention on the route they were taking. The hovercar skirted the large wall for about a kilometre, rounded a corner, and finally reached a large gate that ran all of the way from the top of the wall down to the ground. The interlocking doors of the gate separated and rolled back quickly, and the hovercar passed inside. Serena briefly wondered why they had not simply flown over the wall, but inside she glimpsed several security measures. Small black sensors and cameras clung to the wall at regular intervals like watchful birds, monitoring the airspace over the large enclosure and ready to detect any intrusion from above. There were also more lethal devices such as phasor cannons and laser disrupters. It was a good thing she and Saedon had not tried to fly over the wall, as they would probably have been shot down. Even without the sensors, it would have been difficult to get in without being noticed. The inside of the compound was bustling with activity. Official hovercars glided past, while men and women in military uniform walked briskly between many buildings. Though it was austere, the compound was noticeably less desolate than the poverty-stricken city outside. There were even a few grassy areas dotted with trees.

They stopped in front of one particularly intimidating structure. It was only about three stories tall, but it was built of dark concrete and did not have a single window. There was only one door visible, and it was guarded by two soldiers who stood at attention.

Their military escorts climbed out of the hovercar and unlocked the door on Serena's side.

"Out," barked the fair-haired officer. He reached in and roughly pulled Serena by her arm. Her hands were still handcuffed behind her, and she stumbled.

His colleague stood behind him, aiming a sleek military phasor at the Time Lords to ensure their continued cooperation.

The first soldier ordered Saedon out of the car and escorted them to the building's entrance. He stopped a few paces back from the entrance and looked up at a small camera mounted above the door. "Lieutenants Laikoff and Wyse, with two prisoners for interrogation," he announced.

The two guards saluted smartly and the heavy metal door slid open in response to his request.

After being deprived of the contents of their pockets, Serena and Saedon found themselves deposited in a small, featureless room, while their captors left to check out their backgrounds. There were four chairs around a dull metal table, and Saedon sat down, as casual as ever. Serena walked over and stared at her reflection in the one way mirror covering the wall opposite the door.

Lieutenant Wyse, the dark haired officer, stood on the other side of the mirror. The strange woman's gaze seemed to bore into his own, and he shook off the eerie feeling that she was looking right at him in spite of the mirror. He pulled his eyes away and looked down at the desk where they had set the box of items collected from the prisoners. With the exception of a few objects such as the man's old-fashioned cigarette case and the small electronic pad Serena had been carrying, most of the objects were unrecognisable. Some of the objects were definitely electronic, but he could not figure out how to activate any of them. Instead he tried to access the contents of the reader. "Damn, she's put a password lock on this thing." He dropped the reader back into the box and looked at a man who was sitting in front of a workstation. "So— who are they?"

The man's name was Macey, and he was one of their unit's technical wizards. He had an olive complexion and wavy black hair which nearly exceeded regulation length. Wyse and Laikoff had called him in to check out the strangers. If anyone could verify their identities, he could. He searched the military database, accessing State Intelligence records unclassified to his security level, and perhaps just a little beyond. "There is an agent named Serena," he said, "who matches her description."

Wyse came over and read over his shoulder. "No picture?"

Macey shook his head. "But she has been assigned to work with Sky City police on the bombing of Cloud Mall. So her story about investigating a crime at least partly checks out."

"She'd better have a good reason for poking around down here," growled Laikoff. He stood in the doorway, and his eyes narrowed as he looked at the two people in the other room.

"What about the man. Saedon?"

"I can't find anything on him. Maybe it isn't his real name? It would help if I had a surname."

"Neither of them would give one. Those're probably just code names, anyway," said Wyse, rubbing his forehead.

"Here, let me have a look at that reader," suggested Macey, who was not easily discouraged. Wyse handed Serena's electronic reader to him, and Macey plugged a special interface cable into the back which connected it to his workstation. He started a password cracking program. Numbers and letters rapidly scrolled by in one window. While he was waiting, he pulled the box of collected objects closer and poked around. "They certainly had a lot of odd junk in their pockets." He ran his finger over the polished cigarette case. "Nice antique," he murmured.

"You recognise any of that stuff?" asked Wyse.

Macey picked up one of the devices and peered curiously at it. He pressed a couple of indentations marked with strange characters. Nothing happened. “Not a clue. Looks high tech though.” He could not find a way to open up the device, so he ran an electromagnetic scanner over it. The scanner chirped repeatedly. “Very sophisticated insides.”

“I thought we had the most sophisticated equipment.”

“Guess not. Must be true—Spies get the best toys.”

Laikoff was not amused. “Getting anywhere on the password cracker?” he muttered.

“Let’s see,” replied Macey, looking back at his screen. “Hmm. It looks like she’s set this thing up with a twenty character password. And I think there’s another layer of encryption beneath that. That’s just typical of an SI agent.” He entered a few instructions in another window on his workstation and frowned. “I don’t think my cracker program is making a dent in this thing.”

Wyse sighed. “She must be who she says she is. Who else would have access to this kind of equipment?”

“We can’t just let them go,” said Laikoff.

“We may have to,” replied Wyse. He looked thoughtful. “But if they’re going to continue hanging around in our jurisdiction, we can require them to have authorization sent through the appropriate channels.”

Laikoff scowled.

“Let’s keep this one by the book. State Intelligence agents are bad people to mess with,” said Wyse. “Besides, we can still take their fingerprints and retinal scans.” He picked up some equipment from the shelf in the corner. “It’s the best thing in the circumstances.”

Laikoff shrugged and muttered under his breath, but he knew he had lost the battle.

Serena saw the door open in the reflection. The two lieutenants entered the room, and she tried to read their expressions. Wyse looked indifferent, but Laikoff’s expression was a mixture of determination and annoyance.

“We need to take your fingerprints and retinal scans to confirm your identity,” said Wyse, who was carrying two electronic devices. One was a small palm sized reader while the other looked like a helmet frame with goggles.

She was inwardly relieved; Wyse sounded almost deferential, meaning that they had at least partially verified her identity as an agent for State Intelligence. She slowly turned around and studied the two officers. Laikoff met her icy gaze and refused to look away. His jaw twitched.

Wyse, the more diplomatic of the two, instructed Serena to place each finger on the reader until he had collected a full set of prints. He studied the device’s screen as it checked her prints against all known records. At last, it beeped. “No match.” He looked doubtful. Everyone on the planet over the age of six was supposed to keep fingerprints on file with the government, and there were procedures to make sure they were updated every five years. Occasionally ground dwellers managed to avoid the scans, but Serena looked like she was a topsider. Next, he tried the retinal scanner. He helped Serena pull the helmet frame over her head and pressed a button on the side when she was ready. After a moment, it beeped. “You can remove the scanner.”

Serena took off the helmet and handed it back to him. She smoothed her long hair, feeling more and more confidence with each passing minute.

He looked at the small viewscreen attached to the top of the helmet. “Nothing,” he said at last.

“There has to be a match,” muttered Laikoff. “Everyone’s fingerprints and retinal scans are supposed to be on record. Even State Intelligence keeps records on its agents.”

“Not all of their agents,” said Serena. “Not any more.”

“Check him,” snapped Laikoff.

Saedon smiled good-naturedly. “You’ll find I’m the same.” He obliged, however, and pressed his own fingers into the reader.

The device completed its scan and beeped. “Nothing,” said Wyse. “You two are ghosts to the system.” He repeated the retinal scan with Saedon and shook his head one last time.

“It’s necessary for state security,” said Serena.

“I suppose we can’t be too careful, with these Minimalists on the loose,” said Wyse.

Laikoff’s hostility had not faded. “Well, I don’t give a damn if you’re with State Intelligence. If you’re going to be poking around down here, you need to file with Military Ground Operations,” he growled. “The ground is our jurisdiction.”

Serena’s eyes flashed angrily. Laikoff did not want to back down.

“State Intelligence can go anywhere. Anytime.” Saedon spoke calmly. “Especially when there has been a crime.” The amusement which had been flickering in his eyes since the lieutenants had picked them up had vanished.

Saedon’s tone of voice reminded Wyse of his place as a lieutenant. It suddenly occurred to him that he knew almost nothing about the strange man—but Saedon definitely had the unmistakable air of someone with solid authority. He guessed that he was fairly high up in the food chain at State Intelligence. It was time to let the strangers go. “You’re absolutely right. Is there anything we can do to help with your investigation?”

His colleague was not so easily mollified. Laikoff glared at Wyse and did not let the strangers respond to his offer of help. He turned his attention back to Serena. “I insist that we have to have some sort of authorisation from your superiors.” The corner of his mouth curled up as he had an idea. “In the interests of state security, it’s the least you can do.”

In such a computer-dependent society, Serena did not think it would difficult to fake such an authorisation. “I think we can arrange something. If you would kindly return our belongings and escort us off of your base so we can get back to work, lieutenant?” Her tone was chilly, and her request sounded more like a command.

“Wow,” murmured Amy. Andrea had led them to a large chamber, while Cam had remained outside to talk to members of one of the work teams. Portable lights were strung up around the room, providing spotty illumination. The room looked ancient, and some of it was damaged. In fact, the area around the entrance had been shored up with support beams by the Minimalists. The symmetrical chamber was about thirty metres deep and fifteen metres wide. There were six smooth support columns, three to each side. They bordered a damaged mosaic floor which led to what might have been a second entrance at the opposite end of the room. Unfortunately, it had caved in under a section of collapsed ceiling.

The small group spread out in the room. Amy slowly gravitated toward one of the side walls. Exquisitely drawn hieroglyphics marked the walls, and there were several lavish paintings of people in colourful robes. The paintings had an ethereal quality, and the artist had taken great care to emphasise shadows and facial features. Each one seemed unique, but she could almost see a family resemblance between the faces. The eyes of each character were slightly slanted down, and the nose was long and flared out slightly at the nostrils. She walked along, studying the writing and the people who had used it. “If only Serena could see this,” she murmured.

In the meantime, Brogan wandered down the centre of the room, trying to take everything in at once. Andrea followed him, observing his expression of curiosity as if she

was trying to see everything through his eyes. Everything seemed strange and wonderful to the inexperienced boy who had so little experience with other cultures. It did not matter that pieces of the mosaic floor were missing or that some of the paintings on the walls were damaged. He reached the end of the chamber and looked at the pile of rubble which sealed it.

“What’s behind that?” he asked, pointing at the rocks.

“We’re not sure. It certainly looks like there might have been a doorway at both ends of this chamber,” replied Andrea. “We originally planned to clear the passageway, but our measurements indicate that the cave in is too deep to make the effort worthwhile.”

“Oh.”

“We’re currently working on opening up another tunnel nearby that leads right under the centre of the base,” the leader continued. “It’s the final area we really need access to.” She looked wistfully around the room. “I suppose this chamber will have to wait for another day. We can’t exactly bring in trained archaeologists to do a proper excavation. So it’s probably better this way.”

Tai sauntered over and studied some of the hieroglyphics on the wall near the rubble. She could not understand any of them and she had no particular academic interest, but she had nothing better to do. Gazing absently upward, she suddenly smiled to herself. Faintly etched into the ceiling above the pile of rock was a large symbol which looked like a stylised manka. She casually walked over to Amy, who was at the other side of the rock pile.

“I wish we had a dictionary,” Amy commented. “I would love to be able to read these symbols.”

“Who needs a dictionary,” whispered Tai so that Andrea could not overhear. She indicated the symbol above with her eyes.

Amy followed her gaze, and her eyes widened when she realised what was overhead. She nodded and raised an eyebrow appreciatively.

“Did you find something,” asked Andrea.

Something else caught Amy’s eye. She leaned down to examine some of the rocks. “I’m not sure,” she replied. There was something poking out from behind one of the larger rocks “That’s odd.”

“What?” asked Brogan, kneeling next to her.

“Here, help me move this rock,” she said. Together, Amy and Brogan shifted the rock out of the way, uncovering a thin plastic case, about the size of a playing card but several times thicker. The external case was cracked, but there was something shiny inside which seemed to be in one piece. “Any idea what this is, Andrea?”

The Minimalist leader took the object from her and examined it. “Hmm. Looks like there was a label, but not much of it is left. Might be some kind of data storage device. Maybe Gregory will be able to tell us what it is.”

“It looks old,” said Amy.

“Perhaps the military lost it when they were cleaning up the area after the city collapsed,” suggested Andrea.

“Or maybe it was here from before that,” said Amy thoughtfully. “You know, this is just the sort of place my colleague and I came to study. Ancient artifacts on advanced worlds. It would be good if we could find the others.”

Serena and Saedon came out into the daylight. Wyse had volunteered to drive them back up to Sky City, while Laikoff stayed behind to take care of some paperwork, still unhappy with the outcome of the interrogation.

“I know you’re just trying to do your job,” said Wyse, “but be sure to get that authorisation sent down to Ground Ops. Then we can let all of our scout units know to keep

an eye out for you without interfering in your work.” He was going out of his way to be helpful now, slightly embarrassed by his colleague’s behaviour.

“Thank you, lieutenant,” replied Serena in her most soothing voice.

Wyse opened the rear door of the hovercar and walked around to the driver’s side.

As Saedon climbed in, Serena discretely pulled a small device from one of her pockets. Everything had been returned to them, including the device which had puzzled Macey. She held it in her palm and pressed one of the buttons. While it had remained dormant for Macey, it instantly responded to Serena’s touch; it had a DNA key built in and would only work for Time Lords—a little precaution she had taken with most of her advanced equipment. It would not do to let such sophisticated devices fall into the hands of semi-technological societies for their dissection. She was grateful no one had tried to open it up for examination, as it also had a tiny self-destruct mechanism built in.

She quickly moved it around, and a small light began to blink on the top. Her eyes grew wide. She had not really expected it to find anything.

Unfortunately, Wyse had started the hovercar engine. She could not spend any more time searching the area. She slipped the scanner back into her jacket pocket and climbed into the backseat next to Saedon.

The travellers reluctantly followed Andrea out of the chamber to one of the nearby tunnels where her colleagues were working. Cam was talking to several men who were trying to open up a blockage. One of the work lights shone through a small gap at the top of the rubble, revealing an open passageway on the other side.

Amy sneezed. The air was very dusty from their endeavours.

“How are things progressing,” Andrea asked.

Cam turned away from the work team. “We should be through this in another day or two,” he said. He smiled. “The team was able to send a small scouting robot through this morning to start surveying the tunnel.” He paused, tossing a wary glance at Amy, Tai, and Brogan. “Everything is just as we expected.”

“Excellent.” Andrea looked very pleased. Does the tunnel go where we thought it would?”

“Looks that way.”

Tai observed the interchange between the leader and her colleague and wondered about the details they were leaving out.

“There was something special about that tunnel,” said Tai. They had returned to the Minimalist base, and Andrea had left the trio alone in their spartan quarters to spend the rest of the evening.

Amy nodded. “I had that feeling, too. I wonder what’s so special about it.”

“How come they don’t care ‘bout that big chamber?” asked Brogan. He sat next to Amy, feeling very bored.

“It’s not important to them. They’re not digging out those tunnels for scientific study.”

“So what? They want to break into the base? Why?” pondered Tai, twisting one of her braided locks in her slender fingers. “To steal military technology or weapons?”

“T’ free some more people?” suggested Brogan.

“To destroy it?” Amy remembered the scout cars they had avoided on the streets of the Underworld. “Maybe they want to reduce the military presence on the ground.”

“I suppose. But there must be other bases.”

Brogan chimed in. “Then there must be somethin’ special ‘bout it.”

Serena sighed in relief as Lieutenant Wyse sped off in his military scout car. At her request, he had dropped them near the police station. Wyse did not seem like a bad man, but Serena never liked dealing with military types, not to mention that his colleague had been a little too ballistic. Still, she and Saedon had survived their interrogation without too much effort, and she had even managed to acquire a small clue to the location of the next key to the Gallifreyan riddle.

It was early evening now, and the daylight was just starting to fade. The skies were busy with commuter traffic, and a steady stream of people came out of the buildings and hoverparks, heading home for dinner, evening entertainments, and rest.

“We need to get back onto that base,” said Serena.

Saedon smiled. “So. You did find something. I thought I noticed you running a quick scan before we left.”

Serena pulled the small scanner out of her pocket. “It was a stroke of luck. We’ve got plenty of work ahead though. I’d like to go back in there tomorrow, if possible.” She paced a few times, thinking of a new strategy. “And if we find out that the Gallifreyan key *is* in the burial chamber under the base, we’re going to need to find a way in.” She thought of their options. “Perhaps we can make use of their transmat technology. It looks like they’ve only developed site to site transmat. Could you get hold of some of their equipment and modify it?”

“Certainly.” He understood her plan. If the Queen’s chamber was heavily buried from the city’s collapse, they were not going to be able to get into it by conventional means. A site to site transmat would have been useless for that reason, but with a few clever modifications and the addition of one or two extra components from one of his Gallifreyan gadgets, Saedon would be able to make a transmat controller which could get them in and out of the chamber without having a remote receiver.

“I’ll work on getting our access arranged. Shall we meet tomorrow morning at nine?”

Her colleague agreed, and they parted ways for the evening.

Klein rubbed his forehead. He had not meant to work late after the chaotic and extremely long day, but there had been too many distractions and too much to do. Not only was he having to deal with the mall bombing, but now there was the small matter of the Underworld prisoner escape and the two murdered police guards. He was not having a good week.

To make matters worse, they were having a problem with the computer system. There was some sort of confusion over a missing prisoner from the overnight holding cells. One of the guards swore that he had locked up a man in cell 20, and even the prisoner in neighbouring cell 18 corroborated his story, but the cell had been inexplicably empty in the morning. When they had checked their records, nothing could be found in the computer data base indicating that they had ever had a prisoner in that cell at all. However, Officer Rigby from downstairs insisted he had processed paperwork on a strange man they had picked up the day before who had been trespassing at the stadium with an Underworlder. It was a mystery. And Klein did not like mysteries. Just to be safe, he had ordered an audit of the computer system.

