

Episode 4

Continuum

Chapter 1 - On the road again

Ben thought he would go deaf as soon as he entered Sam's study. The harsh-voice singer, the vocals, the distorted guitars, and the drums thundering from the loudspeakers seem to be fuelled by the heat of a [Viking battle](#). No wonder, Sam didn't hear a thing of the shouting.

'TURN IT OFF!!!'

A torrent of other sound waves blocked Ben's voice from getting to Sam's ears. He just kept working on some gadget. Only the Captain's waving hands right in front of his eyes broke his concentration.

'Oh, sorry!' he said, pressing pause on the audio player. 'What can I do for you?'

'We've landed. Thought you wanted to check where we are. But what are you up to?' he asked, looking at the messy desk.

It was covered with wires, circuits, all kinds of tools and a weird-looking blue crystal.

'Oh, I'm just trying to find out how much electric power this stone needs so it would emit a wave with the proper frequency.'

'What would be the point of that?'

Sam just smirked under his nose.

'You shall see soon!'

'Fine. Then I just wanted to let you know that we're off.'

'Have fun,' Sam replied, not even looking up from his work.

A few days later, Jenny walked in with an enthusiastic smile on her face.

'Hi, Sam! Fancy some hiking? We reached an ocean planet with some mountain islands.'

Sam looked up as if he was visualising the planet in his head. During that pause, Jenny noticed the music.

'What is this? It sounds amazing.' Her statement made Sam smile.

'Isn't it? [Within Temptation. The Unforgiving](#). Their greatest album. But no.'

'No what?'

'I skip the hiking. I'm busy.'

Jenny found it so odd she had to check what he was working on. The thing seemed oddly familiar.

'Hey, that looks like a...'

'Don't! It will be a surprise!'

'What? He doesn't want to go hiking?' Gladys burst out. 'Is he ill or something?'

'He is simply working on something.' Ben tried to calm her down.

'For days, now.'

'He's working on something big!' Jenny said, grinning. 'Well, small, but great!'

'It can't be that great. I still think something's wrong with him.'

'Stop it, Gladys!' Ben said strictly. 'You just want him to have a problem because if he doesn't come, you have to. In those mountain forests, we can find a lot of food. We need everyone except the one guarding the ship. So, gear up!'

Food supplies refilled, a little exercise for the team, and they were off. Straight to the land of boredom. Piotr thought that would be a good opportunity to fill Sam with some of his homebrew.

'Since you're listening to [Alestorm](#), I thought you might want some beer and join the party in the Green Roof.'

'No man's land?'

'Yeah. So, pub? You can be the DJ.'

'Thanks, but I skip,' Sam replied and angrily smashed his computer's keyboard. 'Because this damn scanner REFUSES TO WORK!! Emitting the proper frequency wave is fine, but the program determining the proper frequency is a complete bonkers.'

'All the more reason to take a break and have a pint?' Piotr insisted.

'No, this might be handy on our next trip, so I've got to keep working.'

'Okay, as you see fit.'

'Gladys, you were right,' Ben said sourly at a table in the pub. 'There's something wrong with him.'

'Told you so!'

'He's just working on something like Piotr and Jenny said,' Frank defended Sam. 'And apparently, he's obsessed with it.'

'He doesn't come to a party where he could have absolute power over the music. That must be a whole new level of obsession.'

'Not a regular case, but it can happen.'

'I'm still not buying it. But don't worry, I have a plan.'

Amy couldn't decide if her hearing got impaired or if she was merely hallucinating. When she finally recognized the tune, consisting of modern singing and some sort of cavemen-chanting, she still wasn't convinced she walked into Sam's lab.

'Hooked on a feeling?' she asked without saying hello.

'Oh, Amy! Hi!' Sam looked up. 'Yes, it is. Something's wrong with it?'

'No, just the others told me about loud rock and metal after visiting you.'

'Sometimes, I need diversity. Otherwise, I would get bored of my favourites.'

'I see. So, what are you working on?'

'Trying to find a workaround for a noise problem.' Sam answered, but Amy's confused face demanded some clarification. 'I'm building a new toy, which should prove to be the most useful gadget during our heists. It's working now, but since we would need some silence to avoid too much attention, I wanted it to shut up. Problem is, when its main component, a crystal, gets electricity, it emits a very definite sound.'

Sam turned on the small device, and Amy's jaws dropped in surprise.

'And he dared to say jamming signal!' Sam said.

'Oh, my God!' Amy shrieked. 'You've built a sonic screwdriver!'

'Yep! I did.'

'But it's Time Lord science. How could you achieve this?!'

'Hell, it is! The crystal is, but I found one in a storage of the Cellar. The rest is just elementary engineering. Why would he say it's just a jamming signal?'

The reminder of the past snapped Amy out of her amazement, and she said pretend-strictly.

'Rule number one. The Doctor lies.'

'So, it seems! And what brings you here?' Sam asked and kept browsing the possibly buggy software code of his screwdriver.

'We've arrived, and Ben said, for the second time in five years, we're being hailed and towed in.'

'Hm. That hasn't occurred for a while indeed.' Sam looked up for a minute then returned to his work. 'Where are we heading?'

'The Captain says it's the Shadow Proclamation!'

Sam raised his head and stared at Amy as if he was thunderstruck.

'What?!'

Gladys and Ben were standing in the control room, staring at the corridor leading to Sam's lab. When he appeared, Gladys allowed herself a victorious smile.

'See? I told you he would come if Amy asked.'

'I'm not sure about his rush, though.'

Sam stopped right in front of them.

'We need to dock silently... and politely..., do anything we're asked... Convince them we are... the good guys. Then head for the library,' he said, wheezing.

'The library? What do we want there?'

'Guys! The Shadow Proclamation is the police watching over the stars! They are basically the guardians of the galaxy!'

'Doesn't that mean we should rather keep a distance before they find something to arrest us for?' Gladys asked worriedly.

'Come on!' Amy caught up with them. 'Guardians of the galaxy? Who are they? We crush them!' she said enthusiastically.

'Sure, we crush them,' Ben said flatly, 'but why is this guardian thing good for us? And what's it got to do with the library?'

'The guardians of OUR galaxy! They keep their eyes on the entire Milky Way.'

'Meaning?'

'Isn't it obvious? They have maps! An awful lot of star maps! If we are very lucky, they even have something from the Time Lords.'

'Flying a TARDIS for novices?'

'Something like that. Point is, based on data like that, we could go anywhere we want!'

Ben got excited over this news.

'Even home?'

'Wouldn't be my first choice,' Sam shook his head slightly, 'but yes. We could go home!'

Chapter 2 - The Shadow Proclamation

The complex of the Shadow Proclamation was magnificent. Its imposing skyscrapers were built on the ruins of a planet that once orbited a pale blue dwarf – on three smaller chunks of rock, linked to a bigger one by artificial axils. Even though the system had only a feeble sun, the complex was basking in eternal starlight, coming from the myriads of blinking lanterns in the sky making the very centre of the galaxy.

This bustling city kept track of every civilized planet in the entire Milky Way and arranged law enforcement on them – even if the citizens of that planet weren't aware of it. This was the Torchwood-4 crew's newest destination. And they couldn't possibly stumble into a more dangerous place.

Life roaming across space and time proved to be difficult to sustain without breaking the law, and the people here were keen on making sure everyone kept to the word of the law. That meant the crew was basically walking into a death trap. At least, Frank thought so.

'It's a deathtrap,' he said, looking at the space station.

'Ah, you're too pessimistic,' Amy replied and stepped closer to the cockpit window. 'This is amazing!'

'If they find out what we are dealing with, they will hang us from that cliff right there.'

The Shark was towed into the asteroid designated as Beta-2, meaning number two of the smaller objects. Frank was pointing at the cliff standing out from that rock.

'So, we put on our best smiles and play the good guys. Everything illegal can stay in the TARDIS. I doubt they could detect it.' Ben said.

'How do we know what's illegal?' Frank asked.

'Okay!' the captain sighed. 'We keep everything down the Cellar except the food and the original furniture. Start packing.'

By the time the ship docked, everything non-terrestrial was removed from the Shark. Only a few five-year-old leftover tuna cans, the basketball board, and of course, Bessie remained. The place couldn't have been more spotless. As for their tale, Ben decided to stick to the simple truth. They couldn't screw that up.

When the door lowered, the deck was almost immediately crawling with rhino-like aliens, shouting single-syllable words, examining every corner of the ship and missing the fact that one square meter in the middle was actually a trapdoor.

While the search went on, a pale woman with white curly hair and red eyes strolled into the hangar.

'Welcome to the Shadow Proclamation!' she greeted the crew with a polite smile. 'My name is Lieutenant Dala Marin, and I will be your point of contact while you're staying here. Our records showed that you've never been to our facility before. For this reason, we need to debrief you and clarify a few things about your arrival.'

'Sure!' Ben said weakly while glancing suspiciously at the creatures swarming the place. 'Please, debrief us.'

The whole process rather reminded of an interrogation than an orientation. The crew were led to a sterile and uncomfortable waiting room, then called in separately to be questioned in a tiny, two-chairs-and-a-desk version of the sterile waiting room. Just an average day in state administration.

