

## Episode 3

# Eliminate the Impossible

### Chapter 1 - Lost

When Frank walked into the control room, everything seemed normal in there. It was silent apart from the gentle hum of the standby engine. The countdown clock was reset and counting down from two and the half days, the system sweep was gathering navigation data, the communication channels were mute. All the consoles of the Cellar suggested that all was fine.

Except for one. A screen was still linked to the jukebox in the pub-room. He stepped in front of it and checked the list.

'Hm. That sounds nice,' he said and [started](#) a song.

That pointed out that three heads were far from fine. The combination of the violin and the distorted guitar raised painful voices from the engineering level below the console.

'Turn it off!' Sam moaned.

Frank smiled and waited a bit before he stopped the music.

'Thank you!' Amy said and slowly stood up. 'Ah, my head!'

The three of them got up as if they were about to start a zombi-apocalypse. They lurched up the stairs with the tempo of snails. Frank was looking at them with his head shaking, but also smiling.

'Sam does not want to listen to music. It must be a Level 9 hangover.'

'Excellent deduction,' Sam said, 'except it's wrong.'

Reaching the top of the landing, he staggered to the jukebox-screen. He read the song's title that Frank just played.

'Great! Pack of Rats! You have found the crew's new hymn, on the *"Hymns for Bastards"* album,' then he suddenly changed the topic, 'but it is only a Level 7 hangover. Level 9 is when I start throwing up. Which could happen any minute now.' He had troubles with breathing at the last sentence.

As soon as she reached the landing of the console, Amy collapsed onto floor leaning against the rail.

'Why aren't there chairs in this TARDIS? The Doctor's had one or two. Ah, my head is splitting.'

'I told that you shouldn't drink that motor oil-like wine,' Piotr said.

The Armenian also seemed quite comfortable with the floor. He sat down to light a cigarette.

'Oi! We've agreed the control room is a non-smoking area,' Sam told him off.

'Come on! I feel like crap...'

'No wonder, after a whole bottle of brandy.'

'... I need a fag.'

'Do it elsewhere.'

Piotr just ignored him and continued releasing grey clouds. The smoke started to annoy Frank as well.

'Do what you like. I need a coffee,' he said and went up the stairs.

'Coffee. Good idea,' Amy said and followed Frank.

'Coffee. Bad idea,' Sam stated, 'but I'm a little peckish.'

'Bon Appetit!' Piotr yawned.

When the trio left the room, he finished off the cigarette. He was about to light another one when Gladys, Jenny and Ben walked into the room from the living quarters' direction.

'Don't you dare!' Ben said, but the lighter stopped before it could light anything. 'What is it? What are you staring at?'

'Have any of you seen that lever before?'

'I don't even know what levers are there,' Gladys waved.

'I'm not sure,' Ben said, 'I know the Shark better.'

'That definitely wasn't there before,' Jenny shouted excited. 'Since I've learned to pilot the TARDIS, I know every control, but this is something new.'

'Wonder what it does?' Piotr tried to get up from the floor and walked to the console to pull the lever.

'What the hell are you doing? Lord knows what it will do to us.'

'Look, everything this TARDIS has done so far had a point. This must have as well.'

Piotr didn't wait for the captain's approval. He thought that his reasoning convinced everyone and immediately pulled the lever. Strangely nothing happened. Only the ship shook a tiny bit.

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'What was that?' Amy asked nervously upstairs.

'I don't know,' Frank replied.

'I don't care,' Sam shrugged.

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'What just happened?' Ben looked at the column suspiciously.

'I have no idea,' Piotr barfed.

'Look,' Gladys pointed at the screen, 'the counter stopped.'

That was surprising for everyone. Neither of them could recall an example of such an event. Piotr switched the lever back to its original position, and the clock was ticking again. He tried it a couple more times, and it seemed they were granted the opportunity to stay in one place as long as they'd like.

'So, is that it?' Ben asked. 'We can stop the clock?'

'I doubt that would be all,' Jenny stepped to the console, 'I wonder what happens if I do this.'

'Jenny, don't!' the captain shouted.

His heart skipped a few beats when he saw what she was up to.

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'Okay! That's it.' Sam pushed the almost full plate away. 'I can't eat more.'

'Already?' Amy was a bit surprised. 'You were about to starve to death two bites ago.'

'And it will come back in an hour,' Franks sipped his coffee.

'You must have had a long five years knowing each other's hangovers so well.'

'Indeed it was.'

A moment later, they heard a weird sound. A sound that suggested there won't be a sixth year. The sound of a TARDIS.

'No,' Sam said, 'we couldn't be drunk for two days.'

Amy cheered up immediately when she realised what this could mean.

'The Doctor! He found me!'

She jumped up, forgetting everything about her terrible headache and ran down the stairs. Her steps were a bit uncertain, though. Frank also followed quickly. Sam didn't even have time to say wait. Eventually, he sighed and got up like an ages-old man. When he reached the cargo hold, the others were standing in the middle, confused. Seemingly nothing changed. The hall was empty except for Bessie parking in the corner.

'I don't get it,' Amy said.

'I do,' Frank said. 'They must have done something down there.'

He came off the stairs and strode towards Cellar, but he suddenly stopped halfway.

'Okay! Where's the *down there*?'

Amy, Sam, and Frank gathered around the trapdoor's supposed place.

'I think I know what that sound really was,' Sam stated.

'Excellent deduction,' Frank said mockingly.

Finally, Amy made another trivial comment.

'Let me guess. We are trouble.'

The look the others gave her made it obvious. They were.

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Back in the TARDIS, Ben just finished yelling at Jenny.

'Don't worry. We can go back just as easily,' she defended.

'You might want to hurry with that.'

'Chill out. We are going.'

Jenny pushed a few buttons, and the time rotor moved for a short time.

'There. We are back.'

'Great. I'll go, have some breakfast,' Gladys said and went upstairs.

'Wait a minute,' Piotr said a bit nervously. 'Exactly, how drunk was I last night? I don't remember installing a new door made of solid rock,' he pointed behind his back.

'That wasn't there before,' Ben stated.

'The trapdoor is gone too,' Gladys said at the top of the stairs.

Everyone looked at Jenny waiting for answers. The Time Lady blushed of the pairs of eyes staring at her.

'There is a simple explanation for this,' she muttered.

Piotr slowly rose and shuffled to the appeared door. He almost hurtled out into nothingness, as he opened it and faced a thousand stars twinkling at him.

'Yes, there is,' he said calmly and threw out the stub to space.

Jenny stepped to the consoles.

'I don't understand,' she said anxiously, 'I assumed, if I reversed the last flight, we would end up where we originally were.'

'Well, we didn't,' Ben said.

'Can't you just enter our original coordinates?'

'No. It must be set with Time Lord symbols, but I don't know those.'

Piotr gave quite an accurate translation for this statement.

'Meaning, we are in trouble.'

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Meanwhile, the others left aboard the Shark landed on the nearest, luckily, habited planet.

'Are you sure this is a good idea?' Amy asked as they were walking along a street crowded by human-like but very tall people.

'Of course, it is,' Sam said, 'and it's our only idea. If the others won't show up, this planet is our only chance of survival.'

'What if they do show up?' Amy argued.

'What would be?'

While Amy and Sam were debating, Frank was looking around suspiciously. As usual, he noticed something. Something was bugging him, but he couldn't work out what.

'Well, how do they find us?'

'This is the only habitable planet in the system. They will know we will be here. After that..., they'll find a way... to find us.' Sam tried to be confident, but with not much success.

All of a sudden, Frank stopped and slapped his forehead.

'Oh, we are so dumb, bloody idiots.'

'What?' The others asked simultaneously.

'Listen. Listen to the crowd.'

They were sharpening their ears, but they couldn't hear what Frank meant. Finally, he got tired of waiting.

'My goodness. We are so used to it that we don't even notice it. They're speaking English.'

A big, surprised...

'Ooohh!' ...was the answer.

'They are already here, and the Cellar translates for us.'

'Exactly,' Ben replied.

First, they didn't even notice what happened. They only thought their boss agreed with them, as he occasionally does. But then, as they slowly turned their heads, they saw the captain smiling from a TV screen in a shop window.

'That's right. We are here, but it took us a bloody long way to arrive, and you helped us reach our goal. But that's still ahead of you. Do you like self-fulfilling prophecies? If you do, here is one. Sam, take Bessie out for a ride, and all will be fine.'

The TV turned off. The others were just blinking at the blank screen for seconds seeming ages. Finally, Sam broke the silence.

'So, that's how they will find us.'

## Chapter 2 - A Good Advice

Hal date: 1865. 10. 08.

Perez Rakuun was a citizen of a planet called Hal. If we look at its relative position to Earth, we can say it is on the other side of the galaxy. When the Torchwood-4 team reached that globe, the human race was busy fighting the wars of the dark ages. At this point, Hal was at the technical level of our early seventies.

Considering Perez's job, the most accurate translation would be Police Constable. But not for long. It had been two weeks since he took the detective exam, and that day, he was finally to know the results. All his colleagues in his rank knew he had a bright mind and would pass easily. The only one who had doubts was himself.

He had been nervous ever since he stepped out of the exam room, even though people kept telling him he shouldn't worry about something already certain. Even his direct supervisors were sure that Perez would soon get rid of the uniform. And that made them very, very jealous. Probably, that was the reason for assigning Perez to patrol duty in the worst area of the town on his last day.

Every minute of the day was excruciating. He was counting the seconds until the verdict of his career was published as he was wandering District 8 of the capital city with his partner.

'Will you finally calm down?' Esimel said.

'Today? Not a chance,' Perez replied.

'Oh, come on. Be reasonable. All your preliminary tests were outstanding. Your trainers were chanting litanies of you. Trust me, the stamp has already dried on your promotion.'

'Oh, I've seen everything collapsing at the very end. I will calm down when I'm over everything. The last moment can always hold surprises.'

'So it seems. Look.'

Esimel was referring to the screams and the shouts coming from across the street. The two cops looked over there and saw people running away from a weird-looking trio. A man had a grey, flat box in one hand and in the other a pistol. He was keeping the other two, a couple, at gunpoint. Esimel acted immediately.

'Oi! Drop your gun and hands in the air!'

He shouted and started running towards the robber with a weapon in his hand. Perez followed him closely. When the gunman saw the two coppers approaching he got scared. He quickly placed the box onto the pavement and fled immediately into a narrow alley, but in his rush, he accidentally fired the gun.

Esimel and Perez couldn't see the consequences of that blind shot, so they kept chasing the attacker. He had about 50 meters advantage, and not far from the other end of the alley, he ran through a door. By the

time the cops got there, it was already locked. They were immediately kicking the door, but strangely they couldn't even scratch the seemingly weak wood.

'What the hell?' Esimel shouted. 'Don't tell me we can't knock down a simple door.'

'Somebody help me! Please!' They heard a desperate cry from the far end of the small street.

'Try to get in!' Perez said, and he was already running back.

But his pace slowed down as he got close to the shocking scene. He only found Jenny lying in a large blood puddle and Ben crying over her dead body.