He wondered how Serena was doing in her own independent searches.

“Hello.”

He jumped.

“Sorry Michael,” said Serena, standing in the doorway. “I didn’t think you’d still be here.”

“I’m so glad to see you,” he said, smiling warmly. He indicated the seat on the other side of his desk, and she sat down. “Did you have any progress with your leads?”

“A little,” she replied, “but nothing definitive yet. You?”

“Not really. This hasn’t been one of my better days. I was just trying to dig my way out of some of this paperwork.” His desk was covered in papers, files, photos, and electronic tablets. “Listen, I’m starving. Do you want to go out and get a bite to eat? I know a terrific place that’s just around the corner.”

Serena was almost going to decline, but then she changed her mind. “That sounds like a good idea.” A little relaxation might do her some good, and she realised she liked Klein’s company. He was so honest and hard-working. It would make a nice change after spending a day with her more secretive colleague.

Amy and the others spent a quiet evening locked in their quarters at the Minimalist base. Being locked up was not exactly what Amy had in mind when she thought about relaxing after all of the recent events. She longed for the comforts of the TARDIS—to take a long bath, to cook and eat a proper meal, and to sleep in her cozy bed.

At least she was not alone. Tai was not much of a conversationalist, but the two women occasionally discussed plans and compared notes on the Minimalists and the Gallifreyan riddle. Neither of them really trusted each other, and their cooperation was born of necessity. Amy did not mind when Tai decided to catnap for part of the evening. It gave her time to chat with Brogan. They shared stories. He told Amy a little more about his life on Krimshon, and she related some of her memories of Earth.

No one disturbed them, except when Megan brought them dinner. Amy had tried to engage the young woman in conversation, but she had not stayed long. In fact, she had seemed a little preoccupied. Amy wondered what was going on in the other Minimalist meeting rooms. They could occasionally hear people talking as they passed in the corridor, but they could rarely make out any of the conversations.

She was just thinking about climbing into her cot to get some sleep when there was a light knock on the door. Andrea let herself in.

Tai stirred in her cot but did not get up.

“Gregory had a chance to look at that memory card you found,” said Andrea, jumping straight to the point. She smiled. “You were right—it is very old. A few hundred years, at least. He transferred the data over to an electronic pad. I thought you might like to take a look at it.” She held out the pad for Amy.

“What’s on it?” She accepted the pad eagerly, and Brogan leaned over the table to look at it.

“It contains data from an archaeological survey. We are definitely not the first people to stumble upon that chamber. Some of the data has been corrupted, and we really don’t have any use for it because we already have the sewer lines—but I know you’re interested in archaeology...”

Amy thanked her profusely. “This is wonderful.” She looked at the electronic pad, and a thought occurred to her. She was almost afraid to ask. “Why are you being so nice to us?”

The Minimalist leader came over to the table and sat down. She looked thoughtful for a moment. At last, she said, “Some of my comrades have asked me the same question.” She paused. “They have valid arguments, but then they don’t know about your *unusual* background. I can’t help feeling that we could learn from each other. You come from places where people have survived and flourished. We’ll be lucky if we survive on this planet for another five hundred years, considering the rates of overconsumption and overpopulation.”

The young boy looked into the woman’s sad brown eyes. “This place ain’t like my home,” he said. “Life ain’t easy there, but it’s much simpler.”

Andrea gave a hollow laugh. “Ah, the wisdom of youth. That’s all I’ve ever really wanted, to lead a simpler life. But it seems an impossibility.”

“Are you sure that terrorising innocent people is the way to change things? There must be another way,” said Amy.

“They are *not* innocent,” replied Andrea. She frowned. “They have to learn that there is a price for living the way they do.” She stood up. “There is no other way. People can talk all they want, but when it comes down to it, sometimes you just have to take action to make things happen.” With that, she turned and left the room.

Tai lifted her head and rested it on her palm. “She’s too stubborn to see any alternatives.”

“Too right,” replied Amy.

Brogan remained silent, thinking over the conversation.

“So, how did you get assigned to work the Minimalist case, anyway?” asked Klein. He took the last bite of his dinner, a baked noodle dish called Tirinian pie. He had just finished telling Serena about how he had joined the police force, and he was still very curious about her past.

It was not the first awkward question he had asked her that evening, but she was ever skillful at providing vague answers. Pretending to be an agent for State Intelligence was akin to being a spy, and it had its advantages. “Oh, I suppose I just fell into it.”

Michael Klein was not the sort of man who gave up easily. “Have you been chasing the Minimalists for a long time?”

“Not really,” replied Serena. This question was easier to deal with, when she could be a little more honest. “The bombing incident was my first exposure to them.” Serena absently twisted a fork between her fingers, disturbing the remains of a partially consumed chef salad.

Klein was inwardly disappointed. He had been hoping she would be able to provide some inside government information that would help him track down the terrorists.

“Still, it isn’t the first time I’ve dealt with desperate people,” added Serena, remembering many of the other worlds she had visited.

“Anything similar?”

Serena pushed a dark thought into the shadows of her mind, remembering the times when she acted irrationally. She took a sip of water. “Desperate people have tunnel vision. They can only see the path that they have chosen, and no other. Every action they take blinds them a little more.” She felt a little ashamed, remembering one particular incident where she had put many lives in danger. “If they’re lucky, they get a second chance. But it frequently takes some devastating event to put things into perspective.”

Klein could see the darkness in Serena’s eyes when she spoke. Something in her voice was chilling, but at the same time he felt a twinge of pity for her. “We haven’t seen the worst of it yet.”

“No. These Minimalists have demonstrated their willingness to kill and destroy to make a statement. They’re probably also willing to die for their beliefs because it will make them martyrs. Even if we manage to arrest a few of the leaders, these people aren’t going to disappear.”

They were interrupted by a waiter, who brought Klein a warm drink called bracka. Serena declined.

“I just wish we could predict what they were going to do next. Keep them from killing more innocent people,” murmured Klein.

“Me too.” Serena sighed, but her thoughts were not of saving unknown people. Instead, she thought of her missing friends. She had half hoped to hear from Amy by now, and she felt a little guilty at her lack of progress in tracking down the Minimalists who had

'rescued' Amy and Brogan from the police van. She had spent her day reacting to events—the unexpected bombing at the jail, the surprise encounter with Saedon, the interrogation at the military base. It was time for her to take control again.

"Is something the matter?" Klein had noticed Serena's distant gaze and wondered what thoughts were going on behind her deep blue eyes.

Serena blinked and gave a half smile. "Everything's fine." She suddenly felt inspired by a fresh idea. "Shall we get back to the station?"

Klein opened one of the offices a few doors down from his own. "You can use Steve's old office while you're working with us. I had Baxley clear out some of the boxes today. Steve retired a couple of months ago, and no one has really had a chance to clean out his office yet. So if you don't mind the clutter..."

The room was a little messy, and the bookshelves were overloaded with books and files, but there was a decent computer on the desk. "Thank you," Serena warmly replied. "This was—unexpected."

"Yeah, well, I know some people get ruffled when they have to work with State Intelligence agents, but we're all on the same team." Klein avoided eye contact, as he knew he was really being nice to her because he liked her, and this embarrassed him. "If you need anything—"

"Mike!" cried a fellow detective. He was a few years older than Klein, with salt-and-pepper colored hair and mustache. He rushed down the corridor to join them. "We just got a tip! We have the location of one of the active Minimalist bases!"

"What! Are you sure it's legit?"

"There's no doubt. It was Spider. He used his encryption key to make the call."

"Who's Spider?" asked Serena.

"There's someone in the Minimalist group who's working both sides," explained Klein. "He calls himself Spider. We don't know much about him—in fact, we don't even know if it's a man or a woman, because he uses a device to disguise his voice on the phone—but nearly every tip he has given us has been solid." He turned back to his colleague. "Let's put two teams together. I'll lead one, and you can take the other. Let's keep it quiet for as long as possible. Spread a false rumour that we're going to raid a drug factory on the other side of the Underworld—I don't want these guys to get word that we're coming this time."

The other man nodded and rushed off to begin assembling his team.

Serena and Klein stopped by Klein's office to collect some things and make a few phone calls. While he was rummaging through his desk looking for something, Serena continued to probe for information. "How long has this Spider been helping you?"

"On and off for the last year. At first he made contact very sporadically. But his accuracy has gotten better in the last few months. We think it's someone who's working their way deeper and deeper into the Minimalist fold, but that's about all we know."

"A double agent," murmured Serena.

"Someone from SI?" guessed Klein.

"Maybe." She shrugged. "And this Spider has never double crossed you?"

"Not really. He's been wrong a couple of times, but he's been right most of the time. This is the biggest tip he's ever given us. Mostly he tips us off to Minimalist sponsored robberies and gives us general information about who's involved."

"Well, whoever it is must be taking a lot of risks to get this information in to you."

"No kidding. At least it evens out the odds a little. Sometimes it seems like the Minimalists are the ones who get all of the breaks." He frowned.

Serena read the sarcasm in his voice and his creased brow. "You think the Minimalists have someone working in here, don't you?"

“It wouldn’t surprise me. We’ve been so close a couple of times to reeling in one of their top leaders—we almost captured Cam Duretski on one occasion—and our plans always fall apart at the last minute.”

Amy awoke to shouting. She had only just fallen asleep. “What now?” She was annoyed at having another night’s sleep disturbed.

“It just started,” replied Tai.

Before the women had a chance to climb out of their cots, the door burst open.

“Get yourselves together. We’re leaving!” barked Andrea, flicking the light switch on.

Amy shielded her eyes from the bright light for a moment, squinting through her fingers at the haggard leader. Andrea shut the door on them again to make sure they did not try to leave without a Minimalist escort; she did not want her prize guests disappearing unexpectedly.

Brogan yawned. Even the young boy was getting accustomed to waking up unexpectedly.

“Don’t tell me *this* isn’t a raid,” muttered Amy. She climbed out of her cot and went to the table to pick up the electronic pad Andrea had given her.

Tai stood up and stretched as luxuriously as a cat, seemingly unaffected by the chaos outside.

Amy looked absently around the room for a moment, and then had an idea.

“Quick!” hissed Amy. “Does anyone have anything to write with?”

“Does it look like I have a pen?” Tai raised an eyebrow.

Amy glared at her. “Anything. Even a sharp object will do.”

Brogan shook his head, and Tai reached down to her thigh and remembered that the police had confiscated her knife.

Amy sighed in exasperation. “We’ve got to leave Serena some kind of a message.”

“Why don’t you just leave a message in that electronic thing,” suggested Saedon’s companion.

“No,” replied the frustrated woman. “I don’t want the police to find this. It will only make things worse.” Her gaze settled on a far corner of the room. A thick layer of dust had settled in the corner farthest from the door. A smile flashed across her lips. She went to the corner and carefully knelt down.

Brogan came over to watch her trace something in the dust with her index finger.

“What’s that?”

“A message.”

Klein stood in the middle of the now deserted Minimalist compound. “We were so close!” He was very annoyed, and he had himself to blame. Someone had certainly tipped off the terrorists that the police were coming, but who? It was no surprise. While they were finalising plans, a couple of the men accidentally overheard Klein and the other team leader discussing the mission, and all hope of obscuring their destination quickly vanished as the news flew like wildfire through the department. Anyone who had been around at the police station during the evening could have sent warning down to the ground.

“Bracka’s still warm,” replied one of the other officers who was checking out the main conference room. “They must have left in a big hurry.”

Serena stood in the corridor, watching the police look into each room. Chairs were overturned and things were in general disarray, but there were no terrorists. Her friends were not here, either.

“We’ve got to be faster next time.” Klein turned to talk to one of the other men.

A little disappointed, Serena wandered down the hall and peered into a few of the rooms. There was little to see: a few chairs and portable tables, some old office equipment, a few cots.

Something caught her eye, and she entered one of the rooms. She grew more excited as she realised there was something traced in the dust on the floor:

*Riddle chamber —
Check blocked sewers.*

A.

The message was unmistakable. If any of the others had seen it, they would have been confused and probably eternally mystified; after all, Amy had written her message in English. The Gallifreyan smiled at her friend's cleverness and quickly erased the evidence with her foot. The raid was not a complete loss, after all.

The Minimalists were always prepared for quick evacuations, but warning almost came too late. Andrea sat in the back of the van, watching Cam drive through some of the darker streets of the Underworld to reach one of their backup locations. They had several, and only a few people at the highest levels of the organisation knew where all of them were located. Many of the people had scattered at the first sign of trouble and would not even be joining them at the new headquarters. Only the core members would meet there.

"I get so tired of running," murmured Andrea. "This endless war is so frustrating."

Amy opened her mouth to say something, and then closed it. She wanted to suggest that there were better ways to correct society's problems, but she knew the terrorist leader was beyond reason. She sighed and exchanged a glance with her young friend whose eyes were drooping sleepily.

Cam shook his head. "If it's wearing us down, think how it's wearing *them* down." He turned down a quiet back street that ran between darkened factories. "We have to keep at it until they get the message."

"I know." The dark-eyed woman looked around the van. Cam was driving, but no one sat in the front passenger seat. Andrea sat in the back with the three time travellers where she was less likely to be spotted behind dark tinted windows. Ironically, she felt a little more relaxed than usual. When she was around more members of her Minimalist flock, she felt compelled to be the leader, to be encouraging and to motivate her people. In this smaller group, there was less pressure. She did not need to motivate the offworlders, who already seemed marginally sympathetic, even if they did not agree with her methods. As for Cam, she had known him too long to worry about playing a perfect role. "I think we should lay low for a while after our next event."

Cam did not speak as he pulled them into an underground parking garage. It was nearly empty, except for a few scattered cars which were in poor condition. He pulled them up to a side wall and stopped the engine. "Well, ordinarily I'd disagree," he said, turning around in his seat to look Andrea squarely in the face. "But you may be right. It's probably not a bad strategy for this one."

Andrea nodded slowly, thoughtfully. No more was said of the event, and Amy wondered what they were planning.

Serena listened to the creaking floor and the hum of electronic equipment as she sat with her eyes closed, meditating in her temporary office at the police station. It was proving to be a much quieter night than the previous one. After they had returned from the raid, most of the other officers had gone home, including Michael Klein. No one was working late

tonight if they did not have to. She knew there were several people still working nightshifts downstairs, handling emergencies and booking offenders, but it was quiet on the upper floors. It was actually peaceful.

She was glad for the rest. The arrival of daylight would herald another busy day, and she had a lot planned. She had taken care of a few bureaucratic requirements by hacking into several computer systems and sending authorisation down to the military ground operations base for her supposed State Intelligence activities. It occurred to her that someone in State Intelligence might pick up on her alteration, so she took extra pains to hide her tracks. Thanks to Amy's message and her own little discovery, she also downloaded everything she could find on the old Underworld sewer systems. She even managed to find a little more information about the military base, an easier task now that she knew what was there. The pieces of the puzzle were starting to fall into place. All she had to do now was rescue her friends and get into the buried chamber.

Was it really that simple? Was she oversimplifying the situation? She racked her brain and tried to think of some way to stop the terrorists from hurting more innocent people, but she could not think of anything that would be a good, long term solution. Klein's society was on the brink of disaster. She did not know what form it would take, but she knew that the situation was unstable. She felt incredibly sad, knowing there was little she could do to help.

A familiar voice echoed in her mind. "So much for progress."

She opened her eyes and pictured the Doctor sitting in the empty chair across from her, leaning on the red question mark handle of his umbrella.

"What would you do?" she whispered.

She imagined the way the Doctor would have sighed. She could hear the patience etched in his voice. "Sometimes these things just have to work themselves out."

She imagined the way his eyes might have looked—the mixture of wisdom and sadness which came from his experiences of helping people and knowing he could not possibly solve all of the problems he encountered.

"Sometimes all you can do is give people a little push in the right direction."

The difficulty, she realised, was that she did not know which direction to push.

Amy and the others did not have much time to get used to their new location once morning arrived. Soon after daybreak, Andrea and Cam took them back into the sewer to their underground operation. There was a high level of excitement among the workers when they arrived.

"In another hour we're going to be able to get a person through that hole," said Cam. He was referring to the blocked tunnel they had been working on. The workers had enlarged the gap further during the night, but it would still be several hours before the passage was cleared enough to send equipment through.

"I see you're making progress," said a man from behind them. He had a tenor's voice.

"Lief!" cried Andrea. "You made it!" She rushed forward and they grasped hands briefly like old friends.

"I came as soon as I got your call last night," he replied. He had a smooth way of speaking, and his accent had a slight lilt. He was one of the tallest men in the room, with a wild mane of dark hair and large hazel eyes. His eyes sparkled a little bit, perhaps reflecting his reckless nature. "Your timing couldn't be better. This operation is going to be more effective than we could have hoped." He walked forward with Andrea to inspect the progress on the tunnel.

"Yes, I believe so," replied Andrea. Her glance settled on the offworlders before it returned to her friend. "Let's talk in private," she suggested. She turned to Cam. "Escort

our guests to the large chamber and post a guard. Then join us in the maintenance room off of tunnel three.” She turned to go to the suggested meeting place.

The stranger eyed the offworlders briefly with curiosity before turning to follow Andrea. “Who are they? Did you catch them snooping?” His lilting voice carried down the tunnel.

Cam cleared his throat to get Amy’s attention. “You heard her. Let’s go,” he ordered. Ben, one of the Minimalists from the jail break, came forward to assist him.

Amy missed Andrea’s response. She reluctantly turned away from the fading conversation.

Amy glanced across the large chamber. She and Brogan were sitting at the far end near the rubble, just in view of Ben who was standing guard. As long as they kept their voices down, they could talk without being overheard. He stood in the entrance, leaning against the wall and blocking their exit with his bulk. His expression was relaxed, but there was a serious gleam in his eyes. He also had a compact phasor strapped to his hip, so there was no mistaking his intent to keep them in the chamber as instructed.