Dala went to her boss right away with the report on the crew. She found him watching the holographic record of the last interview, Piotr's. When Dala stepped through the threshold, he froze the image, right at the moment when the Armenian blew out a big grey smoke cloud.

'Can you believe this guy?' asked the human-looking, thin, old man sitting at the desk behind the hologram. 'He knows this will most likely kill him, yet he is breathing in smoke.'

'It is a habit in several civilizations up to level 6, Captain Roos. There are some smokers here as well.' Dala stated calmly.

'I know, but probably because it never occurred to my ancestors that inhaling fumes of burning weeds could lead to any good, I could never comprehend this habit. So, what of these newcomers?'

'I believe they are a bunch of liars.'

'What makes you say that?'

'They claim they are employees of an Earth-organization called Torchwood. Their job was to examine the ship they arrived in, which crash-landed on their planet 30 years earlier. The local date is 2006 when, according to all the crew, an alien armada attacked the Earth. That's when they say the accident occurred. They couldn't tell what exactly happened. Only that a blue light surrounded the ship, and the next thing they knew, we were towing them in. This story bleeds from multiple wounds.'

'Is that so?' Roos asked, bored.

'Well, of course!' Dala insisted. 'Just look at the facts. It is around 2060 on Earth at the moment. Half of that globe is still a nuclear wasteland. They are not supposed to have any crafts that could travel here. Unless, they are time-travellers, but Judoon troops examined that ship from top to bottom, and couldn't even find a hyperdrive. How could that vehicle even end up on Earth?'

'There are many ways for that. It could be a stray transporter from a bigger cargo ship passing by the area, or there is still the rift that constantly spits stuff at the human's porch.'

'Okay, what about the other contradictions? There was no invasion on Earth in 2006.'

'There was, in another history of the planet. Those recently disappeared cracks erased their version. In that other reality, indeed, there was an invasion, from even two directions. From a parallel Earth, a legion of Cybermen came, and then, right from the void, Daleks escaped from Time War. The fabric of reality at that time was thinner than a foil. They could have simply fallen through a random crack.'

With that, Captain Roos considered the debate over. He stood up and headed for the door.

'Thank you for sharing your concerns with me, Lieutenant. I'll make sure they will be noted when I report to the director.'

Roos left Dala in the room alone with her thoughts. She was quite disappointed. Roos saying that her concerns will be noted, meant that they will be ignored completely. But a gut feeling told the Lieutenant something was off with the case. No one would be so calm as the crew were after getting thrown across half a galaxy. And no one seemed to care about that fact.

The Shadow Proclamation was several millennia old when Torchwood-4 paid them a visit. The establishment got really strong in defence against constant attacks coming from the vermin of the galaxy. They were so successful that attempts to bring the Proclamation down slowly stopped around five hundred years ago. The centuries of peace eventually rocked them into the sensation of false safety.

And that's what bothered Dala. She didn't want to pretend there was no danger. Threats had always been present, and as she looked at the hologram, she saw a high-risk factor. But Piotr's smoke-clouded image just gave her an idea of how to prove her theory.

The rest of the crew waited for Ben in a café near the hangar where the Hammerhead-Shark parked. They were already having their third coffee when the captain finally appeared. He was about to sit down, but he had to give Piotr a pitying look first.

'Seriously, you're finishing cigarettes like you were popping candy. Is there anything you need to tell me?'

'Yes! They have tobacco here. I can easily resupply. I figured I could allow myself a bit more. Especially that we can go home soon. Right?'

'Possibly. Some day,' Ben replied uneasily. 'They don't have time travel. They know about it, and they take it into consideration during their investigations. But they don't have any devices for moving through time. We can't get a lift. Frank, Sam? What about the library?'

'Well, they have maps, definitely,' Frank said. 'None from Earth. As it turned out, it's around 2060 back home, and it's not yet interesting enough for this lot. But there are references to Time Lord documents. And star charts as well. Problem is they are in the restricted section. And I do mean restricted. Only the elite cops have access to it.'

'So how can we get those Time Lord maps?'

'Obvious, isn't it?' Piotr smiled behind the smoke cloud.

'Yes. We don't.' Ben quickly said before Piotr could point out the obvious. 'Let's get back to the Shark.'

Chapter 3 - Alternative Solution

'Are you nuts?!' Ben yelled at the Armenian back in the Cellar. 'This whole place is bugged. We obviously try to nick those maps but don't want the coppers crawling the place to know about it.'

'Great! How do we do it?'

The question effectively decreased the volume of Ben's voice.

'Erm..., I don't know. Yet. But I'm sure Sam and Gladys will come up with something.'

The two mentioned suddenly found something interesting on the ceiling pretending they didn't hear what their captain said. This didn't change the fact that they had a job to do, though.

'Why?' Gladys asked sorrowfully, stooping over a console of the public part of the library. 'Why is it always us who needs to solve these computer riddles?'

'Because we're computer experts.' Sam replied, not looking up from the screen in front of him.

'You mean nerds. And that's my point. You're the nerd. The expert, if you like. I'm just good at administrating. So, it should be you, not us.'

'This security system is amazing,' Sam said, not even reacting to what Gladys said.

'Thanks for proving my point.'

'You can't just write code segments and compile them into the main program. You must use a neural interface, enter a virtual reality builder, and compose the functionality with your mind. There are a few of these interfaces here but none of the programmers. They are trained for years, thousands of light years away. They only come if they are really needed. Which is basically never because it works so fine.'

'And how does it work exactly?'

'Strangely, despite the sophisticated implementation, it is quite crude. You can connect any data storage device to the network nodes and download the data. But if it is unauthorized, it gets flooded with nanites, tiny robots, that fry the storage.'

'Isn't this bad for us?' Ben asked back in the Cellar. 'I mean, if our storage gets fried, what's the point?'

'Well, I'd like to see the nanites, which can cope with the defences of a TARDIS. Even a young one.' Sam replied confidently.

'Plus, I think I can separate an isolated area of the Cellar's computer. For extra safety,' Jenny offered.

'Sounds good. So, if I understand correctly, we don't even need to break into anywhere, just download the maps and let the TARDIS finish off the nanites.'

'Unfortunately, no. We still need to break into the restricted section of the library. The Time Lord archives can only be accessed from there,' Sam said.

'Well, it's a library. It's hardly gonna be a fortress. How do we do it?'

'Easy. Get in, get out.'

Dala Marin was right to be suspicious. She followed the crew as soon as they left. Piotr, to be precise. She couldn't think of a better way to prove that they were hiding something than with the help of a living factory chimney. When the company left the café, she collected all the remaining tobacco ash and the stubs the Armenian left behind. The report came back from the lab in a day (just about at the time when the crew headed off to the library). Seeing the results, her mouth curled into a victorious smile, and she instantly ran to Captain Roos.

'I was right,' she handed over the report to her boss.

Roos raised his eyebrows, surprised.

'So, whatever kind of tobacco that man was smoking was not from Earth. What's the problem with that? Maybe he's trying the local things.'

'Sir, we're not talking about a delicacy. He is an addict, a creature of habit. People like him commonly have their preferences regarding their vices. If he just got here, he would go for the stuff he got from home in anxiety. Yet, he doesn't show any signs of being nervous. None of them do.'

'It's a bit of a stretch, but makes sense.' He digested the reasoning for some time then sighed. 'Fine. Get a unit of troops and arrest them.'

'Thank you, sir!' Dala said and turned to the exit.

'Just one thing!' Roos stopped her. 'Don't involve the Judoon! We need them alive for questioning.'

Dala nodded and left the room.

The Shark's crew walked into the library like they were the wicked version of the Magnificent Seven. Except, only five of them had guns, and one carried a briefcase. They didn't even stop until the entrance of the restricted section. Just a clerk stood in their way.

'Sorry, but you can't access the classified documents.'

'Yes, we can!' Ben pointed a gun at him.

The clerk raised his hands but didn't seem that scared.

'I believe you can. You must realize, though, someone has already notified the guards.'

'I'm quite certain of it. That's why you're coming with us as a hostage.'

Amy and Frank grabbed the man and dragged him through the door of the forbidden part of the library. Inside, everyone got to their jobs. Piotr and Jenny stood guard in the doorway; Frank and Amy kept the hostage at gunpoint; Ben just walked up and down between them with his gun raised, sending the clear message that he was the boss. In the meantime, Gladys and Sam opened the suitcase and prepared to download the maps.

'Gladys, find me a socket.'

'Got it,' she replied after a short looking.

'Okay, commence scan.' Sam pressed a few buttons on the briefcase-computer, and it produced a connector fitting the socket.

When Sam pulled it, the attached, long cable coiled out from the computer. He gave the end to Gladys, and she plugged it in.

'Got a connection!' Sam exclaimed. 'Browsing for the maps.'

'Browse as fast as you can. We've got company.'

Dala Marin and her troops arrived at the library. They quickly set up a perimeter around the entrance of the back section.

'Crew of the Hammerhead-Shark, you are surrounded,' the Lieutenant shouted. 'Come out without weapons, with hands in the air! You're under arrest!'

'Not just yet!' Ben yelled back. 'And if anyone tries to arrange that, we shoot the hostage.'

'What are your demands?'

