

Jeremy had hardly eaten any of the food on his plate. He'd had just enough to subdue the growling of his stomach, so far. He was more focused on the discussion going around the room. He had noticed the lemur dominants were doing much the same. None of them had intervened in the argument, for that's what it really was. He continued to stand on the opposite side of the buffet table from the three large lemurs and watch.

Jeremy's opinion of the otter diminished the longer he continued to argue. Harris kept switching his focus between eating and spurring the argument to further heights. He kept insisting that Humbolt was entitled to the find since it had originally been agreed they lead the operation. They'd also leased the mining rights for twenty years, and that alone should satisfy their legal hold on anything that came of their work. He was becoming quite belligerent in his singleminded stand.

Most of the lemurs around him rose to the bait and argued their point that the whole operation was on leased territory and didn't include such an extraordinary discovery. Jeremy had noticed two were leading their side of the argument. After a few minutes it was clear to Jeremy that Desiree and Jerrins were Harris' counterparts. They countered the otter's arguments with an array of reasonable alternatives yet the male opposing them refused compromise. While they weren't coming out and saying it in so many words they were clear that they were prepared to expel all of Humbolt from the country. The situation was close to spiraling out of control.

"What do you expect to gain from keeping that thing to yourself?" Jeremy asked the otter.

"What?" The male asked, clearly not expecting the question.

"I asked," Jeremy replied "what did you expect in keeping that thing to yourself?" His ire at the otter had reached his limit. He knew enough to refrain from calling someone to task in public, at least under normal conditions. "Do you have any idea what it is?"

"No. But neither do they." The otter insisted gesturing to his lemur adversaries with the half full plate in his hand. Finishing the gesture he looked down at an empty plate, it would have been amusing under any other circumstance.

"Exactly. So, here's my proposal." Jeremy said putting his plate down. Facing the three dominants he continued "That part of the mine where, that thing is located should be segregated. Normal operations can continue elsewhere. Whatever inspections or experiments should continue and access in and out can be arranged around the necessary production traffic."

Jeremy saw the prime minister smile and open her mouth to speak.

"But," Harris interrupted "I thought you were here to help our position."

"I'm here to find out why operations stopped, and if possible get everyone back to work." Jeremy replied looking at the otter.

"That's all well and good but I wasn't the one that shut things down." The otter asserted looking at the two lemurs he'd been arguing with.

"When you try to hide a finding of this magnitude, well can you really blame us for stepping in?" Jerrins asked.

"Wait, I wasn't aware-" Jeremy began.

"I'm not obligated to report anything to—" The otter spoke at the same time raising his voice to talk over Jeremy.

"Enough, its clear you made several lapses in judgement." Jeremy said cutting off the otter. Turning back to three dominant lemurs he continued "As I said,"

"I don't know that you even have the authority to make any proposals of this nature."

"I assure you I have every authority necessary."

Harris stared at Jeremy for several long seconds. It was clear he was doing his best to assert his authority as the head of the Madagascar division.

Jeremy smiled back. Without breaking eye contact with the aggressive otter he pulled his phone out of his pocket. Finally looking to forward an email he said "Since you forced this," Jeremy finished and looked back over at the otter "you do have your phone, yes?"

"Yes." Harris replied, curious and angry but also a little confused at the turn of events.

"Good." Jeremy answered hearing Harris' phone chime. Taking up his unfinished plate of food from where he'd left it Jeremy took a bite of food looking around the room. Everyone was watching him and the otter. He could sense the expectation in the room. The otter was looking around the room as well. Jeremy wondered if he was gaging his chances of successfully ignoring his phone.

"How," Harris began.

"How would I know your contact information?" Jeremy finished the otter's question. "All part of the assignment." He watched as Harris pulled his phone out and started reading what he'd been sent.

Turning back to the three dominants Jeremy said "As you can guess, thats a copy of the agreed on terms of my assignment giving me authority equal to Mitchell Boagard, Humbolt's CEO. So, yes, I can make a proposal of any nature I deem proper. In this case it seems to me not only fair to all parties but essential in ensuring there's a reasonable effort to discover just what that thing is."