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Most of the day passed by the time Esimel and Perez could go back to the station. Pretty soon, the crime scene was crawling with the investigators. The poor broken man was escorted in, the body was brought to the police morgue, and after examinations in District 8 finished, everything was cleared up.

'So what now?' Esimel asked when they returned to their desk.

'I guess we wait until we are interviewed. We are key witnesses.'

That's exactly what happened when DI Jörag Mantl entered the uniform's hall.

'Rakuum. Come with me!'

'Here we go.'

Perez went with Jörag to the detective's office.

'Sit, please. As you may know, my former partner was promoted, so I don't have any right now. Given your excellent marks, I would like you to fill that post, DC Perez Rakuum.'

He instantly forgot the events of the day.

'Oh! Thank you very much!'

'You deserve it. And here is your first case. Come with me to the interview room, and let's talk to this Ben Foreman guy. Psychologist just reported he has calmed down enough to get some answers out of him.'

'Wouldn't this be a problem?' Perez asked a bit worried. 'I mean, I'm also a witness in that case.'

'Yes, but let's just say you've already been questioned. I doubt that man's testimony would affect your answers.'

'Fine,' Perez allowed himself a smile.

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Ben was sitting at the table in the interview room. He was elbowing on the table and pressing his hands against his temple. He wasn't crying, but his face was distorted by sorrow. He looked up when Jörag entered, but his expression changed after Perez stepped in.

'No way! Look at you! So much younger, so early in your career, still in uniform,' Ben said, astonished.

'My first case as DC,' Perez said with a slight pride in his voice. 'How did you know?'

'Never mind. Sorry.'

All of a sudden, Ben changed back to being very disturbed.

'Mr. Foreman,' Jörag started talking calmly, 'I know it's hard, but we need to ask a few questions about what happened this morning.'

'Sure,' Ben nodded silently.

'For the investigation, we will record the conversation.'

The detective placed a tape recorder on the table.

'Is this thing turned on? And recording?' Ben asked carefully before anyone would have time to ask any questions.

'Yes.'

Then, he changed again. With no apparent reason, he became angry. Very angry.

'Right!' he clapped his hands, stood up, and leant over the recorder. 'You bloody idiot!' he shouted. 'How the hell am I supposed to use your crap if I can't access it? Solve it somehow, or I skin you alive. ... Somehow.'

It seemed he finished, but the two detectives just stared at him dumbfounded. When Ben saw they were not likely to speak, he simply said.

'That's all gentleman. I'd like to leave now.'

'Yeah,' Jörag sighed, 'maybe we should do this at another time.' He stood up and opened the door for Ben.

'Thank you,' Ben said and simply walked out, but at the threshold, he turned back.

'Just an advice to your beginning career, DI Rakuum. A famous saying of a great detective. Eliminate the impossible and whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Good luck.'

Perez couldn't say a word. He just silently closed the door behind the leaving Captain and asked.

'What the hell was that all about?'

'I have no idea,' Jörag replied just as surprised, 'I've never seen anything like that before. Now, please go and try to create the sets for this case.'

'Will do.'

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Perez was sitting on a table in an empty room in front of a blackboard. Next to him, there was a box full of small pieces of paper. He was supposed to write the facts of the case on them and organise those, but his mind was still fuzzy of the interview.

He finally exhaled a surrendering sigh, picked up a piece of chalk, and wrote three words on the board with capital letters: PERPETRATOR, VICTIM, SCENE.

These were the main sets. All the facts of the case in question should be sorted under these categories and into smaller subsets within them. This would help the detective to see a clearer picture to make deduction easier. But this time, it didn't have any use. Perez could only put up the very basic elements. A significant part of the board was still empty when DI Jörag stepped into the room, reading a paper.

'The report of the box our killer had just came in. It seems it's a machine. Our engineers managed to look into it. It's composed of electric circuits, like in those fancy calculators, but this one is... far more... complicated. Wow! You made big progress,' he said sarcastically, when he saw the result of Perez's work.

'Sorry. I still couldn't get my head around this interview.'

'I can understand that. Only the physical properties, so far?'

'Yeah. So far. By the way, where should I put this guy?' Perez asked waving a paper with a name on it.

'Usually, Ben Foreman could be a subset of the VICTIM, as her husband, or the subset of the SCENE, as a witness. But since this interview, for the first time in the history of criminology, I will open a new category.'

Jörag stuck the captain's file on the board in a fourth column, he wrote 3 letters plus a question mark over it: WTF?

'My thoughts exactly,' Perez laughed.

At that moment, Esimel entered the room.

'I've talked to the sketcher. Here is the result, detective.'

He handed over a piece of paper to Perez. A small smile indicated his congratulation on Rakuum's promotion.

'Thanks!' Perez took the drawing and checked it.

Meanwhile, Esimel got to take a look at the sets. He instantly saw the most conspicuous things. The height of the participants.

'What the hell is this? Midget showdown?'

'Looks like it,' Jörag agreed.

'The sketch is good,' Perez said. 'The guy looked exactly like this.'

'Great. We have valuable info,' Jörag said.

Then he put onto the board a far too accurate image of Piotr.

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The next day, Perez went back to the crime scene again. He didn't really know what he was looking for, especially that everything had been cleared up, but there was something that didn't add up. Finally, he walked into the alley, where he and Esimel chased the killer. He wasn't even surprised he found his former partner at the end of the street.

'I knew you would come here,' Esimel said.

'I bet you even know why.'

'Sure. There was a door right here.' Esimel pointed at the plain brick wall.

'I remember that. What happened to it?'

'Simply vanished. How is it possible? Detective?'

'I have no idea. And there is another disappearance at hand.'

'Already? What?'

'The body of that woman. It's gone. And if that wouldn't be enough, whoever took her also ruined the morgue.'

'Who's that sick?'

'I don't know, but I intend to find out.'

'Good luck with it.'

### Chapter 3 - Eliminate the Impossible

1875.04.32

Almost ten years had passed, but Perez couldn't reveal the mystery. However, he solved every single case he got assigned to. That soon led to his promotion. The rank he achieved in a short decade could be translated as Detective Inspector. Such a promotion calls for a celebration.

'To DI Rakuum!' Jörag raised his glass.

'To Perez!' said Esimel and Liv, the young DI's wife, and they clinked their glasses.

'Thank you, guys. Thank you very much,' Perez said gratefully, then joined the others.

After the toast, they drank a few sips. When glasses knocked on the table, Perez asked.

'So, where the hell is Rabatten?'

'He said to arrive a bit late,' Liv answered.

'Why? Verna isn't letting him go?' Perez referred to the sergeant's too strict girlfriend.

'No, he said he's got a tough case,' Esimel gave a bit more accurate answer. 'Something must have happened, because the morgue called him away when we were about to leave.'

'Don't worry. There he is.' Jörag pointed at a cab stopping in front of the pub.

By the time he reached the table, a beer was waiting for him.

'Thanks, guys. Sorry for being late. Congrats' Perez,' he raised his glass and started drinking.

The others watched surprised, as he vanished the whole pint with just a few big gulps.

'Rabatten, are you all right?' Jörag asked.

'Yes, I'm fine. Only it was the day of crazy witnesses and body thieves.'

'Really? How so?'

'I get another round and tell you.'

The sergeant drank the next bottle at a normal pace. Meanwhile, he told the others about his messed up day.

'So this guy was brought in. Poor sod's wife was gunned down. During the interview, instead of describing what happened, he kept talking gibberish. He wasn't delusional, he wasn't in shock, I just couldn't get a word out of him that made sense.'

'Ha-ha. A few years back, we've also met something like that, didn't we, Perez.' Jörag laughed.

Perez just nervously nodded when he got reminded of his only unsolved case.

'Ours was even shouting.'

'This one was calm but an utter idiot. Later, before I could come here, I was called to the morgue. Guess what! Before the ME could examine her, the body was stolen, and the morgue got completely destroyed.'

Now, this was all too familiar for the two DIs. They started to doubt this was only a coincidence.

'Can you describe the victim?' Jörag asked.

'Well, she was blonde, short, very short, skinny...'

'Let's get back to the station.' Perez stood up immediately. 'I must know everything about this case.'

'What, now?' Rabatten asked. 'I've just got here.'

'Fine then, tomorrow.'

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The next morning, Perez's first thing to do was indeed going to the morgue. Jörag and Esimel found him staring at the ruins.

'The epicentre of the explosion was there.' He pointed at a dissection table, when he noticed his colleagues entering the room.

'According to Rabatten, she was lying there,' Esimel said. 'Come on. He will show you his sets.'

'Right. Let's stop at the evidence locker and get ours.'

They went upstairs to Perez's office and put the two boxes of the evidence onto his desk.

'There it is,' Rabatten said, 'my case.'

Perez took out the files containing the small pieces of paper on which the data elements were stored. He took the pieces and compared all the elements, all the photos, and everything related. After ten minutes, he looked up totally confused.

'This is totally impossible. These two are the same case. The properties the same, the key witness the same, hell, even the victim is the same.'

'Don't be ridiculous.'

'Look at these!' Perez shouted angrily.

He showed up two pictures. Jenny's dead face was on both of them, except they were taken ten years apart. Jörag took the images and looked at them, frowning.

'How can this be?'

'I have no idea. So let's listen the tape you've recorded,' he looked at the sergeant.

'We can do more than that.'

A few minutes later, they were a floor below in the TV room and putting something like a video cassette into a player.

'You've learned to use that camera thing?' Esimel asked Rabatten.

'Sure. Seeing the face of the interviewee gives us much more information. Except for this time. Watch.'

At a push of a button, the battle of ants on the screen became an image of Ben.

'Shit! That's him!' Perez shouted.

Mr Foreman seemed just as calm as he would have watched a lovely, but entirely boring movie.

'Okay. Let's begin with an easy question,' Rabatten from the recording started. 'What is your name?'

'Ben Foreman. Captain of the ship called Hammerhead-Shark.'

'Oh, I see. Nice to meet you, captain. I know it must be hard to talk about this, but can you describe what happened today?'

'Not today, but the thing is, we've got separated.'

'Separated? What do you mean?'

'Well, you see, Jenny thought she could control the Cellar. She set a quick jump, but she couldn't make the jump back. So there we are.'

Rabatten's voice turned uncertain.

'What jump? Is that something to do with your wife getting killed?'

'Yes. Everything to tell the truth.'

'How so?'

'We realised that we can use the police for communication.'

'I'm sorry. What?!' that shocked Rabatten.

'I mean it. These interviews give us an excellent opportunity to share information,' at this point, Ben looked straight into the camera. 'So, if you smart-asses know a way to get the gang back together and find a communication opportunity like this, just go ahead.'

Rabatten stopped the recording.

'I couldn't get a single word out of him after that.'

'Where is he now?'

'I locked him up for obstruction.'

'Let's pay him a visit.'

The detectives and Esimel went down to the basement, where the holding cells were. Rabatten opened the small window on one of them without looking in.

'There he is!'

'Where exactly?' Jörag asked, looking into the tiny rat hole.

'What?' Rabatten shouted.

He quickly unlocked the cell and stormed in. There was no prisoner and no place to hide.

'How did this happen?' he grunted. 'This place is guarded all day. He couldn't possibly escape.'