That made Ben very uncertain. He turned to the crew.

'What demands is she talking about?'

'I reckon they want to know the ransom for the hostage,' Frank tried to help out.

'We just want five minutes left alone.'

'They will siege this room the moment you tell them that,' the clerk spoke up. 'Considering the capture of the felon before reaching their goal is more important than one hostage's life. If you give them one random ransom, they will have to proceed according to a hostage-situation scenario.'

'And why would you tell us that?' Ben put the barrel of his gun at the temple of the clerk.

'Erm... I prefer to stay alive.'

'Fair enough.'

Ben pulled away the pistol and went to the entrance again to present their “*demands*”.

'We want a safe passage to Earth, 2006.'

'And 10,' Amy added.

'Captain. We've already had this conversation. We can't use time travel technology.'

'But I'm pretty certain you can get your hands on it if you try hard enough.'

Dala hesitated for a moment. Protocol clearly stated what must be done, but there was a high chance the team tried to fool her again. Still, she had to stick to the rules.

'I need to talk to my superiors about this.'

Ben saw movement out there. Dala was giving orders to her troops, who ran away to heaven knows where. Ben assumed this was the start kick of the hostage scenario.

'Okay, looks like we have our window. Sam, how are we doing?'

Sam was staring at the screen with his eyes widened.

'I think I found it, and it's massive. Time Lord maps of thousands of galaxies, in 4D.'

'Start with the Milky Way, then proceed with the surroundings. Let's hope there will be time for plenty.'

While the download seemed to perform flawlessly, Gladys noticed something near the plug. Some kind of dense, silverly shining liquid was leaking from the library console itself. She put her finger into the material and picked up a drop to examine it closer.

'What do you think this is?'

Sam looked up and instantly got a smaller shock.

'What the hell are you doing? You're disgusted by any unknown slimy stuff, but if it shines, you have to touch it,' he told her off.

'Fine,' she shook the liquid off her fingers, 'but what do you think it is?'

'I reckon that is a mass of nanites. It shouldn't harm you. This is amazing. The TARDIS defence systems don't even allow the attackers to enter the cable. They must be overflowing at the bottleneck.'

There was movement again out there. Ben couldn't tell what it was about, but leaving anything to chance may mean their doom.

'Something's up! Sam, how are we on those maps?'

'Fully detailed Milky Way and about two dozen other galaxies with basic coordinates.'

'Good enough. Off we go.'

Amy and Frank grabbed the hostage and stood him in the doorway.

'Not long, now!' Amy told him. 'You want to live, so just stay still for a minute here and don't turn around.'

The clerk obeyed without any fuss. In front of him, he saw a strike team getting ready to siege the room; from behind, he heard the crew doing something but couldn't determine what exactly. It indeed took only about a minute, and the noises slowly faded. When he thought he wouldn't hear any more sound, he was about to turn around when a loud distorted hum hit his ears. It came so suddenly that he jerked back to face again the strike force ready to storm the place.

'Torchwood team, your demands can't be completed!' Dala hollered in again, 'This is your last chance! Surrender or we will have no choice, but capture you by force.'

The Lieutenant waited a moment for Ben's reply. The clerk waited for Ben's reply manifesting as a bullet to his head with his eyes squeezed shut. But the shot didn't come. First, he just glanced back, then turned fully. The room was empty.

'They are not here,' the clerk yelled out.

'What do you mean?'

'They are just gone. Don't ask where?'

Chapter 4 – Fever

The cargo hold of the Hammerhead-Shark was also cleared out. Not the tiniest lifesign could be detected. Except maybe for a fly. But it didn't stay long either. After a few spins in the air, it simply vanished. Almost simultaneously, the suitcase Sam was carrying appeared on the floor with the noise of a catarrhal pump. Very soon, the case opened by itself, revealing the computer inside. Its console started to wobble a bit, then it seemed to fall into a hole much deeper than a suitcase could allow it. And that's exactly what happened. The computer just fell down, but Sam standing on a ladder right below the gap caught it in time. He pressed a few buttons and yelled down to Jenny, standing beside Cellar's control column.

'Wifi link active!'

'Confirmed!' Jenny replied. 'Data is safe and downloading.'

'Great, we can have some rest then,' Gladys said leaning on the console.

'Are you all right?' Frank asked her. 'You seem a bit paler than usual.'

'I'm fine, just a little tired, that's all,' she said, but clearly, her breathing was troubled.

Neither was her paleness without reason. In a second, she lost grip on the console and collapsed on the floor.

'Gladys!' Sam cried, frightened and climbed down the ladder. Almost instantly, the cogwheels in his brain kicked off and started spinning at high speed. By the time he reached the floor, the others were around Gladys, trying to help the girl, but Sam interrupted.

'Don't touch her!'

'Are you mad?!' Ben yelled back. 'We've got to help her. Can't you see she's ill?'

'And I assume you want to catch whatever disease knocked her out this quickly,' everyone took one step back for that. 'And I've got the nasty feeling I know what this vermin is. Jenny, prepare the infirmary!'

She stepped to the console and pushed a few buttons.

'It's getting ready. It will be done by the time you reach it.'

'Ben, come with me! Jenny, if Gladys needs anything you attend, you're the immortal one. The rest of you, stay away from her.'

'Sam,' the patient moaned on the floor, 'what's going on?'

'Gladys, you just hold on. We're gonna get you better in no time,' Sam said in the end and hurried toward a corridor, but he turned back at the entrance, 'Ben, come on! We're in a hurry.'

The Captain was so surprised over Sam taking over his post that he just ran after him with a numb expression on his face. A little exercise quickly pulled him back to reality.

'Sam, what's wrong with Gladys?'

They stopped in front of a door, and Sam hit the open button. The Cellar's miraculously never used infirmary revealed itself.

'Nanites attacked her system.'

'I see. So, it's pretty bad,' Ben concluded and went to the hazard suits right away.

Sam just picked up a simple pair of rubber gloves and grabbed a floating gurney at one end. Then, he noticed what Ben was doing.

'What the hell are you doing? These critters eat themselves through metallic wire! Do you think that will stop them?'

'Your gloves will?'

'No, but when it gets shredded, I will know I'm infected. Now, come on and help me.'

'Makes sense.'

Jenny could hear them running from afar. She immediately picked up Gladys from the floor and rushed ahead to meet the self-appointed ambulance. She placed the patient carefully on the gurney, and they were on their way back to the ER. When the others caught up with them, Gladys already laid on the examining table.

'Now what?' Piotr asked.

'I truly don't know,' Sam wheezed disappointedly, but right away, a sphere detached from the ceiling and hovered over Gladys.

Rays of light quickly ran all over her body, and her vital signs appeared on a hologram.

'It's automatic, cool.' Ben noted.

'Unlike her. She is awfully hot.'

'Sam,' Gladys sighed, gasping for air, 'don't go that way again.'

'Calm down, girl. You know I still think you're a beauty, but now I meant that your fever is getting over forty! Get me cooling blankets, quickly!'

Everyone got to rummaging through the cabinets to find one. In the meantime, Sam carefully tried to touch the temperature signal in midair. As he expected, it did operate as a button. Upon hitting it, the greenish outlines of Gladys's body appeared over her.

'Firefly-like med-scan, check! Just what I've been looking for. Look at all those red dots scattered across her body and, in higher concentration, in her right hand, where she touched that grey mass. Oh, these are clever little bastards. They are programmed to take down computer systems, but now, they got into an absolutely unknown, organic environment. So, they send out the scouts, and it is only a matter of time before they find out where the CPU of a human computer is. But the immune system doesn't sit back lazily. It recognizes the danger and fights back. Hence the fever.'

While Sam explained, the others covered Gladys in the cooling blankets to stop her brain from boiling even before the nanites would shut it down.

'Okay, how can we stop them?' Amy asked.

'Erm..., I have no idea... Wait a minute! Of course, I do,' he pulled a device from his pocket. 'With my brand new screwdriver, I can emit an EMP wave and fry them.'

Sam set the device, aimed at Gladys and activated it. As the electricity surged through the crystal in the tool, it triggered its unmistakable sound and an electromagnetic pulse. Nothing happened at all. The hologram didn't even flicker over Gladys, and the small red dots kept swarming in her bloodstream.

'Wrong settings?' Frank asked, standing at Gladys's head, right in the line of fire.

'I'm not sure. Do you have your mp3 player?'

He pulled the device out of his pocket.

'Dead, so it worked.'

'So, it was very irresponsible of me to think that, if something wrecks Earth technologies, then more advanced systems aren't prepared for this kind of attack either.'

'What can we do then?' Ben asked slightly angrily.

'I don't know. I have no idea how to defeat these machines. I'm afraid we need to talk to our hosts.'

'Right,' the captain gulped, 'you better trust that to me.'

In the meantime, at least three dozen Judoon troops got the Hammerhead-Shark's entrance blocked, all facing the hangar gate. They didn't expect the crew could have already returned. Then the Shark's gate started to descend. All at once, the rhinos turned around and waited for Ben to appear in the doorway. When the entrance was fully opened, he hollered at them.

'Okay, you lot...'

'Hostage taker identified! Sentence, execution!'

Ben could barely take cover from the deadly laser rays.