The Prime Minister smiled while her tail swung in a short arc behind her. "That sounds agreeably sane to me." She stared pointedly at the two lemurs who had been arguing with Harris.

"Yes, perhaps we can discuss the details on the way?" The male dominant suggested. Smiling to Jeremy he said "You see, I haven't had the opportunity to see what we're talking about for myself as of yet. Considering my schedule, this may be my only opportunity to do so."

Jeremy smiled. He was interested in seeing it again even though it had only been little over an hour. It had a fascination for him, it almost drew his mind back to it. It was likely going to be an even tougher puzzle than PATOMES. "I have to admit, I would like to be the one to watch your reaction this time." he said looking at Kass.

She chuckled and smiled back. The humor in the room lifted at the interaction. Looking to her dominants she asked "Should I call back the rover?"

"Perhaps it would be best if you could arrange a second rover as well." The Prime Minister added. "If I recall their size properly, there wouldn't be enough room for all of us."

Her statement seemed to be the signal to pause the conversation. In looking around the room Jeremy could see every lemur showed tail-signs of either excitement or anticipation. Chewing on another

bite from his plate he watched Harris. The otter had put his phone away and was staring at the floor. Several of the lemurs had joined in on nibbling on the food. With everyone now milling about Jeremy saw his chance but was forced to wait.

He heard the sound of the rovers as they pulled up in front of the building. Jeremy made an effort to let the lemurs file out first but they in turn insisted he and Harris go first. He complied with a smile and slight bow. He could only hope the otter had learned enough to show a similar respect but his recent actions cased a good deal of doubt.

Several minutes were spent with seating arrangements. Harris decided to forego the trip and stood a few paces from the rovers. Jeremy was pleased that the Prime Minister insisted Jeremy take his place on the section directly in front of her. Soon enough they were heading back toward the mine entrance. Jeremy kept his head up as long as possible. As if taking a silent cue all four dominants ducked down as they entered.

At the sound of a chuckle Jeremy looked up and met the gaze of Kass looking back from the front seat. He smiled back up at the lemur. He was beginning to like the female's friendly and easily amused attitude, even if it was occasionally at his expense. The inability of raising his head due to the low ceiling forestalled any chance of a conversation with the powerful dominant situated right behind him. Jeremy was forced to endure another trip into the deep earth in relative isolation.

Once they'd arrived everyone was busied with pulling themselves from the rovers. Jeremy followed along as Kass and Monica again took to leading the party toward the barrier. Monica sped up to reach the door first and opened it and stepped aside to allow everyone to enter the inner chamber. Jeremy dropped back and watched the reactions with Monica at his side.

Jeremy wondered if either of the two remaining dominants had made the trip before. All three lemur's tails dipped low, the male's even touched the floor a moment before lifting back up. It was a reaction that Jeremy had not seen from any lemur before. Even knowing what to expect Jeremy was awed again at the sight. Monica caught his attention by looking up at him and swishing her tail out behind her. Jeremy knew the tail gesture as one of humor.

"You should know Harris Locke doesn't even enter the mine." Monica said to him, her tone one of confidence.

"What? Why not?" Jeremy asked.

"He's claustrophobic." The lemur answered with a smirk.

Jeremy watched her walk over and join the group that had stepped up to the silvery surface. He followed her and again put his paw on the surface and again a shiver went through him. After a brief pause to let everyone take in the sight Kass began explaining a few of the things they'd discovered about the item. Jeremy listened attentively. He hadn't thought to ask during his previous trip into the deep. He hadn't asked because he would have had more time to look into whatever they'd learned than the ministers. He realized with chagrin that he still could have asked one or two questions.

They'd found no seams or marks on any of the exposed surface. The few tool marks to be seen were those that they had caused. He didn't understand much of the information relating to measurements from the surface. He was as shocked as the rest when she revealed what they thought it was made of. They had been able to establish that it was all made from an amalgamation of three different elements. Jeremy knew his jaw had dropped open when she'd given the atomic numbers.