At the moment, they were more interested in the datapad. Amy found herself wishing for Serena’s help. Andrea’s technical wizard, Gregory, had recovered a fair amount of data from the storage disc they had discovered, but most of it was text—which Amy could not read. She struggled to make sense of the assorted diagrams, pictures, and sketches saved amongst the data, but without an understanding of the text, she was having about as much luck as Brogan in deciphering any meaning. She was tempted to ask Ben to read the material for them but thought better of it, in case it revealed anything important to their own search.

Tai preferred not to waste any time studying the data. She found the whole situation boring, and she longed for some action. She moved around the chamber like a nervous cat. She paced up and down the center of the chamber. She leaned against the columns and sat down near the walls, never settling in one place for more than ten or fifteen minutes. Sometimes she would glance at Ben and give him a flirtatious look, hoping he would take her bait. He merely returned the occasional smile or nod in amusement without budging an inch. He was too disciplined to be distracted.

“I wish I could read some of this,” murmured Amy. She rubbed her eyes, which were irritated and tired. Lack of good sleep was taking its toll on her.

“Me, too,” agreed Brogan. He watched Tai as she wandered between the columns to study the hieroglyphics on one of the walls. “Amy,” the boy continued, “when we get back t’ the TARDIS, could you teach me t’ read?”

“Sure.” Her smile faded a little. “Oh, but I don’t know how I can teach you to write in your own language. We only understand each other thanks to Serena’s technology.”

The boy looked dejected, and then he suddenly brightened. “Maybe Serena has some other technol’gy we can use.”

She smiled and felt silly for her short-sightedness. She really needed to get a good night’s sleep if she was missing such obvious ideas. “Of course. I’m sure she has something we can use.” She immediately began to think of how she might use the TARDIS database to set up a holographic teacher.

“And maybe I could learn your language, too. I’d really like t’ see where you come from.”

“Perhaps after this trip.” She would not mind going back to one of the other Earth time periods, but she did not exactly relish the thought of visiting her own home. Even though she had faced the illusion of her father in the trial of fear, she still did not relish encountering him for real. Of course, with Serena in charge, it was always hard to say

where—or when—they would end up next, but she liked seeing Brogan taking an interest in learning. He was such an inquisitive child, and she was more than a little glad that he had chosen to join them on their journey. She did not think very much of the life he had left behind on Krimshon, working at the inn and having so little opportunity to grow and learn.

Amy turned her attention back to the datapad. “There just has to be something useful here. We just can’t sit around here permanently.” She aimlessly scrolled through the data, trying to make some sense of the alien words, but it was useless.

Saedon returned in the morning in his blue aircar, ready to continue their search.

“I’ve set up clearances to get us back onto the military base,” explained Serena. “And we have a better cover story.”

“I’ve got a better idea.”

They were still flying through the air traffic lanes of Sky City, and Serena realised they were not descending at all. “Oh? Where are we going?”

“Just wait till you see,” he replied, his eyes twinkling. He refused to say anything else.

This annoyed Serena. She had spent a lot of time working out a plan to get them onto the military base, and her Gallifreyan colleague was managing to screw it up already. He was not very good at communicating his intentions. *If only we had telepathic communication*, she thought. She struggled to control her temper for the rest of the drive.

They pulled out of the traffic and hovered in front of a large building. Several signs proclaimed it as Sky City’s Convention Centre. After a moment, Saedon swiftly maneuvered them into the adjoining carpark. This gave Serena a brief view of the base of the convention centre, which was so massive that it required dual support mechanisms. Multiple anti-gravity supports were combined with solid structural supports that went all the way down to the ground, disappearing into the murky clouds below.

After they parked, Saedon pulled a nondescript briefcase from the backseat and led them into the Convention Centre. He maintained his silence, and Serena grew increasingly perturbed.

It was very busy inside. They passed an auditorium, two large halls, and several smaller rooms, all bustling with people. Signs marked the different areas and provided visitors with directions. Two people were hanging a large poster over the entrance to the auditorium which read, “Welcome to Sky City’s Annual Toy Exposition, Gavva 18th – 24th.” Gavva was the name of the current month, and Serena noted that the exposition was starting the next day. People in the halls were busy setting up booths and displays as well as demos of all kinds. Some of the displays were far more extravagant than anything she had seen at the mall. The exposition appeared to have many purposes. It provided a venue for designers and manufacturers to meet up and compare new ideas. Merchants could sample new products and make sales decisions for the upcoming year. Several signs announced that children were welcome; others advertised toys for “bigger kids”. Why had Saedon brought her to this place?

They turned down a side corridor and walked straight past a security guard.

“I’m sorry, you can’t go that way!” The startled guard quickly came after them.

Serena noticed the “no unauthorised entry” sign marking the corridor and wondered what new lies her colleague would invent for their presence.

“What?” he replied, turning. He had adopted an expression of surprise and mild annoyance. “Were you not informed that we would be doing inspections this week?”

“Inspections, sir?”

“Yes. We’ve been sent by Sky City’s planning board,” Saedon added, hesitating as if to jog the guard’s memory. “To inspect the building.”

The guard shook his head. “Sorry, sir, but I haven’t received notification.”

Saedon looked distinctly annoyed at the apparent miscommunication. “Director John Allismar approved our visit. Why, I have his authorisation right here.” He pulled a data pad from the inside pocket of his jacket and showed it to the bewildered man.

The pad showed a signed authorisation from the director of the convention centre, arranging the government inspection. The documentation looked perfectly acceptable. “I’m terribly sorry, sir,” he apologised. “It must be some sort of oversight.” As standard procedure, he reached for his cell phone to make a quick call to verify their visit.

Saedon interrupted him. “Here’s my ID,” he said, handing the man a card with his picture and name (given as Ed Noas, Serena noted). He somehow managed to make eye contact with the guard, who seemed momentarily befuddled. “I’m sure everything is in order,” Saedon added in an almost hypnotic fashion. The effect lasted for only a moment, but it had its desired effect.

The guard replaced his phone at his waist and smiled. “Sorry to have bothered you, sir. I see everything is in order.” With that, he nodded and turned away to resume his post.

Serena frowned. Her colleague’s use of hypnotism bordered on being unethical, but at the same time, no harm had been done. The relatively minor event left her with disturbing thoughts about his behaviour—and her own occasional errors in judgement.

At the end of the hall, they paused at a door which required a card key for access. Saedon was obviously prepared for this and slid his phony ID card through the reader. The door lock popped open. He grinned at Serena and said, “After you.”

As she stepped across the threshold, she found herself standing on a landing where they could catch an open-faced lift. “Where does this go?” she snapped.

“All the way down to the ground.” Saedon was beaming, completely oblivious to her rapidly darkening mood.

A quizzical expression flickered on Serena’s face for the briefest moment until she recalled the dual support system she had seen outside. The convention centre used ground supports as well as anti-gravity supports to keep itself in the sky.

Before she could ask any questions, Saedon added, “In fact, it takes us right into the heart of the military base, and no one is going to know we are there.”

So much for her plan.

Megan crept through the sewer tunnels, quietly approaching the maintenance room Andrea and Lief had retired to for their private meeting. She wanted to get a better idea of their plans for the tunnels. She had only become aware of them recently, and it was through sheer luck that she had managed to get herself into the right place at the right time to gain access. Well, it was mostly luck. Her boyfriend’s planning had something to do with it. She smiled at the thought of her boyfriend, Luther, and absently fingered the silver charm which dangled on a chain around her neck—a present from him. She adored him and would do almost anything he asked of her. After they had started dating, he had revealed that he was an undercover agent for State Intelligence. When her own brother had gotten himself mixed up with the Minimalists, Luther had suggested that Megan should try to follow him into the group. She would be perfectly placed to collect information on their activities. It gave her a little thrill of excitement every time she discovered something useful and was able to get a message out to Luther or the police.

She was a little worried about the things she had seen in the tunnels. The Minimalists had amassed a huge quantity of explosives, and a couple of the work parties appeared to be installing them to destroy part of the tunnel system. It did not make any sense to her. She knew they were under a military base, but the base did not seem like a very interesting target. The Minimalists usually preferred to attack more public locations in Sky City. There had to be more going on that she did not know about.

Her timing was good. When she neared the maintenance room and could make out the voices, it sounded like the conversation had just turned to the very topic Megan was interested in. She stopped a couple of metres short of the door where she could listen without being observed.

“When will everything be in place?” Lief’s fluid voice bounced off the tunnel walls.

“The crews are finishing the wiring at Positions One and Two this morning. As soon as we get into this new tunnel, we can set up Position Three. I think we’ll be ready by this evening.” Andrea’s tone was very cool and business-like.

“You never found a way to get to the fourth support?”

“No. We’ve been looking for access, but there just don’t seem to be any tunnels running under that area.”

Fourth support? Megan wondered.

“Well, no matter,” replied Lief. “We really only need to take out three of the supports. There’s no way the Convention Centre can stay aloft on only one leg and a few anti-gravity boosters. And I guarantee that at least one of those boosters is going to fail.”

Megan’s eyes widened. *The Convention Centre?*

“There’s no way they are going to be able to ignore us after tomorrow.” Andrea’s words were chilling.

“What are the latest estimates for the convention?”

“I think they’re expecting a million visitors on the first day.”

“All those people coming to look at the new toys they’re going to be able to buy this year.” Lief spoke with mirth. “Teaching their greedy little kiddies to be good consumers.”

The full horror of their plan began to sink in. Her mind raced. She had to get warning up to the city right away.

A hand clamped around her arm, and she jumped.

“Hello, what have we here?” Cam had discovered the eavesdropper.

“I came to, uh, deliver a message,” she stammered, trying to make up an excuse.

Lief and Andrea heard them talking and came out of the room.

“Look who was outside,” said Cam, pushing the young woman forward.

Andrea stepped forward, her brow creased. “So, you were spying on us.”

Megan was terrified. She shook her head vigorously.

“Didn’t you say you suspected there was a mole in your group?” said Lief. His eyes settled on her silver charm.

“Yes. But I never thought it was her,” said Andrea. “She seemed so spineless.”

“I am not!” cried Megan, twisting her charm vigorously. She grasped at memories of Luther telling her she was beautiful and brave.

Lief stepped forward and ripped the necklace out of Megan’s hand. The chain snapped. “We’re Minimalists, dear,” he said acidly. “Jewelry is vanity.” His lips curled into a grim smile as he studied the charm. He found a button that unsnapped a tiny compartment. “Particularly this kind of jewelry.” He dumped the contents into Andrea’s hand.

“An encryption key.” Andrea recognised the tiny electronic device which could be installed in a cell phone to make a secure call. “A very sophisticated one, too. I wonder if she’s working with that State Intelligence agent at Sky City’s police department.”

Megan tried to hide her confusion. She did not think Luther was doing anything with the police. She had not been privy to the earlier reports about Serena and did not even realise there was an SI agent at the station.

“No, look at her face,” said Lief, who was good at reading expressions. “I bet no one knows where she is right now.” Apparently Megan’s expression changed enough to confirm his suspicion. He grinned. “Let’s keep it that way.”

Andrea’s icy attitude contrasted sharply with Lief’s humorous manner. “Put her with our other guests,” she instructed Cam. Speaking to the young woman, she added, “I promise, we’ll deal with your treachery swiftly and harshly.”

A sick feeling came over Megan. She had always known her spying was dangerous, but she had never really believed she would be caught.

Just as Cam started to take the girl away, Andrea stopped him. “Where’s Mark? Is he down here with us?”

“No, I think he’s still above ground.” Cam understood what she was hinting at. “I can’t believe we let these two get so close. And to think we just brought him in to the inner circle.”

“Get him down here. We’ll take care of him, too.”

Megan was slow to understand the implications of their conversation. Mark had no knowledge of her own activities. He was as committed to the Minimalist cause as anyone she knew in the organisation. “No! Don’t hurt him! It’s all my fault!” she cried.

“Get her out of here!” Andrea growled, completely disgusted by Megan’s behaviour.

“Don’t hurt my brother,” cried a weak voice.

Amy’s eyes fluttered open. She had dozed off, but the fresh commotion disturbed her. She awoke in time to see Cam push the young woman named Megan into the chamber. She thought she heard him tell Ben that she was a traitor, but he did not stick around to explain.

Tai, who was currently sitting next to one of the columns rebraiding her long strands of hair, watched the scene with curiosity. Brogan was oblivious to it. Like Amy, he had nodded off, but he found it much easier to sleep in uncomfortable surroundings and was snoring softly.

Megan stood in front of Ben for a few minutes, trying to convince him of something important through her quavering voice. Ben gave her a contemptuous glance and shoved her away. She stumbled weakly backwards and finally gave up.

More sympathetic, Amy waved the young woman over.

“What’s happened?” she asked.

“It’s all my fault,” Megan replied weakly. She took off her glasses and wiped her tear-stained face.

Tai meandered over and sat down on the other side, although she did not offer any gestures or words of comfort.

“What’s your fault?”

After much prompting and questioning, they finally learned about the Minimalist’s dreadful plan.

Serena watched her Gallifreyan colleague unpack his briefcase and tried to figure out if there was any part of her plan which she could salvage.

The maintenance shaft was about ten metres in diameter and appeared to have very thick walls. There were flexible joints and extra support bars at key locations, and there were sensors set up to monitor ground movement and detect stresses. It was dusty and the air smelled stuffy. Serena guessed that maintenance was infrequent. She hated to admit it, but coming down through these support shafts was not a bad idea.

She was not exactly satisfied, however. They did not appear to be very close to the hidden Gallifreyan key. She was able to pick up a signal, but it was so weak that she could not localise it.

Saedon cleared his throat to get her attention. “Now then, I’ve got two of these modified transmits. Each contains a power source, so we can use them to leapfrog,” explained Saedon. “The range is only about thirty metres, but it’s the best I could do with our limited supplies.”

“It will have to do,” muttered Serena.

“What’s the matter with you?” he asked, finally noticing her sour mood.

“Nothing.” Serena recalibrated her sensor to detect open spaces underground. The only way this was really going to work was if they could get into the sewer network under the military base. She had partial maps from her diligent studies, but they were incomplete. Many of the sewer tunnels were very old, and some of the underground surveys were a few hundred years old.

Her scan revealed a small tunnel that ran beneath the support shaft. She was actually a little surprised to find it because it provided a potential weakness for the support of the huge building. It was not close to the surface, which she supposed was why the convention centre builders had not discovered it. She adjusted the scan slightly to check for lifeforms and was relieved when she did not detect any natives within their transmit range. They could safely beam in. The last thing she wanted to do was run into people.

Fife stopped at one of the Minimalist headquarters to pick up some medical supplies before going on his rounds for the day. Through the grapevine, he had already heard about the raid on the base. He decided to stop by the newly relocated base to see if Andrea was around.

The base was very quiet. There were only a couple of members around, an older man named Rob who was manning the communication room and someone who was repairing one of the Minimalist vehicles. There was no sign of Andrea. He sighed as he went to look in the storage room for supplies. He hoped she was not out plotting more bomb attacks. He was very troubled. On a daily basis, he struggled to try to improve the lives of people in the Underworld, and he certainly sympathised with Andrea’s Minimalist ideas—he was just as disgusted by the excesses of the sky cities as any in her inner circle—but his friend’s use of violence was growing more and more extreme.

There were footsteps in the corridor. The sound of voices briefly came from the communications room, and a moment later, another person appeared in the doorway.

“Hi Fife,” said the woman. “Rob said I might find you in here.”

He greeted her. Her name was Rebecca, and he had met her on several occasions. She was a willowy woman in her late thirties who had been in the movement for a long time.

“I don’t suppose you’ve seen Mark Clay? Andrea wants him for something.”

Fife shook his head and grimly thought that she wanted the young man for another terrorist mission. “No. It’s pretty quiet around here.” He hesitated, afraid to ask his next question. However, his curiosity got the better of him. “Where is everyone?”

Rebecca did not mind answering. She knew Fife preferred to work the public assistance side of the organisation, but as far as she was concerned, he was a trusted member of Andrea’s inner circle. “There’s a big operation going on underground. Lief Hammersmith just came into town.” She flushed a little. Many of the women found Lief very attractive, and she was no exception.

Fife’s reaction to the name was not as positive. Lief’s presence was bad news as far as he was concerned, and his sense of doom increased. “Oh? What sort of operation is it?”

“I’m not really sure. Something in the sewers.” Most of her work was in the Sky City, so she had not been following the latest operation very closely. “Oh well, I’ve got to find Mark.” She disappeared down the corridor.

He sighed. Lief spent most of his time in Wind City and its ground companion, the Netherworld, where he led the local movement. He was the sort of man who enjoyed his work in the Minimalist movement a little too much. Whenever he joined Andrea, he had a decidedly negative influence on her behaviour.

He tried to shake off the feeling of dread, but it would not go away. He absentmindedly sorted through the boxes, pulling out different medicines to put in his crate. *What are they planning?* he wondered. The last time Lief came to town, during the winter, they had bombed the stadium. Whatever they were planning this time had to be just as big. More innocent people would die. But what were they doing in the sewers? It made no sense, but the more he thought about it, the more he worried.

Fife was a practical man, but he was also a man of faith. All at once he stopped what he was doing. He could no longer turn a blind eye to the violence. He stopped collecting supplies and shoved the crate aside. It was high time he looked in on Andrea’s darker activities.

The air shimmered in the darkness, and an energy beam briefly illuminated the glistening walls of the old sewer. A shadow flickered into existence, and the light of the beam faded, leaving the scene in complete darkness.

There was a click, and the walls of the tunnel once again appeared. Serena stood slightly hunched, shining her torch up and down the dark passageway. Both ends receded into darkness. The air was dank and smelled damp. Fortunately this sewer line was unused, so there were no foul gasses.