'Seize fire! Seize fire!' Lieutenant Marin ran into the hangar, yelling.

The Judoon put away their guns right away. Ben peeked out from safety. It looked clear, so he started shouting again.

'What the bloody hell was that about?'

'Captain, they are doing their jobs. You're a wanted criminal. You gave false testimony; you broke into the restricted archives of the library; you took a man hostage. So, you come with us peacefully, or I'll let the Judoon carry out their favourite sentence.'

'Fine! I surrender! We all do, in fact. I'll even tell you the whole truth about us but on one condition. You reverse whatever your insane security system did to one of my crew before it kills her.'

'Captain, so far, you haven't hurt anyone. We also prefer you to be alive. If that's the only thing you demand, we'll do our best to save her, and I'll accept your surrender.'

'She did what?' the old doctor of the Proclamation shouted angrily.

'You heard me. She put her hand into that bloody nanite glue of yours,' Jenny yelled back. 'So, what? Are you that careless that you didn't test if it can be harmful to a living being?'

'Who do you think we are? Mindless nutjobs from your ridiculous planet Earth. Of course, we've tested it. We know it can be harmful. You would know if you've bothered to check the signs!'

'What? What signs?'

'Those ones above every single computer on this station,' the doctor pointed at the pictogram above his terminal.

'And that supposed to mean it will kill one of us?'

When Frank looked at the picture, he just buried his face into his palms.

'What's wrong with you?' Jenny snapped at him.

'When I think of the Earth-symbol of acid. It is a hand and some liquid dripping onto it. When it comes to danger, it's just as incomprehensible for an alien as this one is to an Earthling. Nonetheless, these are machines. Can you turn them off?'

The doctor's face turned even darker.

Sam was staring at Gladys's hospital bed from outside her ward when Amy found him. It struck her to see her crewmate like this. Gladys was connected to all kinds of machines trying to keep her fever down without success. The girl was shivering even in her sleep.

'How is she?' Amy asked.

'Shut up, I'm thinking.'

'About what?' Amy asked, surprised. She had no clue what he could do in this situation.

'A plan-B. The first thing they could've done is to shut these things down. But they've only treated the symptoms. Something's wrong. We need a plan B.'

'Good. We'll, indeed, need that. I'm just coming from Jenny and Frank. They were told that these machines don't have an off switch. They have two months life expectancy, and the whole batch is replaced by upgraded ones.'

'They must be able to do upgrades for emergency security patches. And if that assumption is right, then we have a plan,' he said and left.

'Wait! What do you have in mind?' Amy called after him.

'Upgrade them with an off-switch.'

Piotr and Ben found themselves again in the interrogation room, staring at Dala Marin. She sat casually with her arms and legs folded and three Judoon behind her.

'So where are you from?' she asked.

'From Earth,' Ben replied, 'as I told you earlier.'

'You also told me you'll stop lying.'

'I'm not. Most things I've told you are true. Except, our arrival here wasn't our first trip. We've been drifting in time and space for five years now.'

'That ship of yours isn't FTL capable, and we are way further than 5 light years from Earth.'

'Indeed, our ship wouldn't fly far, but its Cellar can carry it.'

'What do you mean?'

'We've got a living TARDIS in our basement,' Piotr spit it out suddenly.

It appeared that Dala froze. She could only stare at the two with her mouth open for long-long moments. And when she finally spoke, she could only say, 'Bullshit!'

'We can show you our motor if you like.'

'Go ahead,' Dala stood up, still having the same surprise on her face. So, her expression needed no adjustments when opening the door, she found herself in facing of Sam's blazing eyes.

'Where are the programmers of the security system?' he asked strictly.

'Erm..., I don't know... All I know is their company is on the rim in another quadrant of the galaxy.'

'Right, get them here immediately to write a shutdown routine to those critters inside Gladys.'

'I can send for them, but it will be at least three days before they can get here.'

'Gladys has only one!' Sam burst out furiously. 'That's what the doctors are saying. So, don't tell me there isn't a single soul aboard this station who could simply turn off some machines.'

'The situation is more complicated than you imagine. The company we hired is the most acclaimed security expert in the galaxy. They are very keen on keeping their secrets, otherwise, they wouldn't be the best at what they're doing. They have the equipment here to develop the new functions. It could only be done from those consoles, but the developers only come every two months for maintenance.'

Sam started to pace around, tearing his hair, and constantly growling.

'Un-bloody-believable! How could you be so irresponsible?! Wait a minute!' He stopped suddenly and turned back to Dala. 'You said you have the equipment here to develop functions. Why don't you just use it to save her?'

'Because we couldn't. Anyone could use the interface; true. Even you! If you wish, I'll take you there right now. But if an untrained person enters the virtual reality of the interface, they'll only see static noise. You wouldn't be able to put two lines of code together.'

Sam took a few paces behind and leaned against the wall. He kept knocking his head into the cold metal and thinking of a solution. Dala considered he finished and finally stepped out of the room. Ben and Piotr followed her and glanced at their crewmate, hoping for a reaction. When none came, they went after Dala towards the hangar bay.

They didn't get far, and Sam's head stopped, and lips curled into a smile.

'Lieutenant Marin! If the interface can be used only if its coding is cracked and learned, then we only need the best hacker and the best teacher in the universe.'

'Yes, if we find that person, I'll let you know immediately,' Dala yelled back carelessly.

'No need,' Sam went after them, 'she's right down in our basement.' Sam rushed passed the surprised lot and called back. 'Follow me to the hangar bay.'

Dala caused some level of disappointment. She was a member of a highly advanced society with so much knowledge and technology hoarded that nothing should have surprised her. Yet, when she entered the console room, she reacted just like anyone else of a lesser species would have.

'This..., this is..., ' she murmured, amazed.

'Yes, it's bigger on the inside; yes, it's impossible. Now, could we finally get to the point?' Sam told her off. 'Can you link the TARDIS to the development platform? Preferably, without those things attacking her.'

'Yes, yes,' Dala tried to pull herself together, 'but why would that be good for you?'

'Simple. You link the two, the Cellar cracks the code, constructs a little training material, and teaches me in a minute with this chameleon arch.'

Sam pressed a button, and the helmet that filled the manual on flying a TARDIS into his and Jenny's head slowly descended from the ceiling.

'So, can we do that?'

'We can, but...'

'Good. No but. Do it! Then, our captain, Ben will tell you all he can about this ship.'

Either Dala was way too easy to get intimidated, or the Shadow Proclamation was desperate to get intel on the TARDIS, but Sam got what he wanted. Even with that rough presentation. The TARDIS was transformed into the computer-briefcase and brought to the developer console. Jenny helped him control the Cellar, Frank and Ben gave a briefing on the ship, and Piotr decided to join Amy to check on Gladys. They couldn't do much but watch her from outside the glass.

'My God, I hope Sam can find a way to help her,' Amy said in silent desperation.

'If he has the slightest chance, trust me, he will.'

'Is there something between him and Gladys?'

'No. Sam wanted to, though, but she rejected him. Actually, her rejection was so harsh that sometimes it seems like Sam shut down all his emotions toward human beings. You might have noticed how ignorant he can be when it comes to feelings. That was Gladys.'

'Hence, how he treated Lyla.'

'Exactly.'

At this moment, a doctor and a nurse ran into the room. They grabbed the bed and hurried out with Gladys.

'Hey! Where are you taking her?' Piotr ran after them.

'She's dying. Right now,' the doctor replied while running. 'She needs surgery immediately.'

'Right then. Hurry up. Is there anything we can do?'

'Don't keep us up!'

Piotr slowly fell behind and stared after the floating gurney until it disappeared on the corner. He strolled back to Amy and continued their conversation like nothing happened.

'Truth is I'm scared.'

'You think Gladys won't make it.'

'Unfortunately, there's a chance that she won't. That thought terrifies me, indeed. But right now, Sam is scaring me just as much.'

'Sam? How?' Amy asked, confused.

'I've never seen him like this. Ever. He is angry. More than that, furious. And anger management is vital when dealing with the law enforcement of the galaxy.'

'He really never gets angry?'

'Oh yes, he does. But he can always subdue it somehow or drown it into music. Not this time. Now, he let his rage free, and I can't bear to think of the consequences.' For a few moments, Piotr stared blankly at the floor and headed for the exit. 'I need a smoke break.'

Amy stayed in front of the ward. She slowly descended into a chair with a sigh and tiredly buried her face into her palms. But she had to look up when she heard a meaningful cough. She gaped in her surprise.

'It's you! Again!' The recognition made her very, very confused. 'Hold on. I know we've met face to face before, but I can't remember it. How can this be?'

Chapter 5 – No sense

When the Cellar learned everything about the security system and filled that into Sam's head, she even set up an interface in his room to give him a calm work environment. It looked a lot like the helmet of the chameleon arch. As he put it on his head, he instantly entered the virtual reality of the development environment. His avatar stood on a round, meter-wide pedestal with nothing but a safety rail to keep him from falling into a big black abyss. Then, the blue clouds started to appear.

Soon, out of the clouds, diagrams floated forth, representing the subroutines of the system. Sam raised his hands and pointed at two of them to highlight them. He simply had to drag them together like puzzle pieces to create a new piece of software. By moving additional elements to the composition, he could extend functionality. Sam only had to think, and other small programs scrolled past him until the one he needed became visible.