'Yes, a dead woman also can't wreck the morgue and walk away,' Perez said disappointedly and left, angrily hitting the metal door.

The others stood silently for a moment, then Esimel followed Perez. He caught up with the DI in the parking lot, getting into a squad car.

'Where are you heading?' Esimel asked.

'Where this all started.'

Pretty soon, they were walking down the alley where the first murder happened and an even bigger surprise waited. The door on the brick wall was back.

'What the hell?' Esimel muttered.

Perez just loudly banged on it.

'Open up! Police!'

After a few moments of silence, they heard a weird whirring noise. Soon, the sound started fading away, and as it got quieter, the door became less and less visible. The two cops couldn't find words for this. When the wall was only bare brick again, Esimel finally opened his mouth.

'Now, that is impossible!'

'Question is, how do we eliminate it?'

## Chapter 4 - Whatever Remains

1885.05.22.

Time started to dye Perez's hair to grey straw by straw, but the mystery stubbornly remained uncracked. For long years, it didn't turn out how could a solid door vanish into thin air, how could a corpse go AWOL, how could the key witness escape. Although there were some hope to solve it if they reappeared, as the police deployed security cameras all over the headquarters. And the opportunity came at last at Jörag's retirement party.

While everyone was having drinks and cheerful chats with their colleagues, Perez stood at the window with a beer in his hand, looking at the celebrating department. Jörag kept glancing at him while he was having fun. After a while, he got bored of his partner's brooding and went to the window.

'Evening, Rakuum. Why don't you come over to the land of the living?'

'I'm quite fine here, thank you.' The DI smiled faintly.

'Perez, Perez,' Jörag sighed. 'In the past ten years, I've watched you become more and more isolated. You don't eat properly, you can't sleep. Why are you doing this to yourself?'

'You sound like my wife.'

'Well, I agree with her. I know this is about that certain first case of yours. I thought you've learned by now, in every copper's life, there are unsolved puzzles, criminals who escaped from justice.'

'For God's sake! It's not just an unsolved case! We saw a girl die twice. We witnessed the bloody impossible, and I intend to eliminate it. Impossible can't happen, only something we don't understand yet.'

'I've got to admit, I also feel sorry that I can't see the end of this, but I don't let it depress me.'

'Well, we are not the same.'

'Fine,' Jörag waved finally, 'be like that.'

He gave up convincing Perez to give up and went back to his party. DI Rakuum just angrily gulped from his beer and turned away from the crowd to stare out the window.

Almost immediately, he heard screams from the street below. When he looked down, his heart skipped a beat.

'Jörag!!' Perez shouted.

His partner was back at the window in an instant.

'What is it?'



'Take a look,' Perez pointed down. 'It seems you got the chance to see the end after all.'

Despite his speech a minute ago, Jörag stiffened and said.

'Let's move. We can't let him escape this time.'

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This time, the situation was different. It was only Piotr and Jenny standing opposite each other like they were ready for a duel. Except, only the Armenian was pointing a gun at Jenny. For minutes.

Jörag and Perez ran down the stairs as fast as they could, but they were unable to stop Piotr from pulling the trigger. By the time they burst out through the station entrance, people on the street were running around terrified, and Jenny was lying on the pavement. There was no life left in her body.

But the most curious part was that Piotr didn't even try to flee. He just dropped his gun and waited to be arrested. The detectives didn't make him wait long.

In an hour, Perez took control of the situation. He intervened right at taking a photo of the suspect. Piotr was already standing in front of the camera, ready to expose, when Perez rushed in.

'No! Stop!' Perez stormed in, wheezing.

'What? Why?' The photographer asked.

'Just don't. No record can be made of this case.'

'You've got to be kidding me! This is standard procedure.'

'You don't understand,' he still had trouble breathing of excitement, 'these people..., the girl..., her husband..., and that scumbag out there... I have a reason to assume that they are communicating with someone through police records.'

'Rubbish! With whom do you reckon they would speak via the records? Especially, that dead woman.'

'I don't know. Most likely with someone at the force.'

'Be reasonable Perez!' Jörag stood in the door. 'Calm down and think it through. By taking a picture, we only record how he looks. If there's a message in that for one of us, it's been already delivered.'

That, finally, calmed Perez down and made him use his brain.

'Yeah. That makes sense.' He finally turned to the photographer. 'Take the shot.'

'Thank you.'

'You're welcome. But we interview him in a soundproofed room.'

'Definitely. And we don't use tapes.'

'What tapes are you talking about? It's all digital now.'

'Shut up! You know what I mean!'

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Two hours later, after Piotr was processed, he was taken to a room from which a single sound wave couldn't leave, and there weren't any devices to record anything. For minutes, they just sat and stared at each other as if they were about to engage in a western showdown. After they've got enough of that, Perez asked the question.

'So, what's the message this time?'

'Isn't it obvious?'

Perez looked at Piotr's T-shirt. It portrayed the hand of a puppeteer. Next to the picture, there was one word with big printed letters: The Godfather. Below that, someone painted the reference of a place: *"Barbarian Hotel, Room 221"*

'Bold move. Showing it this openly.'

'This isn't the message. It is where the message is hidden.'

'All the same. Our men are already at the hotel going through the room.'

'They will never find it.'

'We shall see that. I've got no more questions for now.'

Perez stood up and was about to leave the interview room but turned back on the threshold.

'I'm just curious. Why are you doing this? What's the point?'

'Blimey, is that the time? You are already at this question?'

Perez didn't know where to put this kind of reply, but he got an explanation soon enough. Even if it was a bit weird.

'Don't try to understand it. If you do so, no one will get hurt. If you try to crack it anyway, there is a high chance you'll go mad.'

'And what if I solve the puzzle?'

'It will definitely drive you nuts.'

When Perez closed the door behind himself, Jörag was eager to get some answers at last, but his colleague's face was rather confused.

'Oh bugger! I've met this expression twice already.'

'Tell me Jörag, are you still responsible for the department's budget tonight?'

'Well..., technically speaking...'

'So, you are. Great. Prepare for a bill from the Barbarian Hotel.'

'Why exactly?'

'Because I'm even gonna tear down the wallpaper in that room to find whatever they hid there.'

'You really believe you can find anything there?'

'I don't know. But I'm sure I wouldn't forgive myself if something was there and I didn't bother to check it.'

'Fine. Search the place. I'll keep the morgue and this one under surveillance.' He nodded towards the interview room.

'Thank you,' Perez said and rushed to the garage.

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Jörag didn't really expect his retirement would start this way. He was called by the director of the Barbarian Hotel, who was complaining about the mess his men left. Plus, they couldn't even clean it up because one DI refused to leave. It was not necessary to tell Jörag who exactly. So, he went to the inn to drag Perez away.

When he arrived, the whole corridor was closed for crime scene investigation. All the furniture and debris from room 221 were lying all over the carpet. Inside the room, there was nothing, not even wallpaper as Perez promised, only the DI himself sitting under the window with his head bowed down.

'Oh my goodness! What happened here?'

'I think Piotr, that murdering bastard, is right.'

'About what?'

'I'm going mad. Look what I've done to this room and found nothing!'

'Told you!'

'I've just got a call from the station. Both the body and the suspect are gone, yet no one has left the building.'

'What about the security cameras?'

'Whatever happened, while it happened, the cameras recorded only static noise,' Perez said, almost crying. 'And here I thought that would finally give us some information. I should have stayed there and don't move until something happens.'

'Don't worry, we still have a chance to catch them.'

Perez finally decided to move.

'Do we?' He looked up at Jörag.

'Now, we have a photo of the killer. We can put up wanted posters all over the city.'

'Can we really do that?'

'Well, technically, it's the weekend now, and my successor will only take over our department in two days.'

For that, Perez jumped up from the floor.

'No time to lose then. We've got to make at least 10000 copies before we get shut down.'

## Chapter 5 - Must be the Truth

A record amount of wanted posters was glued to the walls of the city, even though, they couldn't finish in time. The police staff on watch was busy with it all weekend. Then, the new boss stopped all this lunacy, claiming it was a waste of resources. She strictly forbade putting more effort into that case than it is necessary.

'DCI Irna! Ma'am, at least allow me to go back to the hotel.'

'Out of the question. They are already thinking of suing us for what you've done to their room.'

'What about roadblocks? Maybe they are not so far.'

'Are you totally insane? Roadblocks for a maybe? Face it, DI Rakuum. You simply don't have enough data to fill up your sets. You tried to gather it but there wasn't any.'

'But...'

'No but. Consider yourself lucky, you've managed to tag every second wall in the damned city with your ridiculous posters.'

'But...'

'One more "*but*" and I'll suspend you. Now, you may leave.'

Perez sucked his lung full of air to use it for a long argument, but he couldn't think of any. He just let out a big surrendering sigh and left the room agitated. However, he should have, indeed, considered himself lucky. His new boss just saved him (and Jörag) from wasting precious resources for nothing. They wouldn't have the chance to find anything.

They couldn't know their efforts were doomed to fail. They only noticed that no one called about the wanted posters. And the chances of that got even worse, as due time, less and less of those flyers remained on the walls. In three months, the citizens took them off from their houses to replace with appeals of the residential community. In the sixth month, the shops replaced them to advertise their own new goods. In a year, the post offices put up new warnings. After five years, only one poster was left hanging yellowed on the police station's wall.

During this five years, as Perez's hair slowly turned even greyer, he learned to stop worrying about that unsolved case. Until one day, someone came to dig up the past.

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1880.01.33.

That day he wasn't particularly busy. He was just sitting in his office reading an interesting article in a computer science magazine when a constable walked into his office.

'Sir, someone is waiting for you in the lobby.'

'Thank you. I'll be down there right away.'

He put down the paper and went down to the ground floor.

'Good day to you, DI Rakuum,' the guest greeted the detective at the reception.

'Good morning. What can I do for you...' Perez read the name on the short man's visitor badge '... Mr Frank Adams?'

'I want to get every available data on the crimes he committed,' Frank pointed at the picture of Piotr on the wall.

'Erm... right.' Perez became uneasy. 'And which division are you from to show interest in our most infamous case?'

'Federal Investigation Agency,' Frank replied and dropped a badge onto the table.

'This says police.'

'Correct. We are a secret division within the force. And we really wouldn't want to reveal ourselves, but one of us made it necessary when he went on a rampage.'

'And is that him?'

'That's right.'

Perez was very suspicious. Especially when it came to this particular case. So he said:

'As I've never heard of this Federal thing, do you mind if I get a check on this badge?'

'That's just natural.'

'Thank you. This might take some time, but I'll try to hurry.'

Perez took the badge and went straight to the IT department.

'Hey guys!' he greeted them.

'Detective, what can I do for you?' asked the head system administrator.

'Could you please check the code of this badge for me?'

'Sure, it will be a few minutes.'

'Thanks. Give me a call when it's done.'

'Will do.'

'Thanks!'

After that, Perez went down to the evidence locker. He took the three boxes of the three cases involving Piotr and Jenny. He swept through the sets and the photos. Frank Adams's name or image didn't come up in either of them. How could it? When this whole thing started, this guy must have been in high school. Although, that's also a fact, a very disturbing but undeniable fact that neither of the participants of these murders has aged a day. And then, his mobile phone rang. It was IT.