She walked a little ways down the sewer line and used her sensor to take readings on the surrounding environment. She did not go all the way to the end, as the next turning was quite far away. She returned to the location of her arrival and set a small device on the ground. She flipped the switch on a small transmitter to let Saedon know that she was ready to beam him in.

A moment later he shimmered into existence. His tall height forced him to bend over even more than Serena to avoid the low ceiling. He carried his small transmat pad. Having two pads made it easier for them to beam from place to place without having to have permanent equipment and without having to be concerned about getting stuck in a dead end hole underground.

“We’re lucky this was here,” murmured Serena. Her voice echoed down the tunnel. She retrieved her transmat pad and walked in the other direction, observing her sensor in the narrow beam of her torch. “There’s another tunnel running parallel to this one. But I still can’t tell whether we’re getting closer to the key or not. It could be in the opposite direction.”

“We have to start our search somewhere,” said Saedon. “Shall I go first this time?”

A short man in dirty grey overalls scrambled through the hole in the tunnel the Minimalists were unblocking. Their surveys of several surrounding tunnels and their studies of a few old maps had led them to believe that one of the tunnels ran right underneath a convention centre support. It was his job to try to confirm this.

He was relieved to find the rest of the tunnel in good condition. They had feared that more of it would be collapsed. The man slowly proceeded through the sewer until he reached a junction where two smaller tunnels split off from the main branch. They had sent a small survey robot this way earlier, but it had a limited control range in the environment

and had not been able to go very far. He paused to check his notes. The tunnel on the left was the one he wanted. Sure enough, he found the survey robot stalled a few metres into the tunnel where the thick walls had blocked out its control signal. He reprogrammed it and sent it back the way it had come.

There was a sound from up ahead. He dismissed it as the scurrying of some rodent.

Serena waited impatiently for Saedon's signal. He had beamed into the parallel tunnel and was taking his time in sending a signal for her. Nearly five minutes had gone by, and to add insult to injury her torch battery chose the inopportune time to wear out. The light flickered and dimmed. If it went out, she would be in utter darkness, and even her excellent vision would be useless, as there was simply no light in the sewer. She fumbled around in her pockets, looking for a spare battery.

The light dimmed further and the shadows loomed closer. She muttered a Gallifreyan curse and continued to search for a battery as an irrational wave of panic threatened to overwhelm her. The situation was bringing back some rather unpleasant memories.

She was so distracted that she did not notice the faint sound of footsteps coming from one end of the tunnel.

A small green LED on Serena's receiver blinked, its bright light glowing fiercely in the dark. "It's about time," she muttered. She tapped the acknowledge button and looked up.

The Minimalist worker turned a corner in the sewer line and paused. *That's odd*, he thought. He aimed his torch down the tunnel and thought he saw movement some distance away. Suddenly, a face loomed out of the darkness and sent a shiver down his spine. The pale face of a woman stared back at him with an expression of surprise. She was beautiful. His heartbeat quickened with fear when he saw how her eyes glittered, glowing as if illuminated from within. Stunned by this unexpected vision, the man cried, "Hello?" His voice echoed down the tunnel.

As if in response to his call, the image shimmered and disappeared.

He stood stock still for several minutes, trying to comprehend what he had seen. The vision of the ghostly woman did not return, and eventually he worked up the courage to walk down the tunnel and investigate. There was no sign that anyone had been in the tunnel with him. Thoroughly spooked, he suddenly decided to return to base. He did not want to spend any more time wandering through the haunted sewer tunnel alone.

"What took you so long?" snapped Serena.

"I was just having a quick look around," replied her colleague. "Don't get yourself worked up over it."

"Worked up?" Serena found a spare battery buried at the bottom of a pocket and jammed it into her torch. "Worked up? Someone spotted me in the tunnel."

"What?"

Serena described her abbreviated encounter with the man, but Saedon was dismissive. "Oh, he'll just think he was seeing things. I can't imagine that he got a very good look at you."

Men and women were clustered around the semi-blocked passageway, murmuring and discussing the peculiar sighting. Andrea and Fife approached, surprised to find the work to clear the tunnel stalled.

"What's going on?" asked Andrea. The excited, slightly panicked expressions on everyone's faces made her think that there had been an accident.

“Mondar saw a ghost in the tunnel,” murmured one of the workers.

The man who had seen Serena pushed forward through the crowd. “It was the strangest vision. Her face was as pale as the moon and her eyes sparkled like diamonds. I only saw her for an instant. I called out to her and she vanished. I think I scared her off.” Now that he was surrounded by many people, he was showing some bravado to hide his fear. “It must have been a ghost,” he added authoritatively.

“A ghost?” Andrea was thoughtful. She did not believe in such silly superstitions. She exchanged a glance with Lief, who was equally disbelieving. “Can you show us where you saw the apparition?”

The Minimalist worker nodded nervously. “This way.”

“Good.” Andrea turned to the others. “Show’s over. We need to get this tunnel cleared today, people!”

He led Andrea, Lief, and a few of the others through the hole and back through the sewer network. At last, they reached the tunnel where he had seen Serena. “She was just down there,” he explained, shining his light down the tunnel.

Andrea and Lief led the way. When they reached the spot indicated by the worker, they paused to do a thorough search.

“There’s nothing here to indicate that anything strange happened,” said Andrea.

“I swear I wasn’t imagining it.” He was more nervous now.

“Even so, the eyes play tricks on us in the dark, when we are alone.” She noted the way the light glistened a little on the damp walls of the tunnel. “Perhaps the light reflected just right, and your imagination took care of the rest.”

Lief was interested in more practical matters. “It’s certainly an interesting coincidence,” he said. “I think this is just the spot we were looking for.”

Andrea came over to look at the electronic pad he was carrying. “Incredible. You’re right. The convention centre support should be just over this spot. We’re a little deeper than I thought we would be,” she added. “We’ll have to drill out holes for placing the charges.”

“We should start right away. The drilling could take a few hours,” Lief added.

“Agreed.”

Klein came into the office quite late that morning. An email report of the computer system audit he had ordered was waiting for him. He grabbed a cup of bracka and sat down to peruse the file.

By his second cup of bracka, he was getting thoroughly frustrated. He had expected to find evidence of hacking, some sign that someone had tampered with the police computer system, but everything was in perfect order. There was still no explanation for the mysterious disappearing prisoner.

He decided to try another approach. He set his search algorithm to look for any unusual computer activity—late night work, reports requested by unauthorized personnel, anything that might give him a lead.

The computer beeped. He pressed a button and discovered plenty of activity on the computer system from the previous night. It came from the computer in Steve’s old office—the retired detective. *Of course*, he thought, *it was Serena*. She had been performing some sort of extensive search of various data bases. He was going to dismiss it as ordinary detective work when he noted the time. 3 am? He probed further and discovered that she had been actively searching for something between the hours of 2 and 4 am. She had worked all night. Why didn’t she go get some rest? She must have been exhausted after such a long day. What could be so important?

He could not discover the target of her search directly, but thanks to the audit he had all of the records he needed to piece it together. Soon he discovered that she had been searching through tons of records on the Underworld, accessing any information she could

locate concerning the old sewer systems. There were also a few accesses to some sort of military data base, but he had no idea of the content. The only clue was that her search seemed to focus on one particular section of Underworld City.

What could she want with such information? The only conclusion he could draw was that she was intending to visit the Underworld to search the sewers for something—for the Minimalists. She had spent the previous day following her own leads, and she must have discovered something useful. Klein frowned. If the Minimalists were hiding in the old sewers and Serena had gone in to search them alone, she was putting herself in a very dangerous situation.

An idea began to take shape in his mind that he should go after her. He could provide backup for her if things turned nasty, and if his concerns turned out to be unfounded, then it would be harmless. This time he would take every precaution to keep his plans secret. He would take only a few trusted men with him and call it a reconnaissance mission. If there was trouble, they could always call for backup. Alternatively, a military base was near his planned search area, so he could probably rely on them to provide reinforcements in a pinch.

Satisfied, he pushed back from his desk. He always preferred action to sitting in the office.

Saedon turned away from Serena and missed the icy glare she gave him. She had just about had enough of his attitude. She could hardly believe that she had liked him initially. He was insufferable. It was one thing when Time Lords acted superior to less advanced species—after all, that particular notion was based upon the simple fact that the Time Lords really were more advanced than most other species in the universe. On the other hand, Time Lords themselves stood on much more equal footing, and unwarranted arrogance was intolerable.

The corner of her lip curled up as the heat of her anger changed into a colder emotion. She knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was by no means his inferior. He was just an ordinary Time Lord; she was not. She did not have to let herself be bullied around by the likes of him! They had a temporary partnership to work together to solve the fourth part of the Great Riddle, and that was all. Her patience did not have to last indefinitely.

She closed her eyes for a moment to practice a few calming techniques, letting her emotions subside into the background. When she opened them again, her anger had disappeared beneath the surface to be replaced by a cooler, less readable expression. She looked down at her sensor and began to take readings.

“I’ve just picked up another energy burst,” said Macey. He had called in Lieutenants Laikoff and Wyse after the first unusual burst of energy had showed up on the base scanners that morning. Both men were sitting nearby, waiting for Macey to complete his first analysis.

“Have you been able to localise it?” asked Wyse.

Macey shook his head. “Not yet. I just don’t have enough information for the triangulation.” He tapped on his computer keyboard. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say it was the energy signature from a transmat. But it just doesn’t look quite right.”

“Can you jam it?” asked Laikoff.

“If I knew where it was coming from I could,” replied the technician. “All I know right now is that it’s coming from somewhere on the base grounds. But there’s too much surface area to cover with our jamming fields.”

“How could anyone be using a transmat on the base? There are only three transmat stations, and all of them are strictly guarded and monitored.” Wyse was puzzled.

“Everyone and everything which comes and goes from the base is scanned. No one should have been able to get a portable transmat inside.”

“Well, someone must have,” said Macey. “Either that, or I’m misinterpreting this data. One more energy surge and I should have enough data to confirm the theory.”

“I think we’re getting closer,” said Serena. The sensor was detecting a stronger signal, and she was beginning to get enough data for a directional bearing. She walked down the corridor and stopped when she could go no farther. The passageway had collapsed at this point and was a dead end. “Yes, I think it’s definitely in this direction. There’s another tunnel nearby.”

“What are we waiting for? Let’s make another hop,” suggested Saedon.

Serena frowned and studied the readout on her sensor. “This obstruction is quite severe. The sewer appears to have caved in for the next twenty metres.” She made a minor adjustment.

“Not a problem. It’s still within our transmat range.”

“Maybe so, but I’m detecting several lifeforms in the passageways on the other side of the obstruction. I don’t think we can get in there undetected. We’re going to have to find another way in.”

They backtracked until they reached another branch in the sewers. This one took them in a slightly different direction, and Serena was beginning to think it was another dead end. Their voices echoed quite a bit in the tunnels, so the two Time Lords spoke little, except to analyse the sensory readings and determine the best paths to follow. Serena was glad for the excuse not to talk to the man she was beginning to despise. At last, one of the turnings brought them back in the right direction, and the signal began to grow stronger once again.

“We’re getting very close. I’m detecting several passageways nearby, as well as several lifeforms. However, one of the passageways appears to be isolated from the others. It’s about twenty-five metres from our present position,” said Serena. “I think we can safely beam in.”

“Good. Maybe we’ve found our missing chamber at last!” Saedon proceeded to set up his transmat pad. “Want to go first this time?” he added innocently.

Serena ignored his patronising manner. “Yes,” she replied simply, hiding her feelings. She stepped onto the pad and beamed into the new tunnel.

The officers had been waiting for nearly an hour, hoping to detect another energy burst. Macey quietly ran various tests on his computer and monitored the base scanners, while the two lieutenants sat nearby, chatting about military affairs. They were all getting tired of waiting.

“I’m going to go get some bracka,” said Wyse, excusing himself from the group. “Back in a minute.” He left the room.

Macey’s computer suddenly beeped. “Hello there,” he said cheerfully. He quickly tapped on his keyboard and began to analyse the fresh data.

Laikoff scooted over in his chair to get a better look. “Well?” His jaw twitched slightly. Laikoff was much more serious than the technician—a breach in ground ops security was a very serious matter.

The door opened, and Wyse came in just as the computer beeped a second time.

“Gotcha!” Macey sat back and looked very pleased with himself. “It’s definitely a transmat, although the signature still looks a little funny.”

“Where is it coming from?” asked Wyse. He set his cup of bracka down on a nearby table and promptly forgot about it.

Macey rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Somewhere on this side of the base, I think. I still don’t have enough data to pinpoint the location, but that should help narrow our search down a little.”

“How many more energy bursts will it take for you to pinpoint it?” asked Laikoff.

“I’m not sure. I had expected to find the location with this data,” he said, frowning. “Unless it’s moving around. That might explain why I haven’t been able to track it down beyond the general vicinity.” He downloaded some data to an electronic pad and handed it to Wyse. “You can use this to begin your search. If we set up a few dampening fields on the west side of the base, maybe we can close the net on our trespasser.”

As Serena became aware of her new surroundings, she realised that they really were getting closer to the missing Queen’s chamber. For one thing, she was no longer in a sewer. She moved her torch around. The passageway was quite narrow, only wide enough for walking single file, but it had about two and a half metres of vertical clearance. She stretched, grateful for the high ceiling after spending so long in the cramped sewer tunnels. The walls, floor, and ceiling were made of rough granite blocks, and the passageway ran about thirty metres from end to end. One end was completely blocked by a pile of rubble, whilst the other end seemed to go nowhere, ending in a stone wall. The construction seemed strange to Serena. There were no markings or carvings that she might have expected to find in such a place. She walked over to the damaged end and examined the stone. Several pieces of the rubble looked odd, and she realised that someone had blasted the entrance to seal it. Why? Why seal a passageway that did not go anywhere?

Logically, the stone corridor should have connected two distinct places. She ran a quick scan of the area to see if she could learn more. The wall of rubble was about four metres thick at the base, but beyond that there was a very large chamber. Could this be the missing Queen’s chamber? She adjusted her sensor slightly. The size and shape of the chamber did not match the layout sketches she had seen among the archaeological records. Perhaps it was some kind of anti-chamber. Several people were also in the large chamber, making it less likely that it was the missing room.

She sighed, feeling obliged to bring Saedon into the passageway with her before he got himself into trouble. She turned back to set up the transmat pad.

Amy stood up to stretch her legs a little. Ben watched her warily, but she did not approach him. Megan sat in one of the corners of the room, hugging her legs to her chest and resting her head on her knees. There was still no sign of Mark. Tai was taking advantage of their captivity to do some exercises which looked remotely like Tai Chi, and Brogan continued to nap on the floor near the rubble.

There had to be something they could do. They had to do something to stop the terrorists from carrying out their plan. Amy paced up and down the centre of the chamber. It was so frustrating to be locked up. Ben was completely unsympathetic and even refused to let them out to use a toilet. So much for her plans of escape.

She paused in front of the rubble. What was on the other side? She rubbed her eyes. She suddenly felt the beginnings of a headache. Great, just what she needed—a headache would just make her day that much better.

As soon as Saedon had joined her, Serena decided to go down to examine the apparent dead end of the narrow corridor. Saedon did not join her immediately. He paused to give the stone passageway a more detailed examination.

“What’s behind the rubble?” he asked.

“A large chamber,” she replied. “But it doesn’t fit the description of the missing chamber,” she added. “It’s too large, and there are several people in it.”

“Hmm. Must be using it as some sort of meeting area.” He gazed around at his surroundings. “More comfortable than the sewers, I’ll wager.”

Serena knelt down to look at the ground at the end of the passageway and tucked her torch under her arm so that it shined down on the floor. She brushed her fingers through the thick layer of dust on the floor.

He walked down to her end. “When they blasted the other end, they must have created quite a dust cloud.” Saedon too had seen the evidence of blasting in the rubble. He peered over her shoulder as the corridor was a little too narrow for him to stand by her side.

“I think there’s a way through here, somewhere,” she murmured. She cleared more of the dust away. Underneath the dirt, she found the clue she was looking for: a simple carving of the ancient symbol of the Pythia which the natives called the Manka.

“Well done,” said Saedon enthusiastically. He pointed his torch down to provide extra illumination. “Look for a hidden trigger. Nothing too sophisticated.”

Serena bit her tongue and stopped herself from snapping at her colleague. She did not need his praise, and his instructions were unnecessary for something so obvious. It was unlikely that they would find any advanced technology outside the chamber. It was, after all, also used as burial chamber, so the entrance would have been designed with the less sophisticated technology of the era in which it was built. She hypothesised that the archaeologists had sealed the other end to keep out vandals, a rather drastic and unnecessary measure. She let her fingers trace out the line that divided the specially marked stone from the next one back. It was quite pronounced. Her keen eyes returned to the carving. It was quite deep. In fact, it was deep enough to provide a decent finger hold.

The stone was heavy, but nonetheless it slid to the right without much trouble. They could hear the sound of the stone rollers underneath as it moved. At last, the cover stone would go no farther into the wall. A few inches of the stone jutted out, and there was a finger hold which had previously been hidden in the wall on the other side.

“There’s our way in,” murmured Saedon. He aimed his torch down into the newly revealed passageway that began underneath the floor. The hidden tunnel dropped down about a metre at the entrance, providing a level surface before a set of stone stairs. They could not see where it went.

“They must have carried the queen’s body into the chamber without a casket,” said Serena, interested in the unusual archaeological significance of the hidden tomb. She remembered the films they had watched which had explained how the body was located underneath the floor. She lowered herself into the tunnel and carefully climbed down the stairs which only descended for a few feet. The passageway opened up again after a short distance, allowing her to stand upright.

Saedon followed her down, wishing that he had gone first. It was still very narrow, and he had to stay behind Serena.

They did not have far to go. After a few metres, the passageway connected with a room. They had finally located the object of their search.