Now that he got comfortable with the system, he could focus on the problem at hand. How does one switch off something that doesn't have an off-switch? Easy! Kick out the plug from the power outlet. Question is, how molecular machines are powered. One of the methods Sam found among the control functions gave a good clue. It seemed that the energy was sent to the nanites by the main server, and the amount of this energy was configurable. Made sense. Even Tesla was working on delivering power wirelessly. So, setting this to zero should render the robots inert.

There it was, a simple, elegant off-switch that, for some twisted reason, the developers didn't bother to implement. But there was no time to wonder about reasons. The clock was ticking. The program was ready now; Sam only needed to identify the group that infected Gladys – the ones directed to attack the Cellar's computer – and send them the shutdown signal.

As soon as it was done, Sam exited the program and threw away the headpiece interface. He ran as fast as he could. Ran all the way through the TARDIS corridors, up to the Shark, across the hangars of the docking station, into the city, and straight to the hospital. He didn't stop for a second until he reached Gladys's ward.

'I did it!' he exclaimed happily.

But looking around, he missed the enthusiasm on his crewmates' faces.

'Tell me I wasn't too late.'

As his sight moved to the bed and saw Gladys's still, lifeless body, he knew he was. And that's when he felt his lung shrink to the size of a pea.

No need to say the crew was devastated. They sat in the interrogation room in numb silence. Dala and Roos were looking at them on a security hologram and wondering what to do with them.

'So, what's next?' the Lieutenant asked.

'What would be? We have to throw them into jail for a few months.'

'Do we?'

'I understand that they went through a tragedy, but they committed a crime. Even if a minor one, we can not let that pass.'

'What about their TARDIS?'

'Apparently, it's theirs, along with the Hammerhead Shark. If we don't find evidence that suggests otherwise, we must return them to the crew, and they can be on their way once they served their sentence.'

'Are we sure about this? TARDISes shouldn't exist in the universe, apart from the Doctor's, of course. We have to find out where it came from.'

'And while they're locked up, we will do our best to do so. But after that, we're not at war, so we don't have the right to confiscate it.'

Piotr was sitting at the desk with only his chin on the tabletop. He stared blankly from this uncomfortable position at a small vial containing a grey, dense, mercury-like liquid. The others stood or sat in the interrogation room to keep the biggest possible distance from each other, minimizing the risk of talking to each other. They all were at different stages of grieving and tried to avoid showing it. Ben, for example, was furious, nearly blowing up. Sorrow shrouded Frank. Jenny was both sorrowful and angry. Sam appeared to be shellshocked and couldn't even hide it that well. He just sat in the corner, constantly banging the back of his head on the wall and borderline wheezing.

And Amy... Well, Amy was just nervous and pacing around, knowing that one word from her and everything could fall apart. She knew damn well she wouldn't say anything wrong, but she needed extraordinary strength to force herself to shut up. Seeing the others in this state, the temptation was just too big.

Piotr, on the other hand, decided the period of silence lasted long enough.

'Why did they leave the nanites here?' he asked casually.

'Probably, they have presentation purposes with it during the further interrogation,' Frank replied faintly.

'Who cares?!' Jenny snapped at them all of a sudden. 'Gladys is dead! It's totally irrelevant who left what and why!'

'Yeah. You're right,' Frank sighed. 'It doesn't matter.'

Frank's tone suggested he had no intention to continue the debate, but the tap opened for Jenny. She intended to pour out everything.

'This can't end like this! Gladys dies, and we go to prison. No! I won't accept! There must be something we can do!'

Her voice was filled with rage but also trembling with grief. Ben looked at her, and the realization struck him. Jenny had never suffered the loss of anyone. He knew he couldn't tell anything comforting, but something must be said.

'I'm sorry, Jenny. We can't. Humans don't come back from the dead.'

'We are time travellers, for heaven's sake. We can go back and use Sam's program in time. I could manage a few hours jump.'

'That would lead to a paradox. If you went to the past to save Gladys, you wouldn't have a reason in the present to go back. There's no way to predict the consequences of such a contradiction.'

'Plus, it's impossible to take Sam's program back.' Dala Marin stood in the doorway. 'You can't just pick scripts and put them into the old system. You have to edit the mainframe directly. I'm truly sorry, but there is no way to save her.'

Then Sam's head finally stopped, and he stood up. He took a few steps towards Dala and stared at her for a few seconds. When everyone got puzzled about what the hell was he up to, with a sudden move, he grabbed the vial of the nanites and rushed out from the room, pushing Dala out of the way. She got so surprised that Ben had to give a reminder of her duties.

'Now, comes the part you yell, "*After him!*"', before he does anything stupid.'

'Yeah, right,' she said, looking rather dizzy. 'Come with me! You're his superior, after all.'

'And I have a pretty good idea where he might be going. You stay here,' he told the others and followed Dala.

They reached the Hammerhead Shark with a smaller platoon of (not Judoon) troops. Entering the cargo hold, Ben grabbed the Cellar-key from his pocket and inserted it into the trapdoor keyhole.

'Great, we aren't late.' He jerked the door open and ran down the stairs. 'Sam! Wait! Whatever you pla... Sam? Where are you?'

No reply. The control room was empty.

'Where could he be if not here?'

'Well, here is a rather big with literary infi...'

'Right, we should split up and...'

'Bad idea. Even we get lost sometimes in these corridors. He could also be in the city. Your men should search up there, and the two of us down here together. If we find him, we could easily take him down if needed.'

'Okay, where should we start?'

'The obvious.'

As expected, they found Sam in his room. He defended himself immediately as he sensed the door opening.

'Get out!' he yelled at them. 'Just leave me alone for a few more hours! Then you can throw me into a prison cell and let me rot there for the rest of my life.'

'Sam, whatever you're up to, please don't! You have to accept it. There's nothing you can do to save her.'

'I KNOW!' Sam shouted. 'And it is ALL... MY... FAULT!'

'No, it's not. You couldn't build the software any quicker. You simply didn't have time.'

'I KNOW. But I could have warned myself. Why didn't I warn myself?'

Ben couldn't know what was that supposed to mean, so he assumed Sam was losing it. Whatever happened, he certainly hadn't seen his crewmate at the edge of crying before.

'I don't know. But now you must come back with us.'

'NO! I can't live with this feeling anymore. And I won't! So, leave me alone!'

Sam picked up his chair and tossed it at the intruders. Ben and Dala were forced to step back out to the corridor. That short time was enough for Sam to close and lock the door.

'Sam! Open it, Sam!!' Ben banged on the door.

'What do you think he will do?' asked Dala.

'No clue. Right now, he is as unpredictable as he can be.'

'So..., erm... You don't think he would kill himself?'

'I really don't know. He has the nanites that killed Gladys in a few hours, he has the means to turn them on, and he asked for a few hours. If we add him being a poetical idiot, I wouldn't rule suicide out.' Then, Ben turned again to Dala. 'Can we somehow track what's he doing with those critters?'

'Yes. We can even turn them off.'

'Great! As a sign of trust, I'm giving you the Cellar-key. In return, me and all my crew, we surrender. Like he said. Shove us to prison, but don't let him commit suicide! If he ever comes out, you can arrest him and bring him to us into jail. Agreed?'

'Agreed.'

All happened, as Ben asked. The rest of the crew was locked up in the vaults of the asteroid, and no one bothered with them. They were left without any news for hours. Only their meal materialized in front of them at one point.

Eventually, the time arrived again when Piotr got bored of the silence.

'At least, there are proper prison cells here as opposed to Starship Ireland,' the Armenian noted, leaning against the forcefield separating them from the world. 'We even got a pretty decent bathroom.'

The years as a soldier taught Piotr how to replace the sorrow over losing a comrade with a less painful apathy. But that enraged Jenny even further as if she was envious of the losses he suffered.

'Who gives a shit about the cells!' she yelled at Piotr.

In her helpless rage, she nearly attacked the Armenian. Frank had to jump between them to avoid a brawl.

'Guys, stop. Sam's back.'

On the far end of the corridor, their crewmate appeared escorted by two guards and Dala Marin. His appearance didn't suggest what happened to him. It suggested nothing at all. He seemed a lot calmer, though. When he was led into the cell, he just nodded hi to his friends and sat down on a seat in the corner. The others waited for him to tell them what he was up to, but the blank face didn't show any willingness to share any news.

'What is it, Sam?' Frank asked carefully, 'What did you do?'

'I've managed to overcome my grief.'

Clearly. There was no grief in his voice. There was no tone at all in a very creepy and disturbing way. Dala invited Ben outside. The captain gladly followed, hoping to get some answers.

'What did you do to him?'

'Nothing. He's done this to himself. He said he couldn't live with the bad feelings, so used the nanites he got rid of them.'

'What? How the hell did he do that? He doesn't know a thing about how emotions work.'

'He didn't need to. He ordered the nanites to ease the communications on the most active parts of his brain. Not eliminate it, only reduce the intensity of electric impulses between the synapses. He did nothing irreversible. Due to his lack of knowledge about the brain, he couldn't finetune it to target the emotional part of his mind, so there could be side effects, like slight trouble with speaking, coordination, and problem resolution. But so far, he seems fine and not a vegetable.'