'Yes?'

'DI Rakuun. I think you should come here. We've found something interesting.'

'I'll be there immediately.'

Perez packed up the boxes and went back to the admin's room. Then, he immediately went to his boss with the information he received.

'This badge definitely uses our codes, but the encryption is far more complex than any of our guys know.'

'Meaning?'

'His story might even be true. It can be a fancy high-tech ID card of an elite sub-organisation of ours. But to tell the truth, I have doubts. The guy is way too young for a 25-year-old case. And given that not even you have heard of the Agency...'

'Makes you wonder if it really exists. What if this man is just new on the case and decided to try a new approach to solving it, which involves our department as well?'

'And he got permission to reveal their top-secret organisation to us? Doesn't sound very likely.'

'What are you suggesting then?'

'Give him the boxes, then follow him. We can't lose much. All the sets are on our secured server, and the data we managed to gather is hardly enough for doing anything wrong with it.'

The DCI was thinking for a few moments then she said:

'Fine, give him the sets. Report everything, and don't do anything stupid.'

In five minutes, Perez was in the lobby again with only one large box containing all the information of the three investigations.

'Here's the information you requested and your badge. It was all fine.'

'Thank you. I'll just make a copy of these and bring it back tomorrow.'

'I appreciate it. May I ask something? Do you know him?'

'Yes,' Frank said gloomily. 'he was my partner. I've got to get him and find out what made him do all those terrible things.'

'I hope you'll have better luck than us.'

'Thanks,' Frank said and left.

Got you, Perez thought. There's no way in hell he knew the killer. He's far too young for that. Although, looking at the unbelievable events that happened in the past 25 years, it might even be true. However, at the moment, Frank Adams was the only lead he got.

In front of the station, Frank got into a weird-looking yellow car and drove away. Perez attempted to follow him closely, yet unnoticeable. After a few miles, he noticed something interesting in the path they were following. At a longer stop, he checked the map. He couldn't believe his eyes. Would it be possible?

He kept following Frank right until his destination, a fancy old building downtown. He couldn't bless his luck enough. After five years, he finally got there. But just in case, he kept following Adams into the building. The so-called federal detective went to the second floor, right into the room Perez was hoping for.

He immediately ran down the stairs and called DCI Irna.

'Ma'am, you won't believe this,' Perez said excitedly, 'Frank Adams went to room 221 of the Barbarian hotel.'

'All right, Rakuum. Calm down. This is great news, but considering the last fiasco with the hotel, we have to do this by the book. Sit down in the lobby and wait for me with the backup and a warrant. Shouldn't be more than an hour.'

'Trust me, I won't screw this up. I waited for a clearer picture for 25 years. I can wait another hour.'

'Good man. We'll be there as soon as possible.'

Perez hung up the phone and sat down near the reception in front of the entrance. Despite his advanced age, he looked like a little boy waiting for opening his birthday presents. While he was sitting, he was nervously drumming with his feet on the floor. Occasionally, he stood up and circled around the sofa. Being this close to cracking this case, of course, he was impatient, but he held back himself. It was only a matter of minutes, and all would be revealed. It must be that way. It was not a coincidence that a man turns up, claiming to be the murderer's partner, and then, he come straight to this place.

And that's when he realised. Frank Adams had not just been the killer's partner. He still was. All the messages, Ben Foreman and Piotr Kerensky sent via the police, were intended for Frank Adams. But how could this be proved? Perez checked his watch. Could he had finished with the recordings already? Possibly. Anyhow, a little listening in couldn't hurt.

He sneaked up again to the 2nd floor and stopped in front of door 221. He heard a conversation between at least one man and one woman. He caught words, but not full sentences, until someone yelled who was, most likely, Frank himself.

'I'm a complete idiot!'

'What? Why?' a woman asked.

'I told the detective Piotr was my partner. He couldn't be. The first case was 25 five years ago.'



'So what?'

'The whole police could be onto us by now thinking we have anything to do with the murders,' that was another man, 'thinking there were murders at all.'

'Okay, we should pack the box and leave now,' Frank said. 'We go home and hide there.'

'Don't forget we still have a play to perform tomorrow,' the woman said again.

'I know. One more reason not to be found here. Let's go.'

Frank opened the door. His legs rooted on the spot when he saw Perez towering above him. Only Perez's similar surprise saved the situation for the crew members. That gave Frank enough time to come around and punch him in the chin. Everything turned dark in front of the detective.

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The squad arrived in twenty minutes, but they only found an empty room and the detective waking up. DCI Irna helped Perez up.

'What happened?' she asked.

Perez leant back to the wall and slowly sat down again.

'They knew we were coming.'

'How many were there?'

'Three. Two men and a woman. But I haven't seen them. Only heard them talking. All the messages were for this lot, and I personally delivered them.'

'Fine. Go home. The squad will sweep through the room. Maybe they will find something usable.'

'I want to stay and help.'

'No way. Not after what you did to this place the last time.'

'Fine,' Perez sighed, 'I'll go home.'

\*\*\*

The next day, Perez walked into the station, following a rather indeterministic path. He got totally wasted the night before. He tottered into his office and fell into his chair. He had only a few minutes to vegetate and scroll the magazine he was reading yesterday when Irna got into his room.

'Morning, Rakuum. Have you even slept?'

'Not much.'

'And I assume you spent the in-between time with drinking.'

'After twenty-five years, the first lead, and I screw it up. What would you have done in my place?'

'Don't get depressed yet. We found fingerprints.'

'Can you tell me any good news about them?'

'Even better,' she said and handed over a file.

Perez opened it and tried to focus on the wobbling letters. When he succeeded, he read it up.

'Sam Flannigan. He was brought in two days ago for drunk driving. That's good! Oh, he was driving that unidentifiable yellow car. That's even better indeed!'

'And you haven't heard the best part,' for the first time, in his life Perez saw the DCI smile, 'he's waiting down here in the lobby.'

'Really? Waiting for what?'

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After ten minutes, they were in the back office of the lobby, looking at Sam from a safe spot.

'You know what? I don't care what he is waiting for. I'm too old and have a too strong hangover to make a fool of myself again. We get him, we interrogate him, he disappears. Years later, some stranger shows up with the badge and plays the delivery boy. I don't want that this time.'

Then Perez turned around and went towards his office.

'What? That's it?' Irna told him off.

'Yes. That's it. If you don't like it, find another fool to take the job.'

He didn't get far. He almost reached the exit when voices of panic hit him from behind. Perez stood still and looked up desperately.

'Great,' he sighed. 'Now what?'

Now, it was Amy's time to step onto the stage. She rushed into the station with a gun in one hand and a laptop in the other, and she simply took Sam hostage. With the arm holding the laptop, she grabbed Sam's neck, and with the other, stuck the gun to his temple. Immediately, they were surrounded by frightened screams and the ends of at least a dozen gun barrels. Amy's next act would be impossible for most people, but she managed quite well. She overshadowed the deafening noise.

'All right, you lot! Here is the laptop. There's a user, created specially for you. The password is the ship's name with capital letters. The icon for the software is on the desktop. Type in the data, wait for the results, then come and get us. That's all.'

She released Sam, dropped the gun, and stood still while taken into custody.

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The justice system of planet Hal is slightly different from Earth's. There is no jury. The judge, the lawyer, and the prosecutor are the same, but they're not to decide if the accused is guilty or not. That's the job of the police. The court only determines, based on the confessions of the witnesses and the evidence, the seriousness of the crime and the punishment. To remind the citizens that they are protected from the thugs, and criminals get what they deserve, the summary of these hearings is televised right after the evening news.

The notion was to decide Amy's fate at a trial like this. But it wasn't really going as planned. First, the recording of security cameras at the police station was played, confirming that Amy had indeed committed a crime. Then she was asked why she made that scene at the police station, but she didn't say a word. It seemed all her rage had vaporised. Then came the questioning of the witnesses, various police officers, people who happened to be in the lobby that day, and the man taken hostage, namely, Sam.

'Can you tell us what happened two days ago at the police station?' asked the prosecutor.

'Well, first of all. Given that we're all here, I have some doubts that our superior's plan - to communicate via police interviews - is gonna work. But to tell you about two days ago? No. Not really,' Sam replied lightly. 'I was in shock, you know. But..., but..., yeah, I've got it. She attacked me.'

'Do you have any idea why?'

'Probably, because of my computer.'

'Your computer?'

'Yes. There is a software on it. It's a kind of translator. It's very useful, if you have only fractions of a translation. You enter the data in both languages, and an algorithm will identify patterns for the later translations. Obviously, the more data you enter, the more exact translation you get.'

'Erm...', the attorney just blinked, confused, 'thank you for sharing this information with us. Are you aware of any...'

'Your honour, may I question the witness?' Perez stood up from the audience to address the judge.

'If it can move forward the case, please proceed with your questions,' the judge replied.

Perez stepped in front of Sam.

'I want to ask one simple question, and I want you to answer honestly.'

'Yes, I know the drill. Whatever I say must be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.'

'Something like that. Now, I would like to know what's the connection between you and the current culprit Amy Pond, a possible detective Frank Adams, a murderer on the run Piotr Kerensky, a witness in Mr Kerensky's case Ben Foreman, and his wife Jenny Foreman.'

The moment Perez said "*his wife*", a surprised giggle slipped away from Amy, but Sam just stared at the DI, with eyes widened. He didn't expect to hear a list of the Shark's crew members. After a few seconds of silence, he poked out:

'Erm..., nothing?'

'Nothing. Really? How was that speech of yours about the truth?'

'Detective! How is this related to our current case?' the judge interrupted.

'The fingerprint of this man, along with Amy Pond's and Frank Adams's, were found in the room 221 of the Barbarian Hotel. The case files related to that room was requested by Frank Adams himself, who hasn't shown up ever since. That certain case is the murder of Jenny Foreman. She was killed in front of her husband, Ben Foreman's, eyes by Piotr Kerensky. I just want to know what's the connection between these people.'

'DI Rakuum. I'm familiar with your infamous murder inquiry. Besides from the fact that it happened very long time ago, also, it has nothing to do with our current case.'

'Oh yes, it happened a very long time ago. 25 years to be precise. Then she was killed 15 years ago and finally 5 years ago.'

Murmurs of confusion and muffled laughter rumbled through the courtroom.

'Don't be ridiculous, detective. A woman murdered three times? Even if that impossible assumption would be true, the topic of the trial is to sentence Amy Pond for the attack at the police station.' At this point, the judge turned to Sam. 'However, it can affect the verdict if you are somehow in relation with Miss Pond.'

Sam just shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, what can I say. If Jenny is married to Ben, then Amy's my girlfriend. But after this hostage situation,' he said to the girl, 'we definitely break up.'

That made Amy giggle again. The judge seemed to be realising something was very wrong with this trial.

'Are you taking this seriously?'

'As for me, not at all. Amy, how about you?'

'No, I don't think so.'

'Right then!' the judge said angrily. 'I suspend the trial until you come to your senses. Meanwhile, you both will wait in jail.'