Fife checked his electronic map. He had been pretty sure he was going the right direction in the sewers until he had arrived at a dead end. His way was completely blocked by a pile of rubble. It did not make sense. Had he taken a wrong turn somewhere? There were a couple of other ways in to where he wanted to go, but it would mean backtracking and going back to the surface to find another entrance. His feeling of dread told him he could not afford to waste any time.

Frustrated, he reached out to touch his obstacle.

His hand disappeared into the stone. He rapidly drew back in surprise. His eyes told him that there was a blockage, and even sound seemed to bounce back from the wall of stone—there were no hollow sewer sounds coming from that direction. He tentatively

reached forward again and let his fingers pass through the illusion. There was nothing there. It was just a screen—albeit a well-crafted one—meant to keep out unwanted visitors. Without another thought, Fife stepped through the projection and found himself on the other side. The tunnel was clear for as far as he could see.

About one hundred metres back, Klein watched Fife's amazing disappearance and smiled. *So that's where they're hiding*, he thought. He turned around and signalled the two colleagues who were with him. They would wait a few minutes before following to avoid detection.

"Fife!" said Cam in surprise. "What are you doing down here?"

"I need to see Andrea," he replied, his deep voice echoing. He was in the midst of the work zone. Workers were rapidly clearing out a real obstruction in the tunnel, and there were piles of equipment and tools lying along the sides of the sewer. A whining sound drifted down through the passageway from somewhere ahead.

"She's down there," Cam gestured, pointing through the partially clear passage. "Though I expect her back any minute." Fife's sudden appearance was unexpected, as he usually spent his time focusing on public work. "Is something the matter?"

Fife was restrained. He did not want to be diverted from his goal; this was a matter of utmost importance, and he only wanted to talk to Andrea. "I don't know. I just need to talk to Andrea."

There was no reason to distrust the man he had known for so long, even if the circumstances were unusual. It was clear from the urgency in Fife's voice that something important had happened. "Why don't I take you to her," Cam suggested.

"Please."

The workers paused in their labours long enough to let the two men pass. They walked silently through the tunnel, approaching the source of the whining sound. A few turns and several minutes later, they approached a smaller work crew. A young man was drilling into the ceiling of the sewer, and Andrea and a few others were standing nearby. To Fife's relief, Lief was not present.

"Andrea!" Cam spoke loudly to be heard over the drilling noise.

The grey-clad woman turned around at this interruption. "What is it Cam—Fife? What brings you down here?"

"I need to talk to you," Fife replied, his voice booming over the racket.

Andrea took one glance at the strained look in Fife's eyes and nodded. "Let's find someplace quieter!" She took one last look at the man who was drilling into the ceiling and then led them back to the main tunnel.

Klein stealthily led the way. They had lost sight of Fife, but navigation after the holographic illusion was easier as there were noises coming from somewhere up ahead. He paused at a turning, adjusting his heavy duty phasor rifle while he listened to the various sounds. Echoes of voices and machines bounced through the tunnels. There was clearly a great deal of activity going on below ground. He wondered what clue had led Serena down here. What were the Minimalists up to?

After the next turn he knew they were getting close when he found lights strung up along the low ceiling. He was becoming increasingly concerned that they would be outnumbered if discovered, but it only made him more aware that Serena was in over her head. He decided that they would just go up to the next turning to see what they could learn about the Minimalist activities; then they would return to the surface and call for reinforcements.

Using hand motions, he silently mouthed instructions to his men to hold their position while he went on ahead. He edged forward as quietly as possible, passing a narrow fork in the tunnel to reach the next turning. The voices ahead were becoming easier to understand. At last, he reached the junction and stopped.

"That should be enough," said one man. "Plenty of space to get our equipment through."

Klein carefully peered around the corner and saw several workmen standing about twenty metres ahead in front of a partial opening in the sewer tunnel. They appeared to have just finished clearing out a blockage. There were still a few rocks and small boulders on the ground, but most of the tunnel was open. *What could be worth so much effort?* he wondered.

Figures appeared in the distance in the newly opened tunnel. Two of them carried torches, but the shadows were too deep around them to make out any features. At last they approached the lighted section of the sewer. As they came into the light, he recognised them.

The first man was Cam Duretski, a major Minimalist player who was wanted for many serious crimes. The second was Fife Lancet. Klein was actually a little surprised to see him with the others. Though he was part of the terrorists' inner circle, he had rarely been directly involved with the more violent activities. Somehow, this underground work did not look like it was benign, so Klein wondered if his role had somehow evolved. The third and most important figure was the Minimalist leader herself: Andrea Cross. She was the mastermind of the Minimalist organisation in the area. If only Klein could bring her in, what a triumph that would be!

"Who are you?" cried a startled voice from behind.

Klein jumped and swung around.

A startled man, one of the Minimalist workers, had come out of the fork behind him and was facing the two waiting detectives.

Before Klein could act, the question was answered by the phasor shot from one of Klein's men.

The man gasped and collapsed to the floor.

"Intruders!" cried a new voice from the fork in the tunnel. "Intruders!" The shouts echoed up and down the tunnels. If anyone had missed the sound of the phasor, there was no mistaking the vocal alarm.

Two more Minimalists appeared from the side tunnel and opened fire on the intruders.

"What the hell?" cried a voice from the work area.

Klein tried looking everywhere at once.

"Get out of there Mike!" cried one of his men, running back down the tunnel.

"Matt!" Klein winced as a phasor shot struck his friend down. He fired a shot from his own rifle, but it missed as the two men ducked back into the side tunnel.

"Drop it!" a voice hissed in his ear.

He felt the lethal end of a phasor pressing against his temple and hastily dropped his own weapon. The rifle clattered to the ground. To his relief, his other colleague safely disappeared around a bend.

"Get after him!" cried Cam Duretski, who was holding the phasor to Klein's head.

The two Minimalists popped out of their hiding place and ran after the fleeing man.

"In here!" ordered Cam. He pushed Klein into the work area. "How did you get in here?" he barked.

Klein matched the hostile glares he received and said nothing.

Andrea stepped past him and picked up his discarded weapon. "Police issue," she murmured. She walked around him and then stepped forward, slipping her graceful fingers into his pockets and withdrawing his badge and ID. "Hmm. Officer Michael Klein,

Detective, Sky City Police Department. Now, how did you get in here?" her voice was soothing and simultaneously menacing.

Klein said nothing.

Fife's face was ashen. "Oh no," he murmured, his deep voice rumbling. "They followed me in here." As much as he wanted to stop the violence, the last thought on his mind was involving the police.

Andrea frowned but did not scold her colleague for his carelessness. She turned away for a moment, contemplating their course of action. At last, she turned to Cam. "As soon as word comes back, I want to know if we stopped the other one or if he escaped. And I want *that* entrance completely sealed," she said, pointing towards the tunnel they had used. "Chances are, they won't be able to find one of the other ways in soon enough to do anything. Get ready to blow the other entrances, and inform Lief. Everything is still on for tomorrow morning. We only have to hold them off for a few more hours."

"What about this spy?" Cam looked like he was ready to shoot the detective immediately.

"Don't kill him—yet." Her eyes glinted with cold fire. "Knock him out and put him with the others."

Cam did not have to be told twice. He set his phasor for the highest stun level and shot Klein at point blank range.

"Something's happening," said Tai, her head cocked as she listened to the unusual echoes coming from the tunnel.

Even Ben looked a little alarmed, but he maintained his post.

Amy nodded. She had also heard the shouts.

The noise died down as quickly as it started. A few minutes later, Cam and another one of the Minimalists dragged an unconscious man into the chamber and dumped him next to one of the pillars. "I'll send relief down shortly," Cam said to Ben as they left.

"Who's that?" asked Tai.

"How am I supposed to kn—" began Amy, before she stopped mid-sentence. She stood up and walked over to look at the stunned man. She knelt down and looked at his face. "Wait a minute. He's the police officer who questioned us at the mall."

The burial chamber was not very interesting to look at in the focused beams of their torches, but Serena quickly solved the problem when she pulled a small gadget from one of her pockets. She set the small cylindrical object on the floor and twisted it. The device began to glow with a warm light that soon became bright enough to illuminate the entire room.

"Do you always carry emergency lamps with you?" asked Saedon.

"Usually," replied Serena. She did not elaborate on her fears of complete darkness. "The power only lasts for a couple hours. Let's get to work." She immediately went over to examine one of the walls.

Saedon began to take measurements. "Hmm. That's odd. I rather expected to find a geometrically perfect room."

"Oh?"

"No. It looks like a perfect cube at first glance, but in fact each wall is off by a slight fraction. At first I thought it was simply a building defect, but now I don't think so."

Serena came over to look at the numbers. "You're right. Those fractions are perfect ratios of each other. It's intentional." She went back to look at a section of the wall. "These wall formations also appear to be intentional. Look at the apparent roughness. There are distinct gradations in the surface. It's definitely a pattern."

"Something mathematical, perhaps?" Saedon rubbed his chin and tried to work out the meaning.

“No. I don’t think so.”

“Well, there must be some point to it.”

“I’ve got to talk to you Andrea,” insisted Fife. They were standing just outside the work area, where Andrea was directing the remaining tasks of their bombing plan.

“Can’t it wait until later? I’m a little busy right now,” she snapped, still frustrated by the police intrusion. She believed that Fife was innocent, that he had not intentionally led the police to them, but at the same time she was very annoyed at the results. She was worried they would run out of time to complete their mission. The third man had escaped the tunnels and would soon return with the authorities. The sealed entrance would delay them, but she had no idea how long it would take before they found another way in.

“I don’t think so.” Fife watched as two men gingerly carried a box of explosives into the newly opened tunnel. “Just what exactly is going on here?”

“Same as usual,” the leader replied grimly. “We’re making a statement.”

“How many have to die this time, Andrea? One hundred? Two? How many deaths does it take to make a statement? Why do we have to kill anyone at all?”

“There’s no other way,” she said firmly. “Those people up there don’t listen. They don’t see what’s going on down here. They don’t care about the suffering.”

“There has to be a better way!”

“There isn’t. I don’t enjoy doing this. You know that. If I could make a difference to our world, hell, I’d give my own life!” Andrea was animated, and her eyes glittered passionately. “If we don’t do something now to turn around the development of our planet, then we are *all* doomed in the long run. Don’t you see that? We’re not just talking about our own survival. We’re talking about the survival and prosperity of our planet, our world! Now if you don’t mind, I have work to do!” She turned away from him to answer a question from one of the workers.

“What are you doing?” asked Saedon.

Serena was sitting near the slowly dimming lamp, making intricate adjustments to her sensor. “In case you’d forgotten, we still have to locate our friends. And we’re not exactly making any progress solving this riddle.” The adjustments she was making were very delicate. It was easy enough to scan for lifeforms, but unfortunately the sensor was not designed for making fine distinctions between lifeforms. She briefly wished she had access to her TARDIS.

“Oh, I don’t know. I still think there’s a mathematical solution here somewhere.”

“It’s too random.” She checked her modifications. She had managed to set the device to search for human readings, but she did not have enough information to find a Krimshon native. She only hoped that Amy and Brogan were still together. “What species is your friend?”

“Human. Maybe it’s something clever, like a musical riddle.” Saedon whistled a brief tune but nothing happened. “Hmm.”

Serena closed up the device, scooped up the dying lamp, and put everything away except her torch and her sensor. “Maybe we just need to get away from here for a while and think about the puzzle,” she suggested. “We have all the data we need for analysis.”

Saedon was a little disappointed to be giving up, but his colleague seemed to have made up her mind. She exited the room. Saedon found her standing at the end of the upper passageway, running a scan.

A small smile settled on her lips. “I don’t believe it. They’re right behind this wall!”

“Any news on Mark?” asked Andrea. She and Cam had retired to the maintenance room for another private conference.

“None. We think he’s somewhere up in Sky City, but no one has been able to track him down. Yet.”

“No matter. We’ll catch up with him sooner or later.”

“What are you intending to do with the others?” Cam’s question was laced with meaning. He was not just referring to Megan and the captive police officer, but also to the three strangers.

Andrea broached the easier subjects first. “I want to leave Megan someplace obvious. And don’t make it too painless. Whoever she was working with, I want them to see the horror on her face. To know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we mean business. Maybe they’ll think twice before sending in another spy.” Her brow furrowed in thought. “I don’t care about the officer. Let’s just leave him in one of the blast areas. He can be one more unsolved mystery,” she added with a grim smile.

“What about the others?”

Andrea rubbed her temples. The strangers were becoming more and more of a liability the longer she dragged them around with her, but she was indecisive.

Cam forced the issue. “You know that Megan will have told them about our plans here. Whatever they were before, they are not going to be sympathetic to this.”

“I know,” the leader replied quietly.

“Why have you given them so much attention, anyway? It just doesn’t make any sense to me.” Cam had been confused from the beginning.

She shook her head sadly. She wanted to tell him they were offworlders, but she could not afford to spend the time convincing him right now. It would only make him question her sanity, and that was not something she could risk during such a critical mission. “I just felt that—” she began, searching for an explanation that would make sense. “The woman—Amy—reminds me a little of Laura.”

“Ah.” Cam nodded, remembering Andrea’s old roommate who had died all those years ago during a riot.

“I wanted her to understand our side,” she added, shaking her head. “It just seemed important.”

Cam looked down at the floor. “She isn’t Laura. She doesn’t share our passion for the cause, and you’re taking a big risk letting her know all about our movements and our plans. And the other woman is even more of a risk—she’s definitely not someone we can trust. If either of them ever reached the authorities...”

“It wouldn’t be good,” Andrea admitted. She knew where the conversation was going. It was easy to decide the fate of a traitor and an enemy, but making the decision on what to do with innocent strangers was another matter, particularly when those strangers provided the proof that she needed for a substantial, long term goal to save her world. However, Cam was right. She would never get Amy or Tai’s help in the Minimalist cause. Through her carelessness, they had become a major threat. Except for Brogan. He was so young—so impressionable! He could learn to understand, she was certain of it. And there was no doubting that his alien physiology could provide the evidence she needed to spur the cause on to bigger and better things. At last, she said, “I don’t want anything to happen to the boy.”

Cam breathed a sigh of relief. Her decision was not quite what he wanted, but at the same time he knew he had won. “We can make it as painless as possible.”

“See to it. But bring the young man to me. He may not understand why I’m doing this, but given time and a little education it’ll make more sense.” As an afterthought, she

added, "Sedate him first. I don't want him to be fully aware of what's going on down here. We can explain it later. It'll be easier on him."

"You're sure they're all in there?"

"Positive. There are six people in the chamber. Three are natives of this world, and three are not," Serena replied. "I wonder if they're under guard."

"Let me see the display," suggested Saedon. He observed their relative positions and pointed to the one who was furthest away. "This one has to be a guard, judging by the way he is blocking the entrance. I don't know about these others. We could come in from behind."

"There's no way to make a silent approach. They'd hear the transmat."

"What about beaming in to a nearby tunnel? One of them must be connected to this chamber."

Serena sighed. "I suppose that's the best way." Though it was comforting to know that Amy and Brogan were so nearby, she feared that they would be moved before she found a way in to rescue them.

"Maybe we should just set some automatic sensors to trigger," suggested Macey. He had been sitting monitoring equipment in a command and control vehicle with the two lieutenants for several hours. "There hasn't been any activity since this morning."

"They'll try again," Laikoff muttered. He was certain the intruders were still somewhere on the base.

"Maybe they were hindered by the dampening fields we set up," suggested Wyse.

Macey shook his head. "No. Even if they were, we should have still detected any transmat attempts."

Laikoff looked at several colour monitors showing the area surrounding the large vehicle. They were parked at the edge of a grassy space in the shadow of their own HQ, which was a prime target by itself. Nearby were several other important structures, including surveillance control and the mission planning centre.

Suddenly, several lights began to flash and an alarm starting beeping.

"Where?" Laikoff stood up impatiently.

Macey feverishly analysed the fresh readings. "Seems to be localised about one hundred metres due west." Just as the alarm stopped it started again. "A second one!" He buzzed the intercom to the driver and gave him instructions to move their vehicle. "If we move the dampening field in here closer, maybe we can stop them from beaming again and catch them in the act." The vehicle lurched into motion and stopped after a short drive.

"Looks like they're doing something in the mission planning centre," said Wyse, noting their new position near one of the other buildings. He picked up the radio and contacted building security to notify them of a possible intruder. Next, he contacted ground security, asking them to adjust the locations of the dampening field generators they had placed in the vicinity. "That ought to slow them down."

Serena and Saedon quietly walked down the sewer line in the direction they thought would take them closer to the chamber where their friends were being held. After they had walked about fifty metres, Serena stopped. There was no sign of a connecting tunnel, and it appeared that their own tunnel was veering off in the wrong direction. Her sensor sweep confirmed that there were no connections in the immediate area.

"We picked the wrong side," she whispered. "We should have gone to the tunnel on the other side."

"Hmm. It does look like this one is a dead end."

They backtracked in the tunnel and Saedon set up his transmat pad so they could beam back into the secret passageway. Serena handed him the second pad and pressed the control on the active unit.

The low whine of the transmat started, but Saedon only flickered for a moment without disappearing.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “Why didn’t it work?”

“It’s some sort of dampening field!” replied his colleague. “They must have detected our transmat activity up on the military base.”

“Perfect timing,” muttered Saedon.

“These readings don’t make any sense,” said Macey. “It’s almost as if—no, that can’t be right.”

“What?” asked Wyse. “What can’t be right?”

“Well, it looks as if the energy bursts were underground. But how could that be?” The sewers had been sealed and forgotten many years ago, and none of them knew of their existence.

“Not from that building?” asked Laikoff.

“I don’t think so. I suppose I could be wrong. It’s hard to tell because the source of the signal keeps moving around.”

“There’s no basement in the mission planning centre.” Wyse turned to a computer station and began to search through the base records. “So where are they?”

The alarm beeped again.