'Only emotionally. How come Sam didn't get the fever?'

'The nanites are highly adaptive. They learned how to hide from the human immune system while they were inside Gladys.'

'You're telling me that if those things learn faster, it could have saved Gladys?!' Ben raised his voice.

'No. If they learned faster, they would have shut her brain down before the fever, and you couldn't even see it coming. I'm sorry, captain, but once she touched the nanites, there wasn't enough time to save her.'

Ben squeezed his eyelids tight for a moment and focused on not blowing up to this bitter reminder. He needed to turn his attention towards the things that still could be helped.

'So what can we do with Sam?'

'On a short term, nothing. The first thing he did was to password-protect his nanites. If he won't give it up, we could only hack it, but given that he seems fine at the moment, that won't be our top priority task.'

'I see. So what happens next?'

'For a few days, you'll definitely stay here. Then, once the severity of your punishment and how much time you need to serve is determined, you will be transported to our prison facility.'

'Great,' said Ben, trying to hide that after all that happened, in his mind, the next step would be snapping the Lieutenant's neck.

The crew finally had something that could divert their attention from their loss. Just looking at Sam felt wrong. He didn't do anything, only sitting and staring ahead. He wasn't entirely catatonic. He reacted when spoken to, but he didn't engage in conversation. Why would he? What's the motivation to do anything if one feels nothing? There's no point in sharing a funny story to make one's friends laugh; no point in joining a party to momentarily let all worries go; no point in finding words of solace to ease the pain of one's companions.

Sam became a mere machine powered by biological functions instead of mechanical ones. He was only driven by the most basic principles, like the survival instinct. So, when his system sensed hunger, he ate; when sensing fatigue, he slept; when his blood flow needed a refresh, he stood up to walk a few circles in the cell. Seeing him like this made the others feel that they lost even two people to a supposedly simple library heist.

At least, it would seem, but that was only the surface. Even an emotionally wrecked mind would realize that the bond of friendship and love is worth living for, and that made all the difference. The willingness to live increases the chances of survival significantly. So, deep down in Sam's mind, the clockwork was still ticking to devise a plan to keep such a bond alive and set off an alarm to wake Jenny up at dawn.

'Jenny,' Sam shook the girl gently.

'What?' she asked painfully.

'Can you really do a few hours jump confidently?' he asked with his weird blank tone.

'Yes, now let me sleep,' she grunted and turned away from Sam to the wall.

'How about a day?'

Jenny turned back and looked at her crewmate with a sorrowful frown.

'Sam, please don't do this to me.'

'Do what?'

'Giving me false hope. I barely slept because it took most of the night to convince myself of the inevitable. We can't even use time travel to save her.'

'We can if we do it properly.'

'We already thought of everything.'

'We missed one property of how time passes. But it seems I won't be able to convince you in my current state.'

'No! It's creepy. So, let me sleep!'

'I'll let you sleep if you are certain you can make a jump bit further than a day.'

'I can. Now, will you leave me alone?'

'Yes.'

Sam didn't feel the necessity to explain the details. With that jump, they would have enough time to wait until morning. Then he could resurrect his more convincing self, and all hell could break loose.

Chapter 6 – Twins

'Do you think he gave the correct password to the Lieutenant?' Frank asked Ben over the last crumbs of his breakfast.

'I don't know,' the captain replied. 'He didn't seem too determined, but he didn't really seem anything lately.'

He stood up, put his empty food tray into the garbage incinerator and rejoined the others, staring at Sam, waiting for a change. When finally, his eyes seemed to get slightly wider, Dala rushed into their cellblock.

'Is it working?'

'It's hard to tell at this point.'

In a second, it was obvious. Sam grabbed his head and screamed in pain. First, every single muscle in his body was shaking as the chemical reactions induced by all the subdued emotions finally could kick in and rage through his system. When the tremble eased, he fell onto a bed, still shivering and gasping for air but already trying to speak:

'Oh-my-god..., oh-my-god..., oh-my-god..., what-a..., fearsome..., nightmare..., emotional..., pitch-black..., scared..., but-can't-feel..., scared..., ..., never..., ..., never..., ..., ag...ain.'

In the end, his breathing regulated, his speech slowed down, and he passed out. For a while, only his silent snuffing could be heard. Amy hadn't spoken a word since Gladys died, but now she couldn't remain silent.

'Ooookay! What the actual f...'

She couldn't finish. All of a sudden, Sam's eyes popped open, and he jumped to his feet.

'I CAN SAVE HER!' he shouted.

Based on the tremors still controlling his every move and the maniac grin on his face, he must have been dosed with an adrenalin-endorphin cocktail enough for an elephant.

'What?' Ben asked, grasping for one last hope. 'I thought we crossed out every option.'

With the explanation, Sam appeared to break every speed record of human speech.

'We have never taken a basic element of our travels into consideration. We can go back in time, take Gladys out for a spin, go back and turn off her nanites, give her a strong sedative to fool ourselves into believing she died and return to our present state. It's that easy.'

'Except, by the time you get her back, it will be too late.'

'No, it won't. We can beat the clock.'

'This time, you can't!' Dala said.

'Just give me a chance, and I can save Gladys with the speed of light,' Sam turned to her. 'If you don't trust me, come with me... With us. Jenny also has to come.'

'And me,' Amy raised her hand for a split second, then quickly bit it to shut herself up.

Frank put his hand on Sam's shoulder as a comfort and an attempt to calm him down.

'Sam, you have to face it. You just can't possibly be fast enough for this.'

'Well, not me, obviously, but the Hammerhead-Shark is.'

And that's when Dala finally understood what Sam really was talking about.

'Oh, my goodness! You're not talking about programming faster. You're actually talking about flying at lightspeed.'

'Yes, what else would I be talking about?'

'Oh, that's genius! That could actually work. I'll go and try to make it happen.'

She ran off, and Sam turned back to the rest of the crew with an almost evil grin.

'It's amazing how tragedy-induced compassion can make people change sides.'

'True, but how do you plan this rescue mission?' Ben inquired.

'We use the twin paradox!' And that was the moment when Piotr understood it.

'No! We can't be that stupid, we haven't thought of that.'

'What's this twin paradox?' Amy asked with a rather worried voice.

'Uncle Einstein worked out in relation to special relativity that if you move faster, time passes slower for you.'

'Isn't that with black holes? The closer you are, the slower time passes,' asked Frank.

'With every object which has a mass, actually, and the rule also applies to every object that moves. Except, the time dilatation is truly remarkable with black holes and lightspeed. So, when we go back, we take Gladys out with the Shark and accelerate to a velocity close to lightspeed. A five-minute round-trip should be enough for past-me to develop the software. After that, preventing the paradox is only the matter of administering a faking-death-drug and falsifying a few documents.'

Ben leant back on his bench with an appreciative smile.

'Excellent! Now, we only need to get out of here to actually do this.' Then, his face distorted. 'Hang on! When you were in agony of grief, you could shut your emotions down, but you couldn't figure out this?'

'What can I say? Desperate mind comes up with desperate measures.'

Quite soon, Dala returned, smiling.

'We've got a green light.'

Sam, Jenny, and Amy entered the cargo hold of the Hammerhead Shark, followed by Dala and a bunch of troops.

'Lieutenant, may I have the key, please.' Sam asked politely and instantly received the TARDIS key.

Sam opened the door, stashed the key in his pocket, let Amy and Jenny ahead, and as he followed them, he shut the door in front of the escort.

'Uh-oh!' Dala gulped. 'I can't believe I just let that happen.'

'What are you doing?' Amy asked, surprised.

'You didn't think I would bring the fuzz as well. After this rescue mission, we also need to stage a prison break.'

'Oh, yes! I forgot about that.'

'It's okay. But why exactly did you insist on coming? Jenny and I could handle it.'

'Erm....' Amy became uneasy again, 'I need to meet someone.'

'Right. I'm resisting the temptation to ask who because I have a strong suspicion. So, Jenny, are we good to go?'

'Almost!' she said, looking at a screen and pushing buttons. 'Amy, where have you put it?'

'I'll show you,' she said and joined Jenny at the console. After entering the correct data, she said, 'There it is.'

Now, Sam was curious too. He went to check the screen, and what he saw made him feel impressed.

'Nice! When did you do that?'

'Creativity can burst out of anyone in no man's land. So, I asked Jenny's help and created this.'

'Great! Now that we are saving someone, we might as well do it in style.' Then his face suddenly changed to desperate. 'Or, are we?'

'What do you mean?'

'For saving Gladys, we need lightspeed; for lightspeed, we need the Shark. We need it out of the hangar. How the hell will we get it out of here unnoticed?'

'Surely the TARDIS can fly at light speed,' Amy suggested.

'I wouldn't be so sure. Yes, she can get to the other side of the universe in ten minutes, but her primary function is not flying in normal space.'

When Sam was about to call off the whole thing, Jenny seemed to come up with something as she stared at the monitor.

'I think I have a workaround for that.'