"What? Wait, that has to be a mistake." Jeremy spoke into the pause Kass had provided.

"No, its been verified several times over." She asserted. Her eyes roamed over everyone a moment. "I'll explain the reason behind Mister Dawn's reaction for clarity."

"To start with, every element we know of has been assigned an atomic number. That assignation is due to how many protons and neutrons it holds in its nucleus. We thought we knew all the stable elements because we had learned that as the nucleus grows larger the less stable it becomes. The largest atomic nucleus we'd ever been able to observe before it decayed was given the atomic number of one twenty-one."

Feoma Arness said "And you said the numbers of this substance is one sixty, one sixty five and sixty six?"

"Yes." Kass replied. "It seems that things stabilize once again after a certain point. There's been speculation of the possibility of that happening for decades. This here," she paused looking up at the massive arc of wall above them all "proves that speculation correct."

"We haven't yet been able to remove enough of a sample to verify the properties of the alloy this is made of. So, beyond that, the real question is how such a pure sample of the three elements can form, and why is it here?"

Jeremy listened with one ear as she detailed the expected properties of the metal. He held his paw against the wall of metal amazed that he was in contact with something so rare to have been thought to be impossible. Dropping his arm to his side he turned to the lemurs.

"I know its a bit of a stretch this early, but I suggest opening this to the rest of the scientific community." Jeremy suggested. He could see by how his audience's tails moved the reaction was mixed.

Feoma Arness tail smiled and said "We've been slowly preparing for opening our boarders up for some time. This will certainly force the issue, and at the same time gently ease the populace into acknowledging the necessity."

Jeremy looked at each of the three dominants and the other lemurs. To his inexperienced eyes it looked as though everyone gathered around him were suddenly in agreement. He nodded to give himself time to pursue a thought that had come to him. He'd found himself in a complex knot of circumstance and yet at that moment he suspected this could be a vital moment.

Taking a deep breath and looking to the floor Jeremy exercised his dominant ability.

With his ability to give himself extra time to think everything through he ticked over every aspect of the situation. He'd already proposed a solution for most of the assignment for which he was in Madagascar. Having found himself standing at the site of what could be one of the most important finds in history he admitted his desire to stay involved. His love of puzzles called to him and this he had no doubt would be the puzzle of a lifetime. He also couldn't dismiss any influence Humbolt might have in what he was thinking of suggesting.

The three dominants with him were positively inclined to allowing visitors to the country more than they had in generations. They also had a need for respected scientists and experts in a wide variety of fields to help solve the mystery of the find. They could make selections by themselves, but Jeremy suspected they had little knowledge of just who outside Madagascar to contact first. It was an obvious opening and Feoma Arness had even stated they'd as much as checked on his trustworthiness.

Given that, Jeremy could assume with some confidence that they'd vetted not only him but the Bureau as well. To do that they would have had to have at least some outside contacts. Likely enough to satisfy their minds as to whether he and the Bureau could be trusted. It had also taken three days to do

so. That delay implied a limit to the number of contacts they felt reliable. Jeremy, and by extension the Bureau were now in a uniquely trusted position. It would be foolish not to capitalize on that opportunity.

The Bureau didn't have a lot of contacts in the fields necessary. He'd have to be honest and up front about that. However, Jeremy was already involved and could be considered part of the inner circle of those in the know. It would be an easier task for The Bureau to be Madagascar's representative and initiate the necessary discussions far easier. If they were the initial contact for the lemur government that would also allow them more time to acclimate their own population to the increase of visitors. They'd also proven themselves capable of maintaining their client's confidence to the satisfaction of the lemurs.

This was just the chance the Bureau were hoping for and it had been dropped in his lap. Jeremy felt he had to make the shot.

"I think," Jeremy said relaxing from the use of his ability. He looked back up to meet Feoma's eyes. "The Bureau might be able to help with that."

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And this will finish the year. Vacation and all, Jeremy will return on the third.