“Ah-ha! They just tried again,” the technician announced, studying his equipment. “The energy fields were different, so I think they didn’t succeed this time. Our dampening fields must be working. They have to be somewhere within a fifty metre radius of one of the dampening field generators.”

There was a flurry of activity as Laikoff called in the report. They watched as a swarm of soldiers moved over the area. Several people came out of the mission planning centre under guard. Wyse turned away from his computer search of base records to watch the hunt.

After several minutes, it became clear that the soldiers were not having any luck in tracking down the intruders. One of the phones rang, and Laikoff answered.

“No one? Right.” The lieutenant scowled. “I want guards posted throughout the building for the next twenty four hours, just in case.” He hung up the receiver.

“They must know we’re on to them,” said Macey. “They didn’t try again.”

“That doesn’t leave us with a lot of options,” said Saedon. “Wander around these tunnels until we get lucky and find one that connects up, or do something about the dampening field.”

“Can you modify these pads to overcome the field?” asked Serena, staring off into the darkness.

Saedon looked thoughtful. “Perhaps. It’s a little tricky,” he added, not particularly daunted by facing a new technical challenge. “But I think I can figure out something, if you can give me more information on the field they are generating to neutralise our transmissions.”

Serena nodded and turned her attention to her sensor once again. She thought about the military base, and wondered how long it would be before the soldiers found their way into the sewers. It was probably best to avoid using the transmat for as long as possible, to keep them from locating their exact position.

Cam returned to the chamber with another Minimalist and dismissed Ben. He also carried a tray of refreshments, which he set down in the centre of the chamber. There was a pitcher of juice, several plastic cups, and some simple sandwiches. "I'm sorry you have to stay in here so long," he apologised to Amy and Tai, ignoring Klein and Megan. Brogan was still napping. "But we haven't forgotten about you."

"Any chance we can get out to use a toilet?" asked Amy. She had still not given up on the prospect of escaping.

"Sorry, not right now. Maybe in an hour. Things are a little tense out there at the moment," he explained.

Tai smiled casually, but her eyes watched him keenly. "Well, thanks for the food." He left the room.

"He was unusually pleasant," murmured Tai.

"Probably trying to compensate for his other failings," replied Amy, thinking of the terrorists' plans.

Tai wandered over to a side wall and surveyed the new guard. She was a stocky woman with short curly brown hair and scruffy street clothes. The only jewelry she wore was a small pin attached to her collar, a simple gold circle upon white enamel. Her complexion was splotchy and pale, but in spite of this she looked fit. Her arms were muscular and she stood with the athletic confidence of someone who regularly worked out. Like Ben, she also had a phasor strapped to her hip. The Minimalists were not taking any chances and were posting capable people as guards.

Brogan began to stir from his nap. He yawned and sat up.

"Morning bright eyes," said Amy. "Feel a little better?"

The boy yawned again. "Aye. Though I wouldn't mind a night's sleep in the TARDIS."

"Me, too. You want some food?"

"Sure."

"You want some Tai?"

"Maybe in a little bit." She was too busy thinking about possible strategies to disable their captor.

Amy shrugged and poured out three cups of juice. After handing one to Brogan, who eagerly drank it all at once, she took the other over to Megan, who was still huddled in a ball in the corner. "Here," she said. "Drink this. You'll feel better."

Megan looked up, her eyes red and swollen from crying. She felt weak and useless, and accepted Amy's offer gratefully. "Thanks," she murmured.

"Sandwiches any better than yesterday's?" Amy asked Brogan as she returned to the centre of the room.

"No," he replied, his mouth full of bread and nut paste. "Ish da same shuff as yesheryay."

"Now we're getting somewhere," said Wyse. "There was once a network of sewer lines running all through this area. When part of Sky City collapsed a few hundred years ago, many of them were destroyed. The government granted the ruined land to the military, which cleaned up the massive piles of rubble and sealed up the underground network." He paused to click through a few of the images on his screen. "It's not as if we needed to use sewers much any more, thanks to newer technology. Once the sewers were sealed up, they were promptly forgotten."

"Obviously someone remembered that they were there," said Laikoff. "And they're using them to get access to our base. Where's the nearest access point?"

“Not quite sure about that. Everything was supposed to be sealed.” He studied the map on the computer screen. “Let’s set up three search teams—here, here, and here.”

Tai’s stomach rumbled. She had decided to leave the new guard alone and wait for a better opportunity to escape. She wandered over to the food tray to see what the others had left her. Glancing toward the back of the chamber, she noticed that Brogan had gone back to napping.

“Dull place for a kid,” she muttered before she realised Amy had also nodded off.

Amy was leaning against one of the columns, her head drooping on her chest. She was snoring very softly.

Tai raised an eyebrow. *Well, you have to rest where you can*, she thought. She poured herself a cup of juice and raised it to her lips. As the liquid touched her tongue, she stopped. She sniffed at the drink. It was just some sort of fruit juice, but there was something peculiar about the smell.

She looked back at Amy and leaned forward slightly. A half-eaten sandwich had fallen from the woman’s hand and was lying in the dust on the floor. Her eyes drifted over to Brogan. There was no similar evidence nearby, but he had consumed his food and drink very quickly, so that was not a surprise.

The final evidence was Megan. She was still huddled up in her corner, but the sounds of her occasional sobs had subsided. An empty cup was lying on the floor next to her.

Why had Cam given them drugged food? Obviously they did not want any trouble while they were carrying out their violent plan.

All this gave Tai an idea. She picked up a sandwich and her drink and wandered over to sit next to the opposite column, acting as if there was nothing wrong. Then she did her best to ignore her hunger and thirst as she pretended to eat and drink.

Macey was sitting by himself in the large command and control vehicle late in the afternoon when the alarm finally sounded again, indicating that the hidden transmat was active.

A smile settled on his face as he happily analysed the data and tried to trace the source. So far, the search teams had not succeeded in finding an open way in to the sewers. Every entrance they had tried was blocked by rubble or cave-ins. They had not made any progress in finding the intruders, and it was getting late.

“Come on, one more time,” he murmured, hoping the earlier trend of double transmissions would continue. Sure enough, the alarm beeped a second time.

He worked with the data for five minutes before the grin began to fade from his face. His brow creased as he tried to understand the readings. “That’s impossible,” he muttered. The intruders had somehow found a way to use their transmat in spite of the dampening fields. Possible or not, he could not deny the data.

There were even more confusing readings. The energy bursts were no longer localised. It was as if there were now multiple simultaneous transmissions occurring at several locations on the base.

Suddenly it dawned on him. They were being invaded! In a panic, he picked up the phone and dialed base security. “Security breach! I repeat, security breach!”

“Any problems?” Cam asked the woman who was standing guard over their “guests”. Ben was standing behind him.

She shook her head. “Not since lunchtime,” she said, the corner of her mouth turned up in a smile.

“Good,” he replied. “We’re going to take the boy. If the others show any signs of stirring, contact me. I don’t want them waking up.” He looked into the chamber. Amy and Tai were each slumped against the large columns, while Brogan and Megan were asleep at the back. The police officer was still unconscious on the floor, too. “You shouldn’t have to worry though. That shouldn’t wear off for at least a few more hours. I’ll be back to administer another dose before then.”

He and Ben proceeded to carry Brogan out of the room.

Tai listened to everything and watched surreptitiously through barely closed eyes. All the while, she breathed evenly as if sound asleep. Sometimes the oldest tricks were the best.

Tai passed an hour in silence, waiting for an opportunity to escape. Suddenly, she glimpsed a shadow of movement through her long lashes. The guard was there, and then she was gone.

Surprised, Tai opened one eye.

In another instant, Saedon was standing in the doorway, looking around at the chamber. As soon as his glance settled on Tai, a huge grin broke on his face. He stepped into the room.

Tai opened her eyes and jumped up, ready in an instant for anything. “I was wondering what was taking you so long,” she said.

Serena walked in behind the Time Lord.

“Making friends?” Tai eyed Serena cautiously. Her small size and delicate beauty made her seem like a low threat, but there was something about her eyes that suggested otherwise.

“Amy!” cried Serena. She rushed over and knelt by her friend. “What’s happened to you?” A wave of irrational panic washed over her as she felt for a pulse.

“She’s okay, I think,” said Tai. “She’s been drugged.” She indicated the tray and the half empty pitcher of juice.

Saedon exchanged a knowing glance with Tai, quietly acknowledging her cleverness for avoiding being drugged. Then he returned his attention to his colleague. When he recognised Amy, a slight frown replaced his smile. “You didn’t tell me *who* your companion was,” he murmured.

Serena was too busy checking Amy’s pulse and looking at her eyes to reply. She picked up Amy’s cup and sniffed it, wrinkling her nose. “Some sort of sleeping draught.”

“Not this one,” said Saedon, who was examining the officer. “This one looks like he’s been stunned by an energy weapon of some sort.”

“Hmm?” Serena looked up. Her initial panic was fading as soon as she realised Amy was going to be okay, and she was beginning to register that there were others in the room. “Oh, no, Michael!” She rushed over to look at the police officer.

He was not in good shape. He had been stunned at close range, and it looked like he might have internal injuries. His pulse was weak and erratic. “He needs medical attention.”

“Not much chance of that down here,” replied Saedon. “Who is he?”

“He’s a police detective. I met him when I was up at the police station,” she explained. “We were working together to find the terrorists.” She wondered how he had ended up in the sewers. Had he discovered her intentions and followed her?

Saedon chuckled softly. “I don’t know why you bother.” He turned his attention to the woman at the back of the room. “Who’s this? I thought you said your other friend was a boy.”

“It is.” Serena looked over at the sleeping form of Megan. “I don’t know who she is.”

“Tai?” prompted Saedon.

“Her name is Megan Clay,” Tai began. “Until a few hours ago, she was out there with the other Minimalists, that is until they found out that she was spying on them for State Intelligence.”

“Hmm,” said Serena, who went over to check on the drugged girl. “She’s the sister of Mark Clay who—I believe—was the person who placed the bomb at Cloud Mall where we arrived.”

“They’ve been trying to find him, too, but we haven’t seen him. They think he’s a traitor, too, but apparently he has no knowledge of his sister’s activities.”

Serena frowned and stood up. Something was missing. “Where is Brogan?”

“A couple of the terrorists took him away about an hour ago. I have no idea why.” Tai shrugged. “Oh, but it gets even better. These people are planning to destroy the big convention centre up in Sky City.”

Serena’s eyes widened. “The Toy Exposition,” she whispered. “All those people!” she cried, horrified. “How—how are they planning to do it?”

“I think they’re going to knock its legs out from underneath it. They’ve been wiring up strategic sections of these old sewers to destroy the support columns, I think.”

“Do you know when they are going to do this?” asked Saedon, concerned more for losing access to the hidden chamber than for saving the innocent people at the exposition.

“Very soon,” replied his companion.

“They must be planning it for sometime tomorrow,” suggested Serena. “That’s when the exposition starts.” She glanced over at Michael. “Probably early, as soon as there are sufficient crowds. They’ll have moved up their schedule for fear that the police are on their way.” She turned to Saedon. “We must stop them from carrying out their plans!”

Saedon did not share her enthusiasm. “If we must,” he replied quietly. He did not care to interfere with the actions of a bunch of primitives. However, he thought he still might need Serena’s help to solve the riddle that would get them off of the planet, and if the terrorists destroyed the sewers and caused the convention centre to collapse, there was a slight possibility that the hidden chamber would become inaccessible.

“Let’s get out of this room, first,” suggested Serena. “I don’t want to be caught in here when the terrorists come back. I also don’t want to leave Amy until she wakes up,” she said firmly. “I don’t want to lose her again.”

“Why don’t we just beam them into the secret passageway?” Saedon pointed at the sealed exit at the far end of the room, behind which was the access to the hidden chamber.

Serena shook her hand. “If we don’t make it back for some reason, I don’t want anyone to wake up and discover they are permanently trapped.” She shivered. “That would be awful. No, we need to find a better hiding place. See if you can find something nearby—a quiet side tunnel perhaps. Preferable something dry.”

Andrea was reviewing her plans in the maintenance room when Brogan began to stir. He had been sleeping off the sedative he had consumed several hours earlier. She set her electronic pad down and knelt near the boy. “Are you okay?” she asked, knowing she would have trouble getting a coherent answer.

“Aye,” he mumbled. “Amy?” he asked, his eyes still closed.

“It’s Andrea,” she said soothingly. “Amy isn’t here. I’m taking care of you now.”

“Amy?” he mumbled again. He opened unfocused eyes and looked at her.

“Forget about Amy,” she replied. “She’s gone. I’ll take care of you now.”

“Amy’s my friend,” he mumbled, slightly distressed. “Where’d she go?”

“She’s gone.” She caressed the boy’s forehead like a mother. “I’ll be your friend now.” She picked up a cup. “Here, drink this.” She helped the boy up and held the cup to his lips.

He was too dazed to refuse. He drank. When he had had enough, he closed his eyes again.

“Sleep now,” she murmured. “It’ll all be over soon enough.”

Officer Trainee Baxley stood behind several other officers in one of the sewer tunnels. He was extremely worried, but his fears were not the same as those of the men around him. For though he was employed by the police department, he really worked for the Minimalist cause. In fact, he was a devoted follower of the movement and of its leader, Andrea Cross. He had known her for literally his entire life, having grown up just a few houses down from her. She was about twelve years older than him, and she had been his babysitter for several years before she went to university. She was like an older sister to him. She called him Mouse, an early nickname which had evolved into his code name within the Minimalist organisation. It was his job to warn Andrea if the police were closing in on any of their bases or any of the inner circle members. This task had kept him very busy lately.

He was alarmed when one of the detectives had returned with a story of a harrowing escape from the old Underworld sewer system. Two of his colleagues, Matt Walters and Michael Klein, were both missing. The detective thought that Matt Walters was probably dead, as he had been shot by a phasor when they stumbled upon the Minimalist base.

Baxley wondered how the underground operation had been compromised. It was a closely guarded secret. He was familiar with Andrea’s current plans, and he knew he had to take some sort of action to help her, particularly since it had become a race against time. He had been trying to reach her since the news came in, but phone contact in the sewers was next to impossible, and he had not been able to find anyone at short notice to carry a warning to her.

His only choice was to join the raiding party. There were ten of them, and they were well-armed. The detective who had escaped the tunnels earlier in the day was leading the way.

They turned a bend and stopped in front of a large pile of rubble.

The man at the front of the group stopped. “I don’t remember this being so near the turning.”

Baxley tried to get a look, but he could not see anything as he was too far back. He knew the directions to get into the sewers from about three locations, all of which were blocked by holographic screens to deter unwanted guests. He waited tensely to see what would happen next.

“It’s real!” announced the detective who had passed this way earlier. “I swear it wasn’t solid earlier.” He knelt down and picked something up. “This clinches it. They’ve sealed this entrance.” He passed the evidence back. It was a piece of a detonator.

Disappointed and frustrated, the men turned around and headed back towards the exit. Baxley soon found himself at the back of the pack again. He was relieved that they had failed, until someone suggested that there was another way they might get in.

As they turned a corner, a bright light flared on in front of them. It was so dazzling that none of them could see what was behind it.

“Halt!” barked an unfamiliar man. “Throw your weapons away and lie down on the floor!” The voice spoke with severe authority.

Someone in the police group whispered “Minimalists!”, and instead of obeying the unexpected orders, fired a phasor shot which took out the blinding spotlight. Suddenly, as they were plunged into momentary darkness, cries of “Terrorists!” and “Minimalists!” began to echo back and forth, and both sides opened fire. A phasor, set at its highest setting, blasted a hole in the tunnel wall right next to Baxley’s head, showering him with dust and small rocks. He turned around and ran, ducking into a side tunnel which was only a few

metres back. Sounds of phasor fire continued, intermingled with the shouts and cries of wounded men. Baxley never looked back but ran as fast as he could to escape the fighting.

Serena had settled into a small room they had discovered which had once been some kind of water catch basin for the sewer. Ironically, since the access holes to the street were now buried under several feet of dirt and rock, very little water made it in to the area and it was relatively dry. It also had the advantage of being connected to a parallel tunnel that was not directly tied to the one they had been in. While it was possible the terrorists knew of the location, it was not likely that they would look there if they began to search for their missing prisoners.

At the moment, Serena was alone with the three unconscious people. Saedon and Tai had gone off to have a look around, and she was a little glad to be left alone for a while. It gave her a chance to meditate and think about how to foil the terrorists' plan.

Klein moaned, and Serena opened her eyes. She went over to see how he was doing. His eyes fluttered open, and they slowly came in to focus on her face which was partially illuminated by her torch. He swallowed and stretched a little. "You're okay," he murmured.

"I'm fine," Serena replied, partly surprised at his first words. "How are you feeling?"

"I've been better," he replied weakly. He shifted slightly and groaned at the pain it caused him. Suddenly he laughed, although it sounded more like a weak croaking. "I was supposed to be rescuing you."

She cocked her head. "Me?"

"I thought you were going to get yourself captured, coming down here alone," he whispered. "We're not both captured, are we?"

"No, we're safe for the moment," she replied, helping him to sit up. He leaned against the wall and drew in jagged breaths. "Except you need medical attention."

"They shot me. Stun, but at close range. I'll be okay. I've had worse." He winced. "Did you find out what they're doing down here?"

Serena looked at him sadly. "It's really bad, Michael. They're going to blow up the convention centre."

He winced again, but this time it was from the thought of more innocent deaths. "We've got to stop them," he said. He tried to get up, and Serena gently stopped him.

"Don't worry about it. I'm going to take care of it."

When he saw the determined look in her eye and heard the strength in her voice, he knew she meant it. He smiled weakly. "Who are you? You're so beautiful, and so different from everyone else."

"I don't like to see innocent people get hurt," she replied quietly. Amy suddenly started to mumble something, and Serena turned away to check on her friend. She was starting to wake up, but her words were incoherent.