Approximately one day earlier, not known to its occupants, something appeared out of thin air in the cargo bay of the Hammerhead Shark with a loud noise. Something that hasn't been there for weeks but was very much anticipated. In the moment of need, the big blue police box appeared inside their ship. Except, this wasn't the box they waited for, but, at that time, it was just fine.

When it fully materialised, Amy, Jenny, and Sam strode out from the TARDIS. They turned back to take a minute to admire their work on the chameleon circuit.

'Impressive, ladies! Really impressive,' Sam said, proudly. 'Now, let's go and save Gladys. What's the time?'

'I don't know,' Jenny replied. 'I could translate the coordinates only to Hal's date.'

'Wait a sec! I can check the time in the Cellar,' Amy offered and went down the trapdoor.

It didn't take much time, and she was already coming back in a rush.

'We need to hurry,' she said, nervously. 'Soon, the doctors come to take her.'

'That's our intervention point. We might as well run if we want to get Gladys before them. We also need to pop into the hospital's laundry to get our costumes.'

'Let's go then.'

A few hundred meters away, in the hospital, Piotr and Amy were discussing the past when a doctor and a nurse ran into Gladys's ward. They grabbed the bed and hurried out with her.

'Hey! Where are you taking her?' Piotr ran after them.

'She's dying! Right now,' the doctor replied, running. 'She needs surgery immediately.'

'Right then. Hurry up! Is there anything we can do?'

'Don't keep us up!'

Piotr stopped running with them, and they kept going on with Gladys. When the Armenian fell behind, the nurse yelled at the doctor.

'Sam, are you nuts? She has a fever! What would you operate on her?!'

'I can't think of everything! Just run!'

Piotr strolled back to Amy and continued their conversation like nothing had happened. Soon, the troubling situation increased his cravings, so he went to satisfy his addiction.

Amy stayed in front of the ward. She slowly descended into a chair with a sigh and tiredly buried her face into her palms but had to look up, hearing a meaningful cough. She gaped in her surprise.

'Hi!' the way too familiar stranger greeted her with a smirk.

'Hi! It's you! Again!' The recognition made her very, very confused. 'Hold on. I know we've met face to face before, but I can't remember it. How can this be?'

'I still don't know,' answered Amy (who came back with Jenny and Sam). 'I'm not that far from your future.'

'When, then?'

'Tomorrow morning, and there are a few important things I need to tell you. First of all, from your point of view, Gladys will die, but Sam came up with a plan to save her.'

'Will it succeed?'

'We have every reason to believe it will, and I know it's gonna be hard – the memory is still fresh – but you must keep it a secret.'

'Then why come back? If I can't even tell that little I learned, what's the point of coming back? I would find out everything anyway in due time!'

'I don't know. I just followed your instructions.' The confusion in her twin's eyes made her rephrase. 'Followed my instructions when I was you. The point is we both know well we don't mess with the continuity when the Doctor's not around.' The two Amys said the last part in unison.

'OK, then. I'll try to do as I'm told and hold my mouth.'

'Then, I've got to go help Sam and Jenny to break the others out of prison.'

Past-Amy's eyed widened and cried, 'What?', but the other one ran away already.

Chapter 7 – Prison break

In a few minutes, they were aboard the fly-looking Cellar, floating in space not far from the Shadow Proclamation's station. Camouflaged as an insect, they could easily sneak out from the hangar bay with the regular traffic. Now came the hard part.

'Okay, how do you plan to accelerate to lightspeed?' Sam asked Jenny.

'With the Shark's chute, of course.'

'The Shark? Which we left in the hangar to avoid attention?'

'Speaking of attention.' Jenny quickly pressed a few buttons. 'We need to activate the cloak the Doctor sent us. Then, we simply use the chameleon circuit. It can mimic anything. Surely, it won't have any problems replicating the ship it occupied for decades.'

Amy was really delighted with the idea, but Sam just slapped his forehead with a grimace.

'Jenny, you're a genius!' Amy said cheerfully.

'It's kind of obvious if you think of it,' Jenny replied modestly. 'What's wrong, Sam? Have I forgotten about something?'

'No, no. It's perfect. I just keep cutting myself with Occam's razor. Let's go and copy the Shark.'

It worked perfectly. The chameleon circuit turned the Cellar's trapdoor into the entire Shark, replicating its home ship up to the last screw. This whole contraption could be sent down the space-time-chute to speed it up to lightspeed in only a minute. Amy even noted this while adjusting the cooling blankets on Gladys.

'Do we even need the Shark after this? We can make one just as easily if we need a fast ship. Oh, did I say something wrong?' She had to ask because fear sparked in the others' eyes.

'No, not for us,' Sam answered, 'but you probably want to keep these ideas for yourself near Ben unless you want to be the first to walk the plank.'

'I see. I won't bring that up then anymore,' she said with a badly pretended ease. 'Do you think we have flown long enough?'

'We spent 5 minutes at 99.98% of the speed of light. Should be enough. How is she?'

'Her fever still goes up slowly, but the med-scan says she's stable for now.'

'Good. Let's take her back.'

When the TARDIS arrived and turned back into a wooden box, Sam popped down to the Cellar to quickly check the reference clock.

'Damn! Nearly five hours passed in the few minutes we were away. Speaking of it is one thing, but actually living it, brrr,' he shivered, 'it's kind of weird.'

'Yes, it is, but are we good in time?' Amy tried to force the matter they actually came for.

'Yes. The shutdown program is ready now. Go get the fake-death-drug while I deal with the nanites.'

It didn't take an hour, and Gladys's fever dropped. She even woke up from the coma just to be put back again. But, at least, the rescue team had full control over the second sleep. Then, her "*doctors*" took her to the morgue and told the bad news to the devastated crew. After that point, they only needed to wait for the present to catch up with them and smuggle Gladys off the slab before the whole station went red alert.

'Good morning, sleepy head,' Sam greeted her in the Cellar's infirmary when she finally opened her eyes.

'Hi! What happened? Where am I?' she asked weakly, then, as she came around, changed to a stricter tone, 'And since when do you use phrases like sleepy head?'

'Well, the thing is, you died. But don't worry, we went back in time and changed it. We couldn't change the fact though that you were very ill. A very high fever knocked you out pretty badly. So, you better rest now while we break the others out of jail.'

Gladys didn't reply, just stared at Sam, shocked. With the lack of response, Sam felt he should say something.

'Do you want a sedative, or will you try to sleep on your own?'

'Sedative, please!' Gladys exhaled.

Sam gave her the medicine and left her alone. In the infirmary doorway, Amy waited for him with some criticism.

'Your bedside manner really needs improving.'

'Why? What did I do wrong?'

'You told her to rest then shocked her with the happenings around her.'

'Should I have just lied?'

'Yes. Rule number one, the Doctor lies. Because it works.'

'I really would like to know if you agree with that rule when he lies to you.'

For a few seconds, Amy faced Sam trying to form a good argument with her mouth, but in the end, she just said:

'Let's go, rescue the others.'

Only one problem remained, the seemingly impenetrable jail cell. Aboard the space station, the spiders and insects arriving with the incoming ships could dwell and weave their cobwebs in many-many tiny holes. From one of these spots, the view to the Shark-crew's cell was quite splendid. But even the tiniest insect couldn't penetrate the forcefield protecting their habitat.

'Are you sure we can't materialize within the cell?' Amy asked.

'I'm sure that's what the Doctor would do, but we can't finetune the coordinates that precisely. Not even close,' Sam said, scratching his chin and looking at the cell on the screens, 'I've got nothing for now. I go and grab a bite. Maybe, a good meal jumpstarts my brain.'

As soon as he left the console room, Amy exclaimed.

'The food!'

'Sorry, what?' Jenny picked her head up.

'Where does the food come from? It just appears out of nowhere as if it was teleported into the cell.'

'You're right! That could be a way in. With the dinner.'

'Great, let's find the kitchen then.'

Sam was already in the kitchen. The Cellar's larder, to be precise. He was eating a sandwich when the whole structure shook.

'Wha' 'e he'?' he grumbled with his mouth full.

He left everything and went to the console room to see what the girls were up to.

'What are you up to?'

'We are going to the station's kitchen and teleport in with the food,' Jenny said while focusing on driving a spider.

'Yeah, that crossed my mind, but how do you get out? The food eventually ends up in the incinerator.'

'Not all of it. A significant part of it gets processed the usual way, then recycled.'

'What?' Sam was rather confused at first, but understood soon enough. 'Oh. So, to get our freedom, we need to sacrifice some dignity.'

'Trust me. It won't leave deep scars,' said Amy as a comfort.

When the food showed up at lunchtime, Ben, Piotr and Frank picked up their plates from the tray and sat at the dining table.

'Shouldn't the others have returned already?' Ben grumbled. 'It's been over half a day since they left. With the TARDIS, they should be here already, and Gladys be alive and well.'

'Just be patient,' Frank tried to calm him. 'You heard Dala. The whole place is looking for them. I reckon it's not so easy to get here unnoticed even with a camouflaged TARDIS when everyone is on full alert.'

'Guess you're right,' Ben sighed and picked up the empty tray to trash it, but something strange stopped him. 'Although, apparently, it's not impossible.'

The instructions that appeared on the tray were straightforward: *"Take this to the loo."* He did so and placed it on the floor.