'Finally,' Sam said and held out his hands to be cuffed.

While the people stood up and proceeded to the exit and the room slowly emptied, Perez just stood still in the middle, wondering. Everyone ignored him except for his boss.

'Well, Rakuum?' Irna asked. 'What now?'

'What would be? They have already delivered the message. In a short time, they will disappear from cells without a trace.'

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The very next morning, they stood at the empty holding cell where Sam was kept. Perez had only one comment.

'Told you,' he said and walked away.

'Is that it?' Irna shouted after him.

'Yep. That's all.'

'What are you planning to do?'

Perez stopped and turned back.

'I'm gonna wait.'

'For what?'

'Scientific breakthrough,' Perez smirked mysteriously.

## Chapter 6 - Is it the Truth?

During the long years, Perez had managed to learn not to torture himself because of that case. After the crew's last escape, he didn't seem to care about it at all. He even asked Irna to reassign the inquiry to someone else. His other plans involved nothing more than waiting. There should be no misunderstanding; he carried on with the investigation, but invested only a minimal effort, in his spare time. Due time, he had more advanced software to organise his sets and put together the few pieces of the puzzle.

As he aged, he got mainly desk jobs, but also caught some criminals too in his few shinier moments. Meanwhile, he patiently looked forward to that certain breakthrough. He spent decades waiting for the solution of his favourite mystery. He could hang on for few more years. He only got agitated when the usage of that technology wouldn't seem to reach the police in time. He had exactly one year left before retirement when he was called to the IT department.

'Hello, guys!'

'Detective. Can we help you somehow?'

'You know you can. I've heard you have news for me.'

The lead admin was smirking mysteriously.

'We finally got the permit to install the system.'

'Yes! Great!' Perez exclaimed joyfully. 'When can we use it on the streets?'

'Oh, that's gonna take a while. First of all, we must learn how to use the program. Identify all of its handy functions. Then come loads of tests.'

'How long will it take?'

'With the usual tasks we have, about a year?'

'A year?!' Perez freaked out. 'Can't you do these tests faster?'

'We can try to make it less than a year, but not by much.'

'Oh damn it. This is gonna be tight. Do your best.'

'We will.'

'Thanks.'

In six months, Perez managed to connect enough elements of his sets for a presentation for DCI Irna, but the computer-aided requirements of his full plan weren't ready yet. He wasn't in a hurry to make a fool of himself until everything he needed was at hand.

'Okay, how are we doing?' Perez asked the admin.

'Well, the preliminary tests are good. We have deployed it at one of the less crowded streets of the city.'

'One street? What good would that do?'

'It's the first live test. You should be glad.'

'Right then. What's next?'

'If all is well, we can see how it performs on a more busy part of town. Finally comes the stress test.'

'Stress test? Could you enlighten me?'

'We will test the system under heavy load to find out how much resources it needs not to crash.'

'Seriously? Is it really necessary?'

'If you want to use it city-wide, definitely.'

'Fine!' Perez sighed. 'Keep me posted.'

'As always.'

Weeks, then months passed quickly. In the meantime, Perez had time to reconsider his plans. He decided it would be foolish to share his ideas with anyone. No one would believe him. Well, maybe one. But even Perez himself had doubts he managed to stay sane. Is it really the truth what he found out? But no matter how he tried to rearrange the puzzle, in any other cases, the pieces wouldn't fit. To confirm his deductions, he had to see that certain truth with his own eyes. But for that, he needed the gang captured once again. He finally got the opportunity when three months before his retirement, the head of IT came looking for him.

'DI Perez!' he stepped into the detective's office. 'Can I have a word?'

'Sure. What do you need?'

'Nothing. I don't need anything. It's finished.'

Perez slowly rose from his chair with concealed excitement on his face.

'You said it needs at least a year.'

'Well, it turns out I'm a genius.'

'I knew we hired you for something,' Perez said excitedly, 'now let's go see it.'

In five minutes, they were in the computer lab again, looking at a screen. Perez had a wide satisfied smile on his face.

'Marvellous. And it is city-wide?'

'The whole town is covered. See for yourself.'

The sysadmin took the controller and started clicking. The results made Perez even more cheerful.

'This is incredible. Now, it's time for me to cash in that favour you owe me.'

'Weren't you doing that by constantly pushing this project?'

'No, that was only gentle persuasion. This time, you must give me access to this system from my private computer. Undetectable access.'

The admin's voice turned to whisper.

'It can be done, but if anyone finds it out, we will be in great trouble.'

'No. I will be in great trouble because I will take full responsibility for my private action. So, please do this for me. Or shall I remind you that you'd be in jail for hacking bank systems if it wasn't for me?'

'Okay,' the admin sighed. 'You can spy on the city by the time you get back home.'

'Thanks again.'

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Of course, that wasn't the end of it. Now, the patience game restarted. From that point on, he had two options. One, he finds them before retirement, which grants him resources of the police. Two, he finds them after retirement, in which case he talks to a few friends who will get him equipment, even if it is a bit limited. Either way, if they turned up before he died, he would catch them for sure.

By the time he gave up hope he could proceed the official way, he got lucky. The clever system the IT installed lately finally indicated that Ben, Jenny and Piotr were back in town. Just one week before Perez's retirement. So he invited an old friend for a beer.

'So, Perez! What news of that big case of yours?' Jörag asked when they both sat down in the DI's living room.

'What makes you think I want to talk about that?'

'Please. I'm nearing my end, but luckily my mind remained clear. It wasn't that hard to work it out. You invited only me, to your home, instead of herding the gang into a pub. And you call me when your misses is out. Oh, and you said it's urgent.'

'Forgot you're a detective too.'

'That's ageing for you.'

'The point is you're right. I do want to talk about that case.'

'And?'



'I cracked it.'

Jörag almost choked on a sip of beer.

'What?! How?'

'Simple. I put together the pieces.'

'Simple, huh? You've gathered the pieces for 35 years. Anyway, show me.'

By the push of a button, a hologram of his combined sets of the four cases appeared. He stood up and stepped in front of the image floating in mid-air. As he touched the icons representing the elements of the sets, they became movable. At first, Perez pulled the pictures of all six participants into focus, below each, their identifying properties.

'Okay, what do you notice?' Perez asked.

Jörag leant forward and stared at the hologram, but he couldn't see anything special.

'I give up,' he said after a few moments.

'Even Esimel noticed it right at the beginning.'

'Oh, it was decades ago,' Jörag waved, annoyed. 'Who remembers that?'

'I do. He said it's like a midget showdown.'

'So what? Maybe he was right.'

'Maybe, if we only look at the original three. But if we add the other ones, that's six people with below average height. Pick six random people anywhere on the planet, and they won't all be that small.'

'Anywhere on the planet? I don't really like what you're implying. You don't think these guys are aliens just because all of them are small. What if Esimel was right, and there was, in fact, a grudge between members of a dwarf community?'

'Yes, that could be true. But there is the undeniable fact that no one, midget or not, can come back from the dead. Not on this planet, at least.'

Jörag frowned, confused.

'That's indeed a fact. And people do age on this planet.'

'Actually, for the ageing part, I've got an even wilder theory.'

'What?!' Jörag exclaimed. 'Even wilder than the fact that you were most likely chasing actual aliens in the past 35 years?!'

'Yes. Let me ask you something. Why do we archive our cases?'

'To keep the data available for... a possible... future investigation,' as he said the words, he realised what Perez meant. 'Go to hell! You've got to be kidding me. Tell me something. Coming back from the dead and not ageing shouldn't qualify as simple aliens. Why do they have to be time travellers too?'

'I can even tell they are screw-up, beginner time travellers.'

'Get away! How could you possibly come to that deduction?'

Perez just smirked at Jörag's shock.

'If they knew what they're doing, this conversation would be much shorter.'

Perez pushed another button on the remote, and a video, composed of quite recent and ancient old clips, started.

First, Ben appeared on the holoscreen:

*'Well, you see, Jenny thought she can control the Cellar. She set a quick jump, but she couldn't make the jump back. So there we are. ... We realised that we can use the police for communication. ... These interviews give us an excellent opportunity to share information. So, if you smart asses know a way to get the gang back together and find a communication opportunity like this, just go ahead with it.'*

Then Sam's image, recorded in the court, was shown.

*'... my computer. ... There is a software on it. It's a kind of translator. It's very useful if you have only fractions of a translation. You enter the data in both languages, and an algorithm will identify patterns for the later translations. Obviously the more data you enter, the more exact translation you get.'*

Next, there was no picture, only Ben's bad quality voice.

*'You bloody idiot! How the hell am I supposed to use your crap if I can't access it? Solve it somehow, or I skin you alive. ... Somehow.'*

Finally, Amy gave an angry speech.

*'All right you lot! Here is the laptop. There's a user, created specially for you. The password is the ship's name with capital letters. The icon for the software is on the desktop. Type in the data, wait for the results, then come and get us. That's all.'*

'Tell me something,' Jörag frowned, rubbing his temple, 'is that laptop the same box Piotr left at the first scene?'

'That's the one. Except, when we found it, we couldn't possibly know what that was. Back in those days, computers filled a room.'

'Okay, looking at it this way, time travelling theory becomes quite convincing. What's up with that other case, when we captured that Piotr fellow?'

'They had to tell the other part of their team where they hid the badge, which got me interested enough to give them our investigation data. They could plant it long after I got us banned from the Barbarian and just in time before the others showed up. That's all I could get out of the data.'

'You know there are an awful lot of questions remaining open.'

'Indeed. I intend to ask those once these people are hooked.'

'So, I guess, you just want to wait until they return for the laptop.'

'I don't have to. They already here?'

'What?! How do you know?'

'Do you know what we have installed on the CCTV network of the city? A kickass face recognition software. And thanks to the favour the admin owed me, I have full access to it. After three months of waiting, this afternoon, I've recorded this.'

Another click on the remote, and the infamous trio appeared on the screen, walking into an oddly familiar building.

'Cheeky bastards!' Jörag shouted. 'They have the guts to go back to the Barbarian.'

'Yes, they have. So, for now, only one question remains. Will you help me nail these cheeky bastards?'

The victorious grin appearing on Jörag's face was the mirror image of Perez's gesture.

## Chapter 7 - Captured

1890.03.12.

The next morning, Ben was sitting in the restaurant of the Barbarian, over his breakfast, reading a newspaper while speaking on a phone.

'So the date is 1890, the 12th of March. Earthly speaking. I still can't remember the month names in this place. ... Wrote it down? Great. Hopefully, that's the last we need. ... Okay. Got to go. The others are here. Time for one more show. ... Thanks! Bye!'

Ben hung up and looked at Jenny and Piotr stepping to the table.

'All set?' Jenny asked.

'Yes. It seems so. Are you ready to die one last time?'

Jenny closed her eyes and held her breath for a few moments before answering.

'Yeah,' it burst out of her, 'just let's get over this quickly.'

'I agree. I want to be on our way tonight.'

\*\*\*

1880.01.33.

Two floors above them and ten years earlier, Frank, Amy, and Sam leant back in their sofas with a quite confused face. They had just got through the audio and video material of the cases they'd acquired from the police. Except, they watched and listened them ordered by date.