"You know her?" asked Klein as he recognised the woman from the mall, still in her exotic and now well-tattered silks.

"Yes. We're friends. We tra... we work together," she explained. "Her name is Amy Wilson."

Klein was confused. "She works for State Intelligence? The boy, too?" He was back to being a detective again.

Serena avoided making eye contact with him as she remembered his treatment of her friends back at the mall, when he had detained them for questioning just because they looked a little unusual. "Yes."

"Why didn't you say anything, when we first met?"

This made her feel awkward. She hated lying to him. “At first I wasn’t sure if the people you had arrested were my missing friends. After they were kidnapped by the terrorists, there was nothing I could do.” She thought about how to explain their involvement. “I didn’t want to compromise their position.”

This made sense to Klein. They had dressed and acted so strangely, that they could only have been helping her in the Underworld. He nodded knowingly. He had done his own share of undercover work, and it was all just part of the job.

Saedon appeared in the entrance, with Tai standing just behind him. “Ah, nice to see at least one person back in the land of the living.”

Serena was a little disappointed to see him. “Michael, this is Saedon, and Tai. We’re working together, too, although they don’t work for State Intelligence.” As an afterthought she added, “I’m not at liberty to explain who they work for, though. Saedon, Michael Klein, of the Sky City Police Department.”

The Time Lord skipped the usual pleasantries of shaking hands since Michael was sitting. “How do you do,” he said. He was indifferent but not hostile.

Tai nodded her head and smiled. Even in the dim light of the torches she could see that the detective was ruggedly handsome. “We found some water,” she said, holding up a canteen.

“Thank you,” replied Serena. She took the flask and sniffed it to be sure that it was safe. Satisfied, she handed it to Klein.

“Thanks.” It felt good on his dry throat.

Amy started to come around. “Where am I?” she mumbled.

Brogan shifted in his drugged sleep and opened his eyes to take a confused look around. He was not at all coherent, and none of what he saw made sense to him. At first he did not see anything he recognised. He did not know where he was. It was not his room at Meg’s inn, and it did not look like the TARDIS. There was a woman standing nearby, turned away. Amy? No, not Amy. This woman was dressed all in grey. A faint memory drifted through his brain, connecting the image with the name, Andrea. Andrea was his friend. He felt safe, and his heavy eyelids drooped shut again.

“Mouse!” cried Andrea, as Baxley entered the room in a hurry. The young man looked very upset. His clothes were dirty and disheveled, and half of his face was marred by small cuts that needed cleaning.

“Bad news!” he cried, out of breath. “The police are coming. But we were ambushed. I think the military knows where we are, too!”

“Calm down,” Andrea instructed. “Tell me everything.”

His words poured out in a flood as he recounted the appalling exchange of fire in the sewers. It had taken him a few hours to find his way to a second entrance. He was afraid that they would be discovered at any minute.

Andrea called one of her colleagues into the room. “Post guards, and set up extra sensors to detect intruders. I want to know the moment any of our access tunnels are breached. Are all of the explosives in place?”

“Yes,” replied the middle-aged woman. “And we’ve had word that Lief is ready up in Sky City. Everything is set for 10 am. All we have left is to finish up the wiring so we can remotely detonate the support columns.”

“Good. We just need to hold out for a few more hours.”

Cam rushed into the room. “Our prisoners have escaped!”

“What?!” exclaimed Andrea.

“I don’t know. Someone knocked out Brenda from behind, and they were just gone. She says she didn’t see anything.”

“Damn! Have everyone keep a lookout for them, and send out a few people to search.” She rubbed her forehead and swore again. “And you’d better start evacuating the workers.”

“Do you want me to take the child out?” asked Cam.

“No, let him stay with me. We’ll be okay. Get Mouse cleaned up and evacuate him with the others. His work is done here.”

After about a half hour of grogginess and general confusion, Amy began to feel like herself again. “So how are we going to stop these terrorists?”

Serena was glad to see that her friend was recovering. “We need to find the explosives and disable them. I think I know where to find at least one of the support columns, and if Megan’s description is accurate, that leaves two more.”

“What about the convention centre anti-gravity boosters?” asked Amy.

Saedon answered. “If the support columns remain intact, the failure of one or two boosters shouldn’t be enough to bring the building down. It’s wired with sensors, so maintenance teams will probably be sent in right away to make repairs.”

“But lose more than one support column, and the building is likely to collapse,” Serena added.

Tai yawned and sat down.

“Then you’d better get to work,” said Michael, wishing he could be of some assistance.

Since Amy was eager to do something useful for a change, she readily volunteered to go with her friend to disable the explosives.

“You coming?” Serena looked at her Gallifreyan colleague expectantly.

“No, I think we’ll stay here and keep an eye on things,” he replied, seeing that Tai wanted to rest. After all, unlike Amy, she had not slept the day away. “Besides, it looks like you’ve got all the help you need.” His studied Serena and Amy in his pseudo-lazy way. “But if you’re not back by 7 am, I’ll come looking for you,” he added as an afterthought.

Serena did not argue with him. Somehow, his decision not to help was unsurprising. He was only concerned that they make it back in time to either get back to the hidden chamber or escape the sewers before the terrorists destroyed them. “We’ll be back as soon as we can. I’m not sure how long this is going to take.”

“We also have to find Brogan,” added Amy, wondering what the terrorists had done with her young friend.

“Good luck,” said Michael. His confidence in Serena and Amy made him feel a little better.

“I was a little surprised to see you and Saedon working together,” said Amy, hoping her friend was in one of her more stable moods. They had just finished transmatting into the nearby tunnel near the large chamber.

“It was convenient,” replied Serena. “We have common goals at the moment.”

“That’s all? You’ve not become best pals or anything?”

Her friend gave her an odd look. “No.” She tried to ignore an annoying voice in her head. *You did like him, at first.* Another thought countered the first. *He’s too selfish. He does not deserve to be my friend!* The first voice chirped again. *Pah! You haven’t even given him a chance.*

“Well, that’s good, I guess,” said Amy. “I still don’t trust him, but I guess you’re right about having a common goal.”

Serena checked her sensor and verified that they were alone as they approached the large chamber. The guard was gone. She was glad to change the subject. “They’ll know you’ve escaped now. We’ll have to be careful to avoid discovery.”

Amy nodded. “Did you find the Queen’s tomb?”

“Yes. I’m amazed that you found out about that while you were in captivity,” she commented.

“Andrea treated us pretty well in the beginning.” She looked sheepish as she remembered why. “I accidentally told her we were offworlders without realizing that they’ve never had alien contact before.”

Serena gave her a sympathetic look. “She believed you?”

“Brogan’s eyes.” The phrase said it all.

“Oh.”

“Anyway, she gave us a lot of latitude at first. Showed us around and introduced us to a few interesting people. There was someone named Fife who knew a bit about local history.”

“Fife Lancet? I’d really like to talk to him. I read his profile when I was trying to find out about the Minimalists. He wasn’t like the others. I was hoping he might persuade his terrorist friends to be less violent,” she added, sounding a little dejected. “He sounded like a man of character. I suppose it’s too late now.”

“He seemed okay. Good with children. Tai was actually the one to get the story out of him,” Amy admitted. “Anyway, I’m dying to know. What was in the Queen’s chamber?”

Serena described the features of the unusual room. “We couldn’t figure out the riddle.”

“Hey, I have something that might help,” Amy said, remembering the data pad. “We found an old data disc left over from an archaeological survey. I couldn’t make any sense of the material though—couldn’t read any of it. But I’m sure you can.”

“Where is it?”

Amy looked down at her silk clothes. “Hmm. Must still be in the chamber where they were holding us.”

“Looks safe. Let’s have a quick look.”

Sure enough, the electronic pad was lying near one of the columns. Amy picked it up and handed it to her partner.

“We’d better not stay here long, just in case they’re watching the area.” Serena slipped the pad into one of her pockets and led the way from the chamber. “I’m sure they’re annoyed that they lost their prisoners.” She took a last look around at the area and remembered something. “The guard was wearing a lapel pin. Did you notice? I was wondering if it had any significance.”

“It’s some kind of Minimalist symbol. Andrea only gives them to people who demonstrate their devotion to the cause. I’ve only seen a few people wearing them—mostly inner circle members.”

“That explains the one I found at the mall after the explosion. Mark Clay must have dropped it by mistake.”

Laikoff and Wyse stood in a dark building with a handful of soldiers who had just returned from searching another entrance to the sewers. Their report was negative; it was another dead end.

Wyse was disappointed and tired. The hour was late, and they had not made any progress in finding the base intruders. They had wasted a couple of hours responding to a false alarm on base, created when Macey overreacted to scrambled transmat readings. As much as he wanted to find the intruders, he was beginning to wish they could call it a night.

“How many possible entry points does that leave us?” asked Laikoff, ignoring his own fatigue.

Wyse checked an electronic pad. “Maybe five or six more.” He gave orders to the soldiers and they left the building and piled into a few military hovercars to drive to the next location.

“Tomorrow is going to be bad,” commented Wyse. “There’s going to be an enquiry after the mix-up with the police.” The fiasco had been a bloodbath. Eight policemen had been killed and one was critically injured and another missing, while on the military’s side there were six fatalities and four serious injuries. “I really want to know why they were down there.”

Laikoff nodded. “Something big’s going on. I know it.” The muscles in his jaw twitched as he clenched his teeth.

“Well, I’m sure we’ll start getting some answers tomorrow morning.” It was impossible to get a straight answer from the Sky City Police Department in the middle of the night in the ensuing chaos.

Serena looked up at the explosive-packed holes in the ceiling and traced long cables with her eyes down the tunnel to the next bend. “What we need to do is disable the detonators,” she said, whispering. “I don’t think we can remove the explosive, but if we can keep them from destroying the columns until the police arrive, I think we’ll be okay.”

“So what can I do?” asked her friend.

“Looks like we’ve got intruders in the north entrance,” said Cam, checking a small pager-like device hooked to his waist. They had set up sensors at the remaining entrances and used a series of relays to get the signals back to the heart of their operations.

“Destroy it,” ordered Andrea. There were dark circles under her eyes. She would not be defeated, not when they were so close to accomplishing their mission.

Cam sent the signal. A minute later the echoes of a distant rumbling reached them. They were using radio-controlled detonators at each of the entrances so that they could easily destroy them at a moment’s notice without providing an obvious way for any intruders to trace the source. However, for the really important blast areas underneath the support columns, they had made other arrangements. These detonators were controlled by state-of-the-art timers which were supposedly tamper-proof. They had also taken the extra precaution of routing control wires back to the central area. The columns were too far from the sewer accesses to cause concern about leaving trails of wire for anyone to follow. The plan was to hold off their final evacuation until 9:30 am, but in the event that they became trapped or the timers failed, there was still a way to set off the explosions.

The ground shook and there was a faint rumbling. Laikoff and Wyse exchanged worried glances as they waited for a report to come back from the group of soldiers which had gone into the sewers.

Finally, a young, shell-shocked man emerged. “Creski and Siyasha—they’re dead!”

Laikoff’s blood began to boil as the stunned man explained how they had discovered a holoscreen in one of the tunnels, and how the sewer had exploded soon after they had passed through the projection.

“Someone really doesn’t want us to find them,” Wyse muttered.

“Let’s get a demolition expert down here. I don’t want any repeats!” growled Laikoff.

“What time is it?” asked Amy.

Serena looked at her watch. “A little after six.” She continued working on one of the detonators in the ceiling. There were several in each location, making it was tedious work.

Amy helped by holding the torch and handing her tools. Suddenly, there was a faint rumbling. “I don’t like the sound of that. That’s the second one we’ve heard.”

“They must have sealed another entrance. Maybe the police are trying to get in.”

“This is bad. I didn’t realise it would take so long to disable these things.” Amy was eager to locate Brogan, but she knew they had to solve the more serious problem first.

“Almost done. Just one more. Then we should have only one more batch.”

A fresh worry popped into her mind. “What if they’ve taken him out of the sewers? How are we ever going to find him?”

Serena smiled. “I found you once, didn’t I? Trust me—we’ll find him.”

Amy looked at the confidence in Serena’s face. She suddenly realised how stable her friend had become. Somehow, in the last few days, she had learned to control her more erratic impulses. Her usual moodiness had evaporated.

“Andrea!” shouted Cam. “Someone is sabotaging our setup!”

“Impossible!” cried Andrea, suddenly panicked by the thought that their well-made plans were going to fail.

He quickly explained the state of Position 1. All of the detonators were ruined beyond repair, and the backup control wires were severed.

“How? Another traitor?” She tried to think. Who was left that could possibly want to do this? She looked down the tunnel. Fife was still present, and he certainly had the motive, but he had been sitting glumly on a box of equipment for hours. She also doubted that he had the knowledge. “Our escapees must be somehow responsible,” she announced. “Though I don’t understand how. What about the other two positions?”

“Not sure yet, but I’ve sent someone to check,” replied her second in command.

“Do we have enough spare detonators to fix the damage?”

“I don’t think so. There are enough replacements for perhaps one of the Positions, but not all of them.” His pager beeped. “Oh no, not this! Another entrance has been compromised.”

“Seal it, and send someone to fix up the first position.”

A man came into view. “Position Two’s down!” he cried, his voice bouncing in the tunnels.

Andrea flinched.

“All finished.” Serena handed Amy a pair of wire clippers and stretched out her weary arms.

“Good.” Amy smiled, but her smile faded when she heard the third rumble of the morning. “We’d better start looking for Brogan.”

“Saedon and Tai might even be looking for us by now. It’s almost nine o’clock,” said Serena, a little surprised by how fast the time had passed. Disabling the detonators and trying to make their way through the tunnels had taken an inordinate amount of time.

“I wonder if the terrorists have figured out what we’ve done.”

“We’ll probably find out.”

“Position One is repaired,” explained Cam wearily. “And Position Three was still good at our last check at eight o’clock—but Position Two is out of action. What do you want to do?”

Andrea looked at her watch. It was just after nine o'clock. "I have this bad feeling, Cam. Send someone out to check on Position Three again, and then give the order to evacuate."

"There's only one exit left."

"I know." Andrea sighed. "Our structural engineer told us we only needed to destroy two of the support columns to get the convention centre to collapse. Blowing three was just an extra piece of insurance. We might have to count on just the two."

Cam nodded and moved off to give orders to the remaining Minimalists.

Andrea looked in on Brogan, who was still sleeping. Seeing him made her sad and full of longing for simpler times. She turned away.

Out in the tunnel, she approached Fife. "Why are you still here?" Her voice was full of concern.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said firmly, his eyes unwavering. He softened his voice a little. "Stop this madness, Andrea."

Andrea gave a hollow laugh. "I'll stop my madness, when they stop theirs." She turned away from him.

Cam ran up, his eyes full of worry. "They got to Position Three!"

The terrorist leader cried out. "Not this!" She looked undecided for a moment, and then made up her mind. "Get everyone out," she said quietly. "I'll stay behind and take care of Position Two myself."

"You'll be killed!" cried Cam.

"So?" Her eyes blazed with determination.

A fresh look of reverence appeared on his face. "I'll get everyone out. You will *never* be forgotten for this!" he said proudly.

Andrea ran down to get Brogan, who she planned to turn over to Cam.

She roused him from his drugged sleep. He was incoherent, but with coaxing, she managed to get him to stand up and walk if she propped him up.

Cam cried out to her when they emerged from the maintenance room. "Our exit! Intruders!"

They had a quick war counsel, ignoring the hovering figure of Fife. At last, Cam volunteered a solution. "We'll hold them off," he said grimly.

"You must stop this!" cried Fife. "All of you—this is insane!" He blocked the way out.

"Get out of our way," muttered Cam.

"No." Fife crossed his arms.

Cam shot him.

Several of the others gasped. Andrea winced.

"Oh," muttered Cam, realising his phasor was still set to stun. He was about to finish the job, when Andrea stopped him.

"Leave him. Go, before it's too late! I'll take care of the rest."

"What about the child?" asked Cam.

"I'll take him with me. At least death will be quick for us." They parted ways.

Andrea filled a canvas bag with supplies. She slung it over her shoulder and picked up a heavy duty phasor rifle. She laughed when she realised it had belonged to the policeman they had captured. How ironic! She did not know if she would need it, but she did not want to take any chances.

"Come on Brogan, we have to move." She struggled to prop him up.

"What's goin' on?" he mumbled.

"Just a little ways. Come on, you can do it," she said, trying to encourage him.

Somehow they made it to Position 2.

* * *

Serena and Amy arrived at the former command centre of the Minimalist operation.

“They’re all gone!” cried Amy.

“Wait, look!” Serena saw the figure of a man on the floor and rushed over to see if he was still alive.

“It’s Fife,” murmured Amy when she recognised him. “Is he...?”

“No, he’s not dead,” said Serena.

He groaned slightly and his eyes fluttered open. He had luckily been several metres away from Cam when he was shot, and the stun was not as severe as the one Klein had suffered. He still felt cold and partially paralysed, but he was aware of his surroundings. He looked up at the pale face of Serena and briefly wondered if she was an angel.

“What happened?” she asked.

Amy leaned forward so that he could see her as well.

“I wanted to stop them. They’re insane!” His voice was weak and had none of its usual deep strength.

“But we’ve disabled the detonators,” said Amy.

“No,” Fife replied, struggling to get the words out. “They’ve repaired one of the positions,” he explained. “And Andrea has gone to take care of one of the others, personally.”

Serena and Amy exchanged a look of horror.

“Do you know when they are planning to set off the explosions?” asked Serena.

“10 am.”

“That’s five minutes away,” cried Serena, looking at her watch. “Where did she go? We have to stop her!”

Fife gestured towards one of the tunnels. “It’s in that direction.”

Serena jumped up and rushed away. Amy followed, but before she left, she called back to him. “Have you seen Brogan?”

“He was here before they stunned me,” he replied.