'Now what?' he wondered. Making sure he was mostly safe from the security cameras, he called back. 'Guys! Come here! What do you make of this?' he pointed at the tray with the message when Piotr and Frank arrived.

'Well, if I assume correctly...' Frank began, but he couldn't finish.

The tray vanished, and almost instantly, a small police box appeared, filling the small space in the toilet booth.

'...that's the TARDIS.'

'You mean the Cellar,' Piotr corrected.

'Yes, I mean that, but in this police box form, I'm more willing to call it what it is.'

'Please shut up, that's not helping,' noted Ben, disturbed, seeing the wooden structure. 'This chameleon circuit is freaking me out more and more.'

As the cherry on top, the doors opened, and Sam's head popped out.

'And we're not even close to maxing out its potential. Now, crouch and get in.'

'You seem happy,' Ben stated when they climbed through the mini door. 'Does this mean...'

'Gladys is fine and sleeping in the infirmary. You can visit her if you like while Jenny and I climb the Cellar to the Shark.'

'Yeah, about that! How do you plan to get out?'

'We turn into our primary sneaking insect and flush ourselves down the toilet.'

'Oh!' That was all Ben could react.

The journey through the sewers wasn't easy. Miles of tunnels, vision blocked by all kinds of waste products. But Jenny and Sam could steer the Cellar to the recycling plant where the precious water was

distilled from the garbage. Getting there provided more than enough time for the rest of the crew to visit Gladys. From there, it was easy to find their way to the upper levels of the complex.

That also was more than enough time for the now furious Dala to fortify the docks. A whole regiment of Judoon and other humanoid troops and automated sentry turrets were defending the Hammerhead Shark. Even an energy shield covered the ship to make sure no one boarded it.

'Have you increased the sensitivity of the turrets?' she asked a soldier as a final check.

'Yes, ma'am. An insect couldn't get through.'

'Good. They could turn into an insect.'

'We can also travel in time!' the sound came from behind. She and some of her men turned towards its source. It was Ben standing at the gate of the Shark.

'How the hell did you get there?' she shouted. 'The whole station is on full alert since you double-crossed me!'

'Please, skip the false accusations. Sam double-crossed you. I had nothing to do with that. About me getting here, I don't even know what's this fuss about. We have a TARDIS. The moment you let Sam shut you out, you lost any chance to catch us. Sam and the girls went back in time to save Gladys. When they succeeded, they broke us out of prison. Then we all went back to a time when there was no riot. I've got to admit it was a bit funny to see how you built the defence of this place, which turned out to be a farewell committee.'

'No, Captain. We will get inside arrest you all, and you will never set foot on your ship again.'

'No, Lieutenant! You still don't get it. You still don't see there's no winning against a TARDIS, even if it is a young one like ours. I just came to say thank you for supplying us with the maps for her and letting us save Gladys. Altogether, this trip was really educational. So, thank you and goodbye.'

'You're welcome,' Dala gritted. 'And how do you plan to escape now that the whole dock is on lockdown?'

'We don't need to leave the dock. Now, the TARDIS connected to the Shark, and she became the Cellar again. We leave in twenty seconds.'

Ben hit the door close button, and the cargo hold gate started to ascend. Five seconds went for the idle shock of the Lieutenant, and then she desperately commanded to open fire. It was another ten to realize the forcefield her soldiers set up was now, in fact, protecting their enemy. It took two to power it down. The last three seconds were a slight miscalculation on Ben's part because the shield didn't vanish completely when the Hammerhead Shark started to fade into the time vortex. The time after that was required for Dala to prepare for the most severe punishment of her life.

Chapter 8 - On the road... again

Finally, all was well again. Gladys recovered from the almost fatal fever rather quickly; the Cellar jumped far in space and time away from the fuzz, and now the crew finally had maps to help them develop some navigation skills. Yet, Amy felt off. Something was still wrong.

She was sitting alone in the Green Roof over a glass of wine and tried very hard to recall a memory, but the picture refused to get clearer. She was in the TARDIS. Wait, no! She was leaning against the TARDIS. Twice! Yes, that was very clear. Leaning against the TARDIS and staring into her own eyes. And the Doctor was there, doing something at the console. For a very short time, he was doubled, too. But there was something else. Something important, something...

'Amy?'

She shivered as she got dragged out of her contemplation.

'Oh! Gladys! Hi!' She looked up.

'Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you.'

'You didn't. Nice to see you all better! Fancy a glass of..., well, this thing?'

'No, I'm good, thanks! I rather wanted to ask something from you.'

'Sure! What can I do?'

'I heard the crew was pretty low, when you thought..., well..., she just couldn't say dead. 'Especially, Sam.'

'Oh, yeah. He went through hell.'

'I guess he felt too much guilt again, thinking he was somehow responsible.'

'The way I saw it, this was more than that. There was something between you two, wasn't it?'

A painful smile flashed briefly on Gladys's face.

'He did have feelings for me. It wasn't mutual. But it is over for him as well for years.'

'I'm not so sure about that. He shut down his emotions to avoid the pain of losing you.'

'Trust me, he didn't. I know how his behaviour changed since then. He shut down his emotions to avoid guilt. And that's frightening me.'

'Why?' Amy asked confused.

'He was ready to bend the laws of time to save me, yet, he doesn't even love me anymore. I'm scared to think how far he would go for you. So, I need you to be very careful and take good care of yourself. If you don't, the consequences could be dire.'

The confusion was erased from Amy's face to give place to a frown. She realized she didn't really like what Gladys was implying.

'Right,' she said just to say something instead of suddenly leaving. 'Well, thank you for the chat, but I need to attend to... some... things. So, bye!'

With that, she was already out of the pub. She didn't get far on the corridor as someone was calling her name from behind.

'Frank! Hi!' she turned around.

'Hi! I just talked to Sam and need to ask you about...'

'There's nothing between us!' Amy defended automatically, passing the confusion-ball to Frank.

'...about your time travel... I've never thought there is something between you.'

'Good, if you don't see it, Gladys is probably hallucinating. What did you want to ask?'

Frank was blinking rapidly for the time he needed to realize he should ignore whatever Amy was talking about.

'So, Sam told me you volunteered to go back with him and Jenny only to meet yourself.'

'Yes. Why?'

'That is my question. Why?'

'My future self told me to go back. And who am I to contradict myself?' she said with a nervous smile.

'That still doesn't add up. You go back to tell yourself to go back, while you went back in the first place because you were told to.'

Now, Amy understood what Frank was trying to say and became very confused herself. 'I've got to admit that doesn't make much sense. Would this be that written by Time stuff?'

'Sounds much like it, and I'm afraid I know what this means. Sam thought Gladys could be saved by creating a loop, but he didn't create the loop. As soon as you met your future self, the loop was there.'

'So, it is the written by Time stuff.'

'Not quite. Last time, by chance, it all fell into place like pieces of a puzzle, forming the loop. As if we were caught up in a temporal maelstrom, a force of nature. But now, with you going back just for such a small thing, it seems like someone planned this. Like we were tested, if we could discover the possibility of the loop and your involvement was there as a failsafe, in case we couldn't.'

'But who and why would someone do this to you? To us?'

'I don't know. But if this was indeed a test, and we passed, I bet we will find it out very soon.'

A few thousand parsecs to the west and about 500 years earlier, Lieutenant Marin and Captain Roos were told off by the director of the Shadow Proclamation.

'Idiots!' he shouted. 'Useless fools! Since I'm in this office, I have never seen such incompetence.'

'Director, if I may...' Dala tried to defend herself.

'Shut it, Lieutenant! You may not. There's nothing to discuss here. You let your personal feelings for this gang cloud your judgement and allowed that psychopath to trick you. If you were so moved by their grief, you could have helped them with their time-travelling venture after they served their minor sentence for a minor crime.'

Dala gave up making excuses.

'I admit I made a mistake and am ready to face the consequences.'

'You bet you will. Six months of service in a detention colony will give you enough time to think about your mistakes. Dismiss!'

Dala and her supervisor were about to leave the room, but the director wanted to discuss more classified topics.

'Not you, Captain.'

Roos let the lieutenant out and turned back to his boss.

'So, what do you think of this incident?' asked the director. 'Do you believe it was an effective learning experience?'

'Yes, I do, actually. She definitely won't let compassion affect her decisions about prisoners. As for Torchwood, they managed to steal classified data, mastered the usage of the chameleon circuit, and could live with its benefits. They even made it through the loop. So, yes, they are nearly ready.'

'So they can go home soon.'

'Sooner than they'd think, but not to their proper time. I tried to avoid their involvement in humanity's history, but the results of the Scrolls are clear. The team will reach Earth very soon. Soon for them, at least, but it already happened nearly two thousand years ago. Even the Proclamation was involved.'

'Is that so?'

'Yes. During your training years, you might have read the report of the incident on the north pole of Earth.'

'That was them?' the director asked surprised.

'It wasn't their fault, though they were the root cause. But they ended up creating an entire mythology. And now, if you don't have any more questions...'

'Just one. Why be a captain? You could lead this whole place.'

'I get the influence I need as a captain. In any higher rank, I would get too much-unwanted attention.'

'Understood. As you see fit, Lord President.'