'Ooookay! Is it just me, or these really didn't make any sense?' Amy asked.

'Well, it made some sense,' Frank said, 'we just had to put these in a Cellar-relative chronological order.'

'So let's assume the second one is the starter,' Amy started to assemble the picture. 'They expect us to come up with some genius idea, we somehow tell them something, and Ben gets angry over it.'

'My guess is Ben's got angry because he can't access my laptop,' Sam said and took his machine out of the box.

'Why can't he access it?' Amy asked.

'Because it's password protected, and I think I know what might be the solution for our problem.'

'Already?' Frank got surprised, 'That was quick. What is it?'

'Well, I worked on a kind of alien-language-grammar-identifier software back at Torchwood. It basically decrypts the Rosetta stone way quicker than Champollion and Young. Now, then! The Cellar, anywhere

she might be, displays the actual coordinates, of course, in Time Lord symbols. If the others keep jumping in time, back and forward, back and forward, the TARDIS will give them loads of coordinates. The translation of those coordinates can be found in the daily newspaper. They enter all the data in my software, then, sooner or later, they can get the coordinates of this particular day in Time Lord language. After that, they just set the Cellar to go, we are reunited and out of here.'

'Wow! That's brilliant,' Frank said, 'but how do we tell them all this?'

'Same way as they did. We use the police,' Amy stood up excitedly. 'We go to the station and make a scene. Anything would do. We only need to make sure we're seen by the cameras, and we're scandalous enough to keep the recording for a good long while.'

'Now, we have a plan,' Sam exclaimed and turned on his laptop. 'Time to get cracking. I create a user for them and put the software's icon on the desktop. They couldn't miss it.'

'Why don't you just give them the admin password?' Amy asked.

'And let them ramble through my stuff? No way. Plus, they wouldn't find what they need anyway.'

'Hang on! If you tell them how to access this program nice and easy, he won't go shouting during his interview, so you wouldn't know something needs to be done to help them find the solution. That's a paradox.'

'Nah. I don't think there will be any. They just probably screwed up something. Most likely, they find the original version of my computer first, resting on my table in my room, back in the Cellar. Okay, now what the hell is this?'

'What's wrong?'

'The date says 2022. I haven't set it since we left Earth.'

'Yes, the battery of the clock must have died ages ago. These cases are several decades old. Your computer could be in that box for...' suddenly Frank froze, then he shouted. 'I'm a complete idiot!' he hit his forehead.

'What? Why?' Amy asked.

'I told the detective Piotr was my partner. He couldn't be. The first case was 25 five years ago.'

'So what?'

'The whole police could be onto us by now, thinking we have anything to do with the murders,' Sam said. 'Thinking there were murders at all.'

'Okay, we should pack the box and leave now,' Frank said. 'We go back to the ship and hide there.'

'Don't forget we still have a play to perform tomorrow,' Amy reminded him.

'I know. One more reason not to be found here. Let's go.'

Frank opened the door. His legs rooted on the spot, facing Perez towering above him. Only Perez's similar surprise saved the situation for the crew members. That gave Frank enough time to come around and punch him in the chin. Everything turned dark in front of the detective.

'Told you they're onto us,' Sam said lightly.

'Never mind that. Hurry to Bessie, and let's get the hell out of here.'

They left the detective lying on the floor and ran down the stairs.

\*\*\*

1890.03.12.

Ben and Jenny looked at each other and nodded silently. Then they walked through the main entrance door of the Barbarian, out to the sunny street, hand in hand. They decided this time they shouldn't go that far. After a hundred meters of strolling, the action was about to start.

Piotr began two corners away from the hotel. He started walking towards the building and pulled his gun from its holster the moment he spotted Jenny and Ben in the crowd ahead. Being much below the crowd's eye line concealed the weapon, but everyone was running scared when Piotr raised it.

It didn't take too much time, and the area was clear around them. The gun was pointing right at Jenny's heart (the left one), and the Armenian moved his other hand to lock and load when an unexpected shot was fired. Ben yelled in pain and collapsed onto the pavement.

'Ben!' Piotr and Jenny yelled at once.

Ben was shouting selected swear words for a few moments, then he waved he would like to sit up. The others help him rise and lean his back against the wall. His words started to make sense only after that, but he was still heavily wheezing.

'Piotr..., when did you... forgot... how to shoot? Why... did you... shoot my leg?'

'It wasn't me!' Piotr defended instantly, 'Here! My gun's barrel is completely cold.'

'Then, who was it?' Jenny asked dimly.

'Sorry! It was me!' Someone tried to shout through the voices of panic on the street from across the road.

It was old Perez Rakuum. The barrel of his gun was smoking. He kept yelling while he crossed the street.

'Ben Foreman, Jenny Foreman, Piotr Kerensky. You are under arrest for being a chronic pain in the ass.'

'DI Rakuum. Nice to see you again! Grey hair suits you,' Ben greeted him as an old friend. 'Now, would you be so kind and call an ambulance for me?'

'Certainly. Along with a few squad cars.'

\*\*\*

By nightfall, the team, instead of finally being on their way, was sitting in the interview room of the police station. They were brought in at a quite late hour, after they finished at the hospital. It turned out the bullet just grazed Ben's leg and wasn't a direct hit. The doctors treated the wound, bandaged his leg, and issued the captain a nice cane. Then the whole gang was escorted away for interrogation. Perez and Jörag welcomed them with a very pleased smile, and the DI had something familiar in his hand.

'DI Rakuum. We don't seem to get rid of you,' Ben said, limping to the nearest chair, 'and you are...'

'Take a good long look,' Jörag replied, 'it will come to you.'

Soon the recognition struck Ben.

'DI Jörag?'

'It's DCI. Also, retired.'

'Ah, I see. Years wasn't so kind to you.'

'Unlike you lot,' said Perez and showed up Sam's laptop. 'I assume you have returned for this.'

'Yeah. Given that you're ranting instead of being shocked, I assume you've worked out something about how all this could be possible. After all, you had 35 five years.'

'Actually, only Perez deserves the credit for the idea that you are not of this world,' Jörag said. 'I was only tracking you on the CCTV system and guided the DI so he could shoot you.'

'How nice of you. I always desired a cane of an alien civilisation,' Ben flashed an angry grin at him and turned to Perez. 'So, if you know the truth, why exactly did you arrest us?'

'I still need confirmation and direct proof of being right. Also, there are some fuzzy details left.'

Ben turned around.

'Guys, what do you think? Can we show them some proof?'

'You're asking us?' Piotr got surprised. 'Aren't you supposed to be the captain to make that call?'

'I think Perez deserves to see it,' Jenny made a generous offer. 'He spent decades to find it out. If he found it out indeed.'

'Fair enough. What do you think the key is to this whole thing?' Ben asked the detective.

'Time travel!'

'Impressive. We shall show you then how it can be done. Right here, right now. But only to you.'

Perez didn't need too much convincing.

'Jörag, could you please step out for a moment?'

'Are you sure?'

'All three of them are here. They can't rescue each other. What could go wrong?'

'Anything.'

'Just to clarify,' Ben interrupted, 'at this point, we will go through with this, no matter what you do. The question is if you will know what happened once we are gone.'

'Jörag. Please!' Perez insisted.

'Fine. Be careful,' the old man sighed and left.

'Okay. What's the big secret?'

'Do you see that fly around the lamp?'

'Yes?' Perez frowned. 'What's it got to do with anything?'

'Everything,' Ben said and yelled at the insect. 'You can stop now!'

Nothing happened. The fly kept circling around the light bulb. Perez started to think he was being fooled.

'OI! I said STOP!' Ben yelled again.

After a few more seconds, it finally stood still in the air. Not just hovered but completely stopped. Not even its wings moved. For that, Perez's eyes almost jumped out.

'What the hell?! How is this possible?!'

But it wasn't over yet. The fly faded away with a silent whirring noise. Then it's volume got turned way up. Slowly the room also started to disappear, and another one, a much bigger one, replaced it. By the time the process finished, Perez found himself inside the Cellar's control room.

'This..., this..., no..., no...'

'Yes. It's bigger on the inside.'

Perez's surprise changed to confusion.

'And yes, we are time travellers. We are from another planet. In one thing, though, you missed. You caught three of us, but that's not all of us,' then Ben turned around. 'Gladys, what the hell was that? You almost screwed up our epic revelation.'

'What do you mean?!' Gladys showed up from behind the time rotor and pointed at the more and more disturbed looking detective. 'Look at the poor old man. He doesn't have the slightest idea what's happening around him. By the way, I told you it is a bad idea to designate me as the driver. Now, if you excuse me, I go and finally have a rest. From this point on, Jenny can fly this thing.'

Gladys rushed out of the console room immediately.



'Jenny! Would you take the wheel and get us out of the police station?' Ben turned to the Time Lady. 'Oh, and find the others afterwards.'

'Sure,' she nodded and took the laptop out of Perez's hand. 'May I take this?'

'Thank you!' Ben said and went after Gladys. He shouted back when he was limping already in the corridor. 'Oh, and send Sam to my quarters when they are back. I would like to demonstrate how destructive a cane can be to the bones.'

Piotr stepped next to Jenny, who was already finding the way out of the station.

'Is it just me, or with this cane, Ben resembles a bit of Doctor House?'

'What is that, a hospital?' Piotr forgot Jenny's unfamiliar with any Earth TV series.

'Never mind. So what do we do with our guest?'

'Well, I'm busy with the TARDIS, so would you mind orientating him?'

'I was afraid you might say that,' Piotr muttered and turned to Perez, still gazing around astonished. 'DI Rakuum! You look like someone who could do with a pint!' Piotr said and lead the detective towards the Green Roof replica.

## Chapter 8 - Adrift

Two massive glasses knocked on the wooden table. This time, the pub was fairly empty. The holograms were turned off, but the beer tap worked just fine.

'Thank you! Cheers!' Perez said and took a remarkably big gulp of the golden liquid.

The basic structure of the brew serving establishments is probably the same all over the universe. Most likely, the familiar environment brought Perez's courage back.

'So, when Mr Foreman said it's bigger on the inside. What did he mean? And where the hell are we anyway?'

Piotr almost choked on the sip of beer.

'Yes, I imagined it might be a confusing notion for you. Well, how to put it?' Piotr looked up, thinking of an explanation. 'Basically, we are inside that fly you saw.'

'Excuse me? I saw a lot of wild things in my life, thanks to you, but now I really think you're trying to fool me.'

'Right then. I shall probably start at the point when we arrived at this star system.'

'About time.'

\*\*\*

'Can't you just enter our original coordinates?' Ben asked.

'No,' Jenny replied. 'It must be set with Time Lord symbols, but I'm not familiar with those.'

Piotr gave quite an accurate translation for this sentence.

'Meaning, we are in trouble.'

'Not necessarily,' Jenny said. 'We might be at the right place, but the Hammerhead Shark drifted along in space.'

'OK, what does the radar say?' Ben asked. 'Where's the Shark?'

'We've got nothing.'

'What? We even missed the time?'

'Apparently,' Jenny muttered nervously.