Andrea was hurriedly reconnecting the last few wires to a large battery, in preparation to set off the explosion that would topple the convention centre. Brogan was sitting on an empty crate nearby, leaning heavily against the curved wall of the sewer. He was starting to come out of his stupor, but he was by no means coherent yet. He was aware of Andrea, who was talking softly to him, but he did not understand what was going on.

A few metres away, Andrea had left her canvas bag and the phasor rifle sitting on top of a short stack of crates which were left over from carrying explosives and detonators. She did not think they were out of reach, but she was not prepared for the surprise of being discovered so quickly.

“Andrea!” cried Amy as she and Serena ran up to the crates, which were partially blocking the tunnel. “Please, stop what you’re doing!”

The Minimalist leader jumped, but the interruption only spurred her on to work more quickly. “You’re too late!” she cried.

Suddenly, the ground shook with the force of a low grade earthquake.

“They’ve succeeded in detonating one of the positions!” Serena looked worried.

Amy was frightened. The convention centre had lost the support of one of its columns. One more, and they would all be dead. “Please, Andrea! Don’t kill all of those people!”

Somewhere behind them, the faint sound of footsteps echoed.

Brogan looked up at Andrea, his eyes unfocused. “What’s goin’ on?”

“It’s okay Brogan,” she whispered softly. She picked up the last wire and reached for the battery terminal that would spark the blast.

“Stop!” cried Serena and Amy in unison. Serena spotted the phasor rifle sticking out from underneath the canvas bag and reached for it.

The bright blue energy beam snaked out and caught Andrea full in the chest. A cry escaped her lips and she flew backwards.

The boy screamed. In an instant he was on the floor, kneeling by the woman.

She looked up at him and whispered his name. Then the light went out in her eyes, and she was dead.

Serena and Amy ran forward. Serena yanked the connections away from the battery. There would be no second explosion. Amy knelt by her young friend and tried to ignore the stench of charred meat that wafted from the woman’s corpse.

“She’s dead!” cried the boy. “She was my friend!” He sobbed uncontrollably over the body.

Serena gazed down at the glazed eyes of the dead woman and felt awful. It did not matter that they had saved countless lives in the city above. In spite of the fact that she had had no choice, she could not bury the fact that she was completely responsible for the woman’s death.

Amy pulled Brogan away from Andrea. He clutched her tightly and continued to cry. She soon found herself weeping with him.

No one had moved several minutes later when Saedon and Tai emerged from the end of the tunnel.

“What happened?” asked Saedon. His usual nonchalance was gone, and he actually looked concerned.

Serena’s face was blanched. She looked up at the Time Lord with haunted eyes. “It’s over,” she said.

Their eyes locked for a moment, and in that instant he understood what she was feeling. In a low voice, he whispered, “This is why we don’t get involved.”

“Sometimes there is no choice.” She heard herself say the words, but at the moment she wished she was light-years and centuries away from the scene. She could not block out the sound of Brogan’s sobbing, and she could do nothing to erase her own memories.

Eventually, they found their way back to the room where Klein and a distraught Megan were waiting for news.

When Amy and Brogan walked in with their red, puffy eyes, Klein’s heart skipped a beat. “Serena?” He thought she was dead. Then she followed her friends in, and he let out a big sigh. “Thank heavens, you’re all right.”

Serena said nothing. Her eyes were unfocused, and she was lost in thought. She sat down in one of the corners away from the others.

“It was a very close call,” explained Saedon. He explained about the Minimalist leader and how she had nearly succeeded in destroying them all.

“You didn’t see my brother?” squeaked Megan.

“No. I don’t think they ever found him,” said Amy, exhausted from the affair.

“Is there anyone else left out there?” asked Klein.

“Only one. But he’s not responsible for any of this,” said Amy. “His name is Fife. When he found out what Andrea was planning, he tried to stop her. They stunned him and left him during their evacuation.”

Klein was about to ask where he was, when Tai entered the room with the large man. “So you weren’t helping them?” Klein studied Fife, trying to judge his character.

Fife sighed. "I am guilty, but not the way you think. I'm guilty of looking the other way, of abdicating my responsibility to my fellow man."

"How's that?"

"Thinking back, I could probably have done more to stop the violence." Fife frowned. "Oh, I argued with Andrea a lot, but she was so stubborn. I should have tried other things." He sat down next to Serena, feeling tired but strangely peaceful. He shook his head. "It finally made sense to me yesterday. I don't want to be a bystander anymore. I still don't like the way our society is, but Andrea's methods were wrong. I'm sure we can find a better way, something that doesn't involve hurting people."

Suddenly, Serena looked up as if remembering something. As she looked at Fife, a glimmer of hope returned to her eyes. "I know Andrea was devoted to her cause, and there are bound to be many people in her organisation whose resolve will only be strengthened by her death." She paused, collecting her thoughts. "Don't let her death be used that way. Use it to bring people to their senses."

Fife nodded.

"So now what?" asked Klein.

"I suppose we just wait. I'm sure either the military or the police will be here soon," said Fife. He recalled how the Minimalists had been sealing up all of the entrances. "I'm a little surprised they haven't made it in already. I suppose Cam must have had some success in slowing them down."

Saedon cleared his throat. "Tai, why don't we go see if we can hear anyone coming." He and his companion slipped out of the room.

The move did not escape Amy and Serena. "Maybe we can go find something to eat. They must have left a few supplies behind," suggested Amy. If they waited for the authorities to arrive, they might never have another opportunity to get into the hidden chamber.

"Do you mind?" asked Serena, looked at Klein. She was glad that she did not have to say goodbye.

"No. I could do with some food."

Amy turned to Brogan, who was staring blankly at the floor. "Come on. You'll feel better after a little walk." As they left the room, they could hear the distant echoes of shouting.

The two Time Lords and their companions crowded into the Queen's chamber.

"So what's the answer to our little riddle?" asked Saedon. "What is the purpose of this one?" He moved the light of his torch around the chamber, studying the roughness on the walls and puzzling over the room's strange dimensions. "Maybe it's some sort of transcendental dimension trick," he suggested.

Serena went over to one of the walls and studied it closely. "I would have expected to find a plasmic shell."

Amy remembered the datapad. "Maybe there's something on that disc we found."

"Let's see," replied Serena, pulling the pad from her pocket. She skimmed through the data for several minutes.

"Well?"

Slowly, she shook her head. "Sorry. Some of it would be interesting to the local archaeologists, but I'm afraid there's nothing here that will help us."

Amy sighed.

"How come there aren't any clues, like at the other ones?" asked Tai.

"Well, there are clues," said Saedon. "There could be a mathematical solution." He explained about the room's unusual measurements.

"Maybe you have to stand in the right place," suggested Serena.

“That could take forever,” muttered Tai. “And there are five of us. Maybe it only works with one person at a time.”

Amy listened to the suggestions bouncing back and forth and felt like she was at a complete loss. Brogan was completely silent and stared at the floor, ignoring everything around him, which worried her. She was tired, she was hungry, and she badly wanted a long hot soak in a bath. Out of frustration, she muttered, “Maybe there just isn’t a solution at all.”

Her words had an unexpected effect. There was a chime, and a deep voice suddenly issued from the ceiling. “You have passed the Trial of Impossibility. Some riddles have no answers.”

Everyone turned to look at Amy, who had a very surprised look on her face. She did not have a chance to say anything before the Gallifreyan transport mechanism whisked them off to the final stage of the ancient riddle.

The five of them materialised on a large stone platform in the middle of a field of tall red grain. A large reddish-yellow sun sat high in the clear blue sky. There were no signs of civilization, and the fields stretched out for as far as the eye could see, except in one direction. About one hundred metres away, three large objects towered over the swaying grain.

One of the objects was easily recognisable. Serena’s TARDIS stood to one side. The small gold emblem on the front of the black monolith glittered in the sunlight. The second object was highly reflective. None of them could figure out what they were looking at, as it was too shiny and seemed too out of place. Next to this, a large boulder sat quietly looking for all the world like it had always been there. However, in the middle of such a flat plain, it too seemed like an oddity.

“Ah, my TARDIS!” cried Saedon. He set off walking.

Eager for the comforts of Serena’s TARDIS, Amy quickly followed, dragging a sullen Brogan along with her.

Serena and Tai were not far behind.

As they approached the time capsules, Tai had a chance to get a better look at the reflective object. She cocked her head and tried to figure out what it was.

“Mirrors?” said Amy. “That’s a new one.” It too had caught her attention. She decided that she could postpone her bath for a few more minutes.

There were six mirrors resting on a stone base in a hexagon, each facing out toward the vast plain. Saedon stopped in front of them and said, “They’re carnival mirrors.” He looked at his distorted reflection in one of the mirrors which had a convex shape.

“Well, this must be our last riddle,” said Serena. She stared at her own reflection in a concave mirror and frowned.

Brogan, still stunned by the morning’s events, looked at the mirrors without any enthusiasm or interest. He did not really even see his reflection, but he vividly remembered the image of Andrea looking up at him when she died. He wanted to cry again, but he no longer had the energy.

“Well, it’s certainly not much of a work of art,” said Amy. She tried to get a look at herself in each of the mirrors. “I don’t look that bad, do I?” The distorting mirrors made her look super fat or minutely skinny in her ripped silk yinsha. It was no longer red and gold but a dirty shade of brown. Her hair was tangled and matted from lying in the dirt when she had been drugged, and her eyes were still swollen from crying. “Then again...” Suddenly, she started to giggle. Soon she was laughing heartily.

“What is it?” asked Tai. “What’s so funny?” She did not like looking at the funny reflections of herself, particularly the one that made her look fat.

“I can’t believe we just went through all that for some silly old Gallifreyan riddle!” Amy cried. “Well, I guess it’ll make a good story for my grandchildren someday!” With that she fell into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

All of the mirrors suddenly changed shape. Each one became a perfect mirror, reflecting the scene without distortion. Amy stopped laughing, and everyone watched the transformation.

Saedon gave Amy an annoyed look. He thought it was unfair that a primitive human had somehow solved two parts of the Gallifreyan riddle on her own, by accident.

Their own images suddenly vanished from the reflections, and they saw an old, decrepit man standing in their places. He was transparent, like a ghost, and Serena thought it was some sort of simple hologram. He gazed out from each mirror, but only one of the reflections moved and spoke at a time.

“So, you have solved the final riddle.” His voice was deep, but worn and crackly. He faced Amy and spoke directly to her.

“I have?” she said. “What was the riddle?”

The old man laughed. “The Trial of Laughter!”

“Huh?”

“It’s always important to remember to laugh at ourselves.”

“That’s it?” muttered Tai.

“That was the last riddle,” he said, speaking from the mirror nearest Tai. “Trial of Logic, Trial of Fear, Trial of Creativity, Trial of Impossibility, and Trial of Laughter. That’s five.” He laughed again. His laughter was like the crinkling of dry leaves.

“Enough!” said Saedon. “There’s supposed to be a prize for finishing.”

The old man peered at him from the nearest mirror. Serena looked at her fellow Time Lord and wondered what he was talking about.

“Ah, yes, the prize,” said the old man. “Very well. Select any scene from the history of time and space and, for your viewing pleasure, the mirror will replay it for you with whatever modifications you wish.” He folded his arms.

“What?!” exclaimed Saedon, surprised and unexpectedly angry.

Serena walked over to him, puzzled by his outburst. “You didn’t tell me there was a prize.”

He made a face at her and then looked back at the mirror. He was livid. “It was *supposed* to let you go back in history and change the outcome of some event. It was *supposed* to let you participate.”

“You know that’s not possible, that it’s not allowed. What has already happened cannot be changed.” Serena spoke to him as if he was a simple child. “It’s just an amusement device. This whole thing was just designed for amusement.”

“Well, I don’t think it’s very funny!” He turned and went over to the large boulder. “What a complete waste of time!” With that, he opened up the door to his TARDIS—which looked rather incongruous in the middle of the boulder—and disappeared inside. Tai shrugged at the others and followed him inside, closing the door behind her. In a moment, they heard a familiar wheezing sound as his TARDIS faded away.

Serena, Amy and Brogan were alone with the mirror. The old man continued to stand with his arms crossed, waiting for them to make a selection.

“I don’t think it’s very funny either,” whispered Brogan. It was the first thing he had said since Andrea’s death.

Amy and Brogan were not interested in experimenting with the mirror, so they went inside the TARDIS. Serena stayed outside by herself.

Inside the TARDIS, Amy led Brogan through the gothic console room and into the brighter corridors that led to the bedrooms and other parts of the ship. She stopped at her

own room to get a fluffy white robe from her wardrobe. Brogan waited out in the hall without going in to his own room. When Amy emerged from her room, robe in hand, she took a good look at the boy, observing his puffy eyes and blank expression. He obviously needed some attention, but she felt inadequate to the task. She sighed. "Come on, let's get cleaned up."

She deposited him in a large white bathroom which had a huge walk-in shower. She realised that he did not have anything to change into after he had finished, so she said, "Here, you can use my robe when you're done. I'll get another one. One of the wardrobe rooms is two doors down from here, if you want to pick out something new to wear." His clothes were also ruined.

He said nothing and stared at the floor.

"You know how to work the shower?" she asked.

He shook his head. At least he was not ignoring her, she thought.

She demonstrated how to use the control knob. "Why don't you take a nice hot shower and clean up. You'll feel a lot better afterwards."

He nodded slowly without making eye contact.

"I'm just going across the hall, if you need me. I'm going to soak in a bath for a while. Afterwards we can get something to eat. I'll fix you some pancakes. Does that sound good?"

Brogan was unenthusiastic. He shrugged.

Since there was nothing more she could do, she left him alone.

She slipped into the wardrobe room and picked up another robe for herself. When she came out, she could hear the sound of running water from Brogan's bathroom. "At least he's responding to me a little," she murmured. "I wonder how Serena's doing."

Amy almost felt like a new person after she had soaked in a bubble bath for a half hour and washed out her grimy hair. All she needed now was some food, and maybe a long nap. She noticed that Brogan's bathroom was empty when she came out of her own.

When she returned to her room, she saw Brogan sitting on the bed in the room across from her own, all dressed up in his original clothes from Krimshon. She wondered why he had not gone to the wardrobe to select something more comfortable, but then as an afterthought she decided that he might have needed a reminder of home to get him through his current misery. "I won't be long," she said in passing.

She donned a pair of dark trousers, a crisp white shirt, and a paisley vest. "Much better," she murmured. As she exited the room, she called to her friend. "Come on, let's get something to eat."

The boy slowly stood up and followed her, as subdued as ever.

Amy bustled around the kitchen, mixing flour, milk and other ingredients into a fluffy pancake batter. Soon, she had a batch of puffy cakes cooking on a large griddle. She dropped some blueberries into each cake and watched them pop and sizzle. While they cooked, she poured out two glasses of orange juice and microwaved some syrup. She also prepared a pot of tea.

"Here you go," she announced, setting a pile of hotcakes in front of the boy.

He stared at them. "I want t' go home," he whispered.

His words startled her. She set a second plate down and sat down across from him at the white kitchen table. She looked across at the boy, and his eyes met her own. She had never seen such a solemn expression on one so young. "You do?" Suddenly, she realised how sad his request made her.

Serena opened the door to the kitchen. Her eyes looked haunted again, and she looked almost as dejected as Brogan. The time she had spent alone had obviously not been quality time, and Amy wondered if she had made some use of the mirror. However, at the

moment she had more important things to worry about. “Brogan wants to go home,” Amy said quietly.

Somehow, those words made the Time Lord look even more depressed. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

This triggered a response from the boy. He pushed back from the table and glared at her. “You’re sorry?!” he cried. “I hate you! I hate you!” He ran out of the room.

Amy jumped up and ran after him, missing the look of horror on her friend’s face.

She found Brogan in the console room, bawling in one of the chairs. When she tried to comfort him, he pushed her away. “Take me home,” he said repeatedly in between sobs.

Serena came in and immediately went over to the console to set the coordinates for Krimshon.

They materialised outside of Beranna’s cottage in the middle of the afternoon. As soon as Serena had verified their location on the scanner screen and pressed the door lever, Brogan jumped up and ran out of the TARDIS.

Beranna emerged from her house, and the boy immediately ran to her and clutched her, crying like a small child. “What happened?” asked the old woman, patting his back to console him.

Amy came out after him. “It’s a long story,” she replied. She did not know how to tell the kind woman about their misadventure. She felt horribly guilty about what had happened, about what he had seen. “I don’t know how to explain it,” she said at last. “Do you mind looking after him for a while? He doesn’t want to stay with us,” she said. “And the inn probably isn’t a good place for him right now.”

“Do you want to stay with me, dear?” asked Beranna, looking down at the child.

He nodded mutely.

Amy did not want to leave him like this. She kept trying to tell herself that he did not really have to go, that they could work through this. However, in her heart she knew it was too dangerous to take him on their travels. Their recent adventure had proven that much. He was too young to cope with the difficult situations she and Serena frequently encountered. “He doesn’t understand what happened. He may not understand it for a long time,” she said. She felt she owed some kind of explanation. The boy had never learned about Andrea’s plan for the convention centre—he had been asleep when Megan had revealed it to them. “There was a woman who was going to kill a lot of people,” she explained. “And the only way to stop her...” She trailed off, not sure how to finish. “Let’s just say she won’t be hurting any more people.”

The old woman nodded with the wisdom of age and experience. “I’ll try to explain it to him someday.”

“Thanks.” Amy desperately wished she could hold back her next words.

“Goodbye, Brogan,” she said quietly.

The teary-eyed boy pulled away from Beranna and gave her a swift hug. “Bye, Amy.”

The corners of Amy’s mouth pulled down and she fought off a wave of fresh tears. “You take care of yourself, and of Beranna.”

“I promise,” he whispered. He returned to stand next to Beranna and took hold of her hand.

Amy could not stand it any more. She quickly escaped into the TARDIS, and the time capsule faded away.

The End