'What about the planet nearby?' Piotr asked. 'We could simply fly there. That's what we would do anyway. And I think Frank would also start to search for us there.'

'Okay, that's what we'll do,' Ben accepted the plan. 'Jenny, take us to that planet. And meanwhile, we should try to figure out how we find each other across time.'

The trip lasted only for a few hours. They were already on orbit when Gladys asked the key question of this mutual rescue mission.

'Wonder what's the TARDIS looks like?'

'What do you mean?' Ben asked.

'I mean the Chameleon circuit. It makes the ship blend into the environment. The circuit of the Doctor's TARDIS is broken. That's why it looks like a police box all the time. But ours is fully operational and camouflaged her as a cellar door on the Shark. As this is her first time off-ship, I'm just curious what she looks like.'

Jenny raised her finger thoughtfully.

'I think we can check it,' she pushed some buttons, and a big rock appeared on the main screen. 'There. Look's like we look like an asteroid.'

'That explains the massive stone blocking our exit,' Ben said.

'I think this can do more than camouflage at her own will,' Jenny leant closer to the screen. 'I think we can set any exterior we want. There are plenty of templates, but we can design our own as well.'

'That's lovely,' Ben said sarcastically, 'but now, take us down to the planet, please.'

'Right! We're on our way.'

Jenny set the Cellar to arrive on the outskirts of the biggest city, into the woods. But as soon as they landed, something unexpected happened. The time-rotor began moving up and down and emitting its signature whirring noise.

'Jenny,' Ben said strictly, 'what have you done this time?'

'Nothing!' Jenny cried out desperately. 'I haven't even touched the demat...'

Everything stopped all of a sudden.

'Okay, where are we?' Piotr asked.

'Where we're supposed to be,' Jenny said, looking at the screen, surprised. 'Outskirts of town, middle of woods.'

'Really?' Gladys asked. 'What did happen then?'

'I don't really know. I think we should go out and check it.'

This time the door seemed to be made of wood crust, and Jenny could open it with a push of a button on the console. As suspected, the Cellar became a tree in the forest.

'Well, the asteroid had to vanish to materialise the tree.'

The explanation calmed Ben down enough to give the orders.

'Okay, now we head for the city. Simple recon. Once we know all is safe, we establish a base there. Jenny, stay here in the... tree. I have no idea how we open it once the trunk is closed.'

'Okay, see you soon!' Jenny said and went back inside.

\*\*\*

'You bastards!' Perez said while Piotr was busy emptying his glass. 'So that's how...'

'Not there yet.' The glass hit the table. 'So, we went to the city. We found ourselves a safe spot. Well, kind of. It was a derelict flat in the not-so-pleasant part of town.'

'Why didn't you just stay in here?'

'We needed this as transport. So we camouflaged it as a completely ordinary car of your planet. Lucky, we did so. This way, with the flat, we've acquired ourselves a telly. And luckily, Gladys has always liked watching TV.'

\*\*\*

It had been about three or four days since the team occupied that flat when Gladys was staring at a flat screen. The others were down in TARDIS while she was watching a year-end special of some kind of court trial show. It summarised the most memorable cases of the past months, and one of those made her jaw drop. She instantly jumped up and ran down to the car. She opened up the trunk and shouted in.

'Guys! Come up! You must see this!' No reply. 'Guys! You..., ah, enough of this.'

She climbed into the trunk, and then pretty soon, the four of them climbed back out.

'Are you sure it was Sam and Amy?' Ben asked seriously.

'Definitely,' Gladys replied confidently.

'OK. Do you know if there will be a rerun of that show?'

'Don't know. I've never checked the program. I was only channel-surfing most of the time.'

'Great!' Ben sighed. 'What then?'

'It's an advanced world,' Piotr said, 'there must be some kind of possibility to retrieve it. Someone must have recorded it, maybe there's a local kind of Internet, and it can be downloaded. Worst case scenario, we could even contact the network.'

'Fine. Let's go and find a way to get that program.'

By the next morning, they managed to get a recording from the local computer network and sat around the flat screen excited. Gladys pressed play, and a presenter appeared in front of them.

*'This year began with one of the most controversial trials. It was the case of Amelia Pond, who rampaged at the central police station,'* as an illustration of this event, a picture of Amy holding a gun appeared next to the presenter's head. *'On her following hearing, one of the witnesses made a quite unusual statement. Here is the footage.'*

The picture changed and showed Sam in the courtroom.

*'Can you tell us what happened two days ago at the police station?'* asked the prosecutor.

*'Well, first of all. Given that we're all here I'm starting to doubt that our superior's plan to communicate via police interviews is gonna work. But to tell about two days ago? No. Not really,'* Sam replied lightly, *'I was in shock you know. But..., but..., yeah I've got it. She attacked me.'*

*'Do you have any idea why?'*

*'Probably because of my computer.'*

*'Your computer?'*

*'Yes. There is a software on it. It's a kind of translator. It's very useful if you have only fractions of a translation. You enter the data in both languages and an algorithm will identify patterns for the later translations. Obviously the more data you enter, the more exact translation you get.'*

Gladys paused the recording.

'Is that it,' Ben asked disappointedly, 'a translator?'

'Of course!' Jenny was rather excited about it. 'We input the Time Lord symbols of our current spacetime coordinates and the date in today's paper. Save. Then keep jumping backwards and forwards in time and keep entering the coordinates and the date. If we input enough data, we get the Time Lord symbols for their time.'

'Oh, so we can get to them with Sam's laptop. Right?' Gladys asked for confirmation.

Ben jumped up suddenly.

'Lying comfortably on his desk down in the..., the..., ' he hesitated about what name he should say, 'well in the car's trunk.'

'Seems like it!' Piotr said.

'Well then! Let's go.'

They all stood up and headed for the door, except for Gladys.

'Wait a minute!' she said. 'Haven't you listened to him? Our superior's plan? Communicating via police interviews? Ben, you have to plant that idea for them.'

'And how do we do that?' Ben asked.

Gladys restarted the video and fast-forwarded it to the relevant point.

*'I want to ask one simple question and I want you to answer honestly.'*

*'Yes, I know the drill. Whatever I say, must be the truth, the whole truth and nothing, but the truth.'*

*'Something like that. What I would like to know is, what's the connection between you and the current culprit Amy Pond, a possible detective Frank Adams, a murderer on the run Piotr Kerensky, a witness in Mr Kerensky's case Ben Foreman, and his wife Jenny Foreman.'*

For long moments, they couldn't say a thing. All of them were just gaping until Ben's mouth finally managed to form the words of two questions.

'Okay! Who the hell is this old geezer, and how the hell does he know us?'

Jenny, on the other hand, said only one thing, which made it clear she understood what was waiting for her.

'Shit!'

\*\*\*

Pretty soon, they were back a few decades (Jenny overshot the coordinates a bit) and discussing their rather risky plan in the control room.

'Jenny, are you certain of this?' Gladys asked worriedly. 'What if something goes wrong? What if you can't time your regeneration, or even worse, it doesn't succeed?'

'Don't worry. I might be the Doctor's daughter, but I'm far less experienced.'

The others gave her weird looks.

'Meaning?' Piotr asked in the end.

'Meaning,' Jenny sighed, annoyed, 'I got myself killed loads of time. I'm an expert in regeneration. I'll be fine.'

'Better question is can you drive our getaway car?' Ben asked, turning to Gladys.

'I've got the instructions right here,' Gladys said and pinned a piece of paper to the screen, 'but I'm still not sure I'm qualified for this.'

'You watched the trial. You're the only one who that detective doesn't know. We've got to keep it that way, so you've got to stay here and fly the TARDIS,' Ben said. 'Piotr? Can you do what needs to be done?'

'Sure. I've seen Jenny regenerate enough times to know all will be fine.'

'Right then,' Ben let out an uncertain sigh. 'Let's trigger a murder inquiry.'

\*\*\*

'I assume now comes the part when your weird ship turns into a bug and flies Ben and Jenny out of the station. The same way, it can turn into a door in a solid brick wall. Right?'

'Correct.'

'Then tell me something! Why did you ruin the morgue?'

'Erm..., well..., Jenny's ability to come back from the dead has a rather destructive aspect. And that pretty much sums up the first case. The first, from our point of view.'

'Yes. From ours, it was the second. I guess something went wrong, given that another one was necessary.'

'Yes, we made a slight mistake, and thanks to that, as you might have heard, we couldn't use the computer.'

\*\*\*

'Password?! You've got to be kidding me,' Ben stood up from Sam's desk. 'Does anyone know it?'

'Sam's password? I wouldn't even dare to guess it,' Gladys said.

'Great. What can we do?'

For long moments, they just stood silently with the obvious answer looming over them.

'I have a feeling another murder is in order,' Jenny muttered at last.

'Are you sure?'

'Somehow, we have to deliver the message that we need the password. And there are supposed to be three killings.'

'He won't give you his password. You can be sure of that,' Gladys objected.

'Damn. That's probably true,' Ben nodded.

'Are you sure?' Piotr asked. 'Given the severity of the situation, he wouldn't be worried about his dirty little secrets?'

'Trust me, he would. Gladys and I worked with him long enough to be certain of this.'

'Then what?'

'We don't just deliver the message. We send the computer as well.'

\*\*\*

'And this is how we got to the second assassination.'

'With the laptop delivery? Then that case started my detective career.'

'And took the whole of it to solve.'

'Yes, but to protect my dignity, time travellers are not among the usual suspects.'

'I've got to admit we weren't keen on making your job easier.'

'You might even want to now. So, tell me about the third murder.'

'What third murder? You stopped us before we could commit it.'

'No, there was a third killing.'

'Or there will be... if something's still wrong.'

Piotr jumped up and ran back to the control room, where, as expected, Ben was howling.

'WHAT DO YOU MEAN IT'S STILL PROTECTED?'

'I told you the password is still on, and I have no idea what is it?' Jenny fought back.

'Have you checked the recording?'

'Of course, I have! It hasn't changed. My second death hasn't rewritten history!'

'BOLLOCKS!' Ben hit the console with his cane. 'What now?'

'Have you seen the original footage?' Perez asked.

'What original footage?' Ben looked up.

'The one recorded at the station. The reason why the trial was held.' The crew was still giving him dim looks. 'Wait a minute, I'll get it.'

\*\*\*

Jörag woke with a shudder when Perez burst out from the interview room with haste defying his age. He slowly got up from the chair and called after him.

'Hey! What's going on?'

Perez turned back, and for the first time in decades, Jörag saw real enthusiasm on his face but also signs of insanity.



'Jörag, this is amazing. They really are time travelling aliens. Go home now. I'll meet you tomorrow in the pub and tell you everything. But now we've got to put the final pieces of the puzzle together,' Perez said, and he was on his way again.

'Meaning?'

'I've got them! All of them!' Perez shouted back.

'Whatever,' Jörag waved, annoyed and strolled away.

\*\*\*

*'All right, you lot! Here is the laptop. There's a user, created specially for you. The password is the ship's name with capital letters. The icon for the software is on the desktop. Type in the data, wait for the results, then come and get us. That's all.'*

Ben stopped the playback and took Sam's laptop. He entered the word Hammerhead-Shark in the password field. The authentication succeeded, and the necessary icon was visible in the middle of the screen. Ben started rubbing his face nervously.

'So, you had this footage all along?' he asked Perez.

'Yes. As I said, the trial was held because of that.'

'Damn. So we just watched the messages in the wrong order. Sorry, Jenny. It looks like we killed you one time more than we should have.'

'It's okay. If you don't tell them off, the idea of the assault probably never crosses their mind.'

'Weird to think how tightly everything's connected,' Gladys wondered.

'Yes, marvellous, but,' Piotr gave voice to his doubt, 'what about the third killing the good DI mentioned?'

'Actually, I have a rather unpleasant feeling that I know what will make it necessary,' Perez said. 'Come to my office.'

In five minutes, they were staring at a string of numbers on the wall screen in Perez's office.

'This is the identification code of the badge, which your pal Frank used for requesting the sets for the cases,' Perez said and pressed a button. Another string appeared. 'And that's mine, which I was given only a month ago.'

'Blimey, they are the same,' Ben smirked, slightly surprised.

'I can't believe this,' Perez said jadedly. 'The tech guys said it's police code but with more advanced encryption. So I believed it could belong to a supa-dupa department of ours. Now, it turns out I used my own bloody badge to fool myself.'

'So, I guess I need to die one more time to deliver it, after all,' Jenny sighed.

'Yes,' Perez agreed. 'And Piotr needs to be captured.'

'What? Why?' The Armenian asked desperately.

'I'm hardly gonna do much strolling around, am I,' Ben knocked the floor with his cane. 'So, what do we know of this case?'

'Showing it,' Perez said and opened the belonging file.

'Is it wise to have foreknowledge?' Jenny asked, but by that time, the wanted poster of the Armenian appeared on the screen.

'Hm, they caught your best angle,' Ben said.

'Ha-ha. Very funny,' Piotr grunted. 'What does this mean?'

'Isn't it obvious? Fetch your Godfather shirt, and let's get the job done.'

\*\*\*

In three hours, they picked up Jenny from the morgue and Piotr from the holding cells. In the meantime, Perez could recall the events following the incident. So, when the Armenian stepped into the TARDIS, he couldn't withhold gloating.

'See? I've learned the truth, and I haven't gone mad.'

'Clearly. I need a cane because you're completely sane enough to make a shoot-out on a crowded street,' Ben defended Piotr.

'Yes. And it is also a great idea to help commit the murder you're supposed to solve,' Piotr said, took Perez's badge, and turned to Ben. 'So, what do you want with this?'

'We jump ahead a few months or years until the police give up searching the room, then hide the badge there.'

'Where exactly did you have in mind?'

'Isn't it obvious?'

## Chapter 9 - Found

The badge was hidden, and years later, the badge was found. The question of how would be a different story told by someone else. At the moment, that man was bored out of his mind.

Only sixteen hours had passed since the trial, but Sam was already losing it. He was just sitting in a dim and cold cell, without any news about Amy or Frank, without anything to do, without anything to occupy his mind. He was already banging his head against the concrete wall when finally, something happened that made him jump up to the cell bed.

'My goodness! A spider!'

He was already taking his shoe off to hit the eight-legged "beast" crawling in under the door when the fear of boredom defeated the fear of arachnids.

'Hm, an alien spider.' he climbed down from the bed and crouched over the creature. 'How fascinating!'

Then he jumped again.

'What the hell?!' The thing faded away. After a short period of confusion, the realisation hit him and made him grin. 'That's it, guys! It was about time!'

As soon as he said it, the cell began to morph into the console room of the Cellar around him, along with the crew, including Amy and Frank.

'Hahaa! You did it!' Sam laughed.

'Indeed, we did,' Piotr smiled.

'Great!' Sam clapped. 'Now, let's get off this boring rock.'

'Not so fast,' Ben said. 'You still need to be debriefed by someone.'

'And that would be...?'

'Me.'

Frank, Amy, and Sam turned to the corridor and the source of the disturbingly familiar voice.

'Now, if you'd be kind enough, please, fill me in on the last details of what the hell were you up to on our planet.'

\*\*\*

'Sam, take Bessie out for a ride, and all will be fine.'

The TV turned off. The others were just blinking at the blank screen for seconds, seeming ages. Finally, Sam broke the silence.

'So, that's how they will find us.'

'I don't see how a joyride will help us,' Amy said.

'You heard the captain! It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.'

'Yes, but what does that mean?'

'This video was most likely taken in our relative future,' Frank explained. 'Probably, we even participated in making this recording. If we do this, we will start the chain of events, which ends with the crew back together.'

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An hour later, they were back aboard the Shark.

'Frank, here's the key,' Sam threw Bessie's keys to Frank, which came back immediately. Only Sam wasn't paying attention, so it hit him in the chest and ended up on the floor. 'What?'

'You have to drive!'

'Come on! I haven't got this awful hangover in months.'

'Don't care. You still need to drive.'

'Why? Because Ben said so?'

'No, because the prophecy said so.'

'Fine,' Sam sighed and picked up the key with a painful growl. 'But if I end up causing a mass catastrophe, don't blame me.'

It doesn't take a genius or a seer to predict what happened. Bessie rolled out from the Shark, then from the derelict warehouse used as a hangar bay, then from the abandoned and ruined plant. From that point on, it didn't take long to reach a busier part of the city. Sam crashed into the first car they'd met. While Bessie got out of the accident without a scratch, the other car's back was obliterated.

The police arrived within five minutes. The officer at the scene asked for papers first and got to the question of alcohol straight away. The gang found themselves at the station in no time.

'I believe, at this point, I'm supposed to say I told you so,' Sam said bitterly.

'I'm not certain you should,' Amy said with a faint voice upon glancing at Frank sitting between them.

'You definitely shouldn't. Look!' Frank said, staring at the opposite wall covered with wanted flyers, and from the middle of it, Piotr's glum face was staring back.

'What?!' Sam jumped up and instantly regretted it. The hangover was still squeezing his skull. He collapsed back onto the chair for Frank's gentle pull.

'Don't get so jumpy. We don't want to bring attention to the fact that we know a wanted criminal.'

'What did he do to become a fugitive?' Amy wondered.

'It doesn't matter. Look at his shirt. It's a hotel with a room number.'

'Okay. We should check it out once we get out of here.'

Nearly five hours passed until they could walk out of the police station. Sam was looking at a paper which definitely looked like a check.

'Unbelievable, how similar this civilisation is to humanity. Even the punishment for breaking the rules of the road is the same. Although, I'm not sure about these numbers. They seem pretty big, don't they.'

'We don't know their currency. Give me the car key now.'

'I'm fine now. Hangover passed. I can drive.'

'No way. You've just proved that you shouldn't drive. Besides, we still need to find that hotel, and you're better as the navigator.'

'Fine. Drive carefully.'

After another two hours of circling downtown, they managed to get to the Barbarian. They booked room 221 and went upstairs. At first glance, nothing seemed out of place to indicate a possible hidden message.

'Okay, what are we looking for and where?' Frank asked.

'Well, we have one more clue,' Sam replied. 'The Godfather.'

'What? Are you saying there is a horse head in the bed?' Amy asked a bit nervously.

'No! I say there's a gun in the toilet's water tank.'

'What?' Frank asked, annoyed. 'Why would they leave a gun for us?'

'I don't know. But why else would Piotr wear his Godfather shirt?'

'For committing a crime, maybe? I have no idea,' Frank replied with a sarcastic voice.

'Okay. Just let me check the water tank. If I can't find anything, you can gloat.'

Sam went to the bathroom, and Amy, just in case, checked the bed for possible horse heads. Pretty soon, he returned with a small leather wallet in his hands.

'Well, it's not a gun, but definitely something. A police badge.'

'A badge?' Amy asked. 'What good would that do?'

'Okay, you were right,' Frank admitted his mistake. 'Now, I think we shall find out what exactly did Piotr commit.'

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'I believe you know the rest,' Frank said. 'You either saw it or eavesdropped.'

'I see. I shall thank you, I guess.' Perez sounded calm, but his body was tense. His pacing up and down and the small glances he cast at the crew were foreshadowing something bad. 'Finally, all the pieces are together. Now, the case which took a lifetime to solve finally makes sense.' Then he snapped. 'So, tell me,' he pulled his gun and started pointing at each of them, 'why the hell shouldn't I just kill you all?'

Everyone jumped back one step and the barrel kept moving on the line of them.

'You almost ruined my life. You broke my career. This whole thing nearly made me mad; it nearly finished me! You have...'

He couldn't finish. As soon as the barrel moved away from the captain, with a lightning-fast strike of his cane, Ben hit the gun out of Perez's hand. He picked up the weapon and put a bullet in the surprised detective's leg.

'Now, I nearly finished you! And also evened up!' Then, he noticed the others' stunned looks. 'What? I got tired of his whining,' he said and turned back to the whimpering Perez. 'You point a gun at my crew, for what? Not getting to the top of the rank? Seriously? Your pal worked on the same case, and he's doing fine, so don't blame us for getting carried away. You could be more grateful, in fact. You've just learned a big bloody secret of the universe! So, since this is how you thank it, all is left for you to sod off!'

Ben holstered the pistol and hit a button on the console. A minute later, Perez found himself collapsed on the interview room's floor. While he was trying to sit up and bleeding all over the floor, Jörag stormed into the room.

'Oh, my goodness! What the hell happened?' he asked, shocked. 'I know you wanted me to go home, but I heard this weird noise.'

'Really? So... in the few hours..., I was..., in fact, away only a few minutes passed,' Perez wheezed.

'What are you on about? What happened?'

'The case that haunted me in the past 35 years. It is closed. This calls for getting pissed drunk,' Perez said, shivering, but with a faint smile.

'Let's patch you up first,' Jörag said and dialled the number of the ambulance.

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'So, on our way again?' Piotr asked when the copper disappeared.

'No,' Ben said, leaning on the console. 'Not just yet. We still need to deliver my message.'

'Indeed. I'll get the camera,' Sam volunteered.

'Isn't that weird?' Amy asked.

'What is?'

'Ben's message lead us to the police station, to our stage act, to the court trial, which lead you,' she pointed at the TARDIS team, 'to jumping forwards and backwards in time, leaving us messages, which lead us to give you the solution to reunite the crew, which now leads to recording Ben's message.' After describing the full circle, she became uncertain about what to say. 'This is... I mean...what the hell?'

'Huh! Infinite loop with no entry point. How interesting!' Sam said, amazed.

'What do you mean, infinite loop?' Ben asked.

'It's like the messages we sent each other were generated somehow by Time itself,' Frank gave an answer.

'Time itself? Is that even possible?' Gladys asked.

'Well, there's another possibility,' Sam said mysteriously.

'Sam, we don't need to hear that,' Ben tried to shut him up, but it didn't work.

'Maybe we can thank this to an unimaginably powerful force that can control both ours and the Doctor's TARDIS anywhere in time and space.' He paused for a bit, and when the others' faces reflected the glum expression he was after, he flashed a manic grin. 'Can't wait to meet them.'