

Since Jeremy had been in the lead carrier he had climbed out and had cautiously intercepted Mitchell before he entered the trailer office. The otter still looked as upset as he had become at the revelation below. "Mister Boagard, this may not be the best time for this."

"No, this is a mistake that needs to be corrected publicly. Our partners need to be able to trust us." Mitchell replied.

"Perhaps, but he's not unsalvageable. He's been here how long? And if not for this little, unavoidable lack, would you be taking any action against him? After all, did you even have any idea he wasn't actually entering the mine?"

Jeremy could see his point had gotten across. The otter nodded before turning back toward the trailer. He took the steps and entered. Jeremy followed behind only a step behind the otter. Before he could close the door Clara and Jerry entered right behind him. Jeremy reluctantly stepped to the side letting the two lemur executives move around him. Gakota came in and stood next to Jeremy while several others entered through the still open door. While the rest of the party filed into the trailer Mitchell had gone over to where Harris leaned back in a chair. The smaller otter was somehow napping while leaning back against the wall in a folding chair.

Mitchell forcibly nudged one of the chair legs that were off the floor. Harris startled awake and barely managed to keep the chair from slipping out from under him. Planting his feet on the floor he stood with his customary gleaming toothy smile aimed up at his superior. "Mitchell, how did the exhibit go? I'm sure you can see, um, well. What is it?"

The male's pleasant attitude had withered under the glare of the dominant otter. Mitchell softly asked "Tell me, what was your impression on seeing it for yourself?"

Uncertainty had crept into the otters demeanor. "Well, theres no evidence that its a hoax." He observed patting his paws together in front of his ample belly.

"Hoax? The thought never even entered my mind. When was the last time you saw it for yourself?"

Harris opened his mouth to answer but paused with a quick eye movement to glance at Jeremy and those standing watching before closing his maw. With an accusatory expression he asked "What's he been saying about me?"

"Mister Dawn? Whats he got to do with your actions?"

"He's been trying to undermine my position since he got here." Harris asserted. His face had taken on a sly look that reminded Jeremy of his former brother.

"The question of the moment is your behavior. Tell me, when was the last time you entered Kealuroondea?" Mitchell asked.

Jeremy was a bit impressed that he'd managed to pronounce the name properly.

Harris sneered at Jeremy for a moment before answering. "Its not necessary for me to enter the mine I'm the manager here-"

"Stop. Its not only necessary but its essential that my managers prove to be capable of doing the work they are overseeing. Straight up, tell me now, are you claustrophobic?"

Harris' eyes darted around the room. Everyone was focused on the interaction between the large dominant and the pudgy otter. Jeremy felt a little sorry for the male. He looked trapped within his own collapsing subterfuge. Knowing his secret was out he looked to the floor and silently nodded.

"Consider yourself reassigned. Report back at headquarters as soon as possible." Mitchell ordered. His voice while almost emotionless nonetheless sounded compassionate.

Harris' eyes lifted up to meet those of his dominant for a moment. "I apologize for concealing my claustrophobia."

"I understand. It will be taken into consideration regarding your next assignment."

His face changed. With wide and hopeful eyes Harris managed to look up to the larger otter. "My next assignment?"

"You are a competent manager and an asset to the company. I'll expect you to be forthcoming in any other situation that may affect your ability to fulfill your duties."

"Understood Sir." The otter said and turned for the door.

Gakota spoke before Locke reached the door. "If I may make a suggestion."

Everyone stopped and looked to the ocelot.

Clearing his throat the cat continued. "I'd suggest leaving Mister Locke in his position until his replacement arrives. With everything that's going to be required of the on site team during the transition back to full production and whatever arrangements are to be made with the discovery, you'd really need someone that's already up to speed with the facility's operations and personnel."

Jeremy could see the otter was thinking it over. He added his input to Gakota's. "He's served well to this point. Despite his aversion to entering the mine he's worked hard and been a capable enough manager that none outside the facility had even a hint of his phobia." Jeremy paused and glanced to Gakota.

He could guess the feline was thinking the same as he was. Looking back to the otter Jeremy could see he was convinced. He was looking back to Jeremy with an expression that told he was close to seeing a favorable outcome for Harris.

"Also, we have a managerial training course ready to implement." Looking to Gakota and seeing the cat smile he continued "We've been looking for an opportunity for a beta run before finalizing the course structure. We'd be happy to include Mister Locke and any other managers in your organization in that trial run."

"Considering the mutual benefit to the both of us we'd even conduct the first course and wave our normal fee." Gakota added.

Mitchell was smiling back at Jeremy and Gakota. "You two don't miss a trick, do you?"

Gakota chuckled. "Nope."

Nodding his acceptance the otter looked to Locke. "Harris, since you made such a favorable impression I'll ask you to stay and help with the transition with your replacement."

"Yes, sir." He managed to reply though his voice was rough from emotion. He glanced to Jeremy and nodded his appreciation.

Jeremy smiled back before looking to everyone watching. "Now that that's settled, let's take a moment to enjoy the buffet Mister Locke has arranged for us."

The atmosphere lightened almost instantly. For half an hour everyone either nibbled or stuffed themselves from the food on offer. Without any coordination Harris Locke was given a wide berth. At one point he had moved to stand next to Jeremy and looking up softly spoke. "Sir, I can't thank you enough for saving my hide, but I don't understand. I had gotten the impression that you despised me."

Jeremy looked around the small room and motioned for the otter to follow him to an empty corner. "It's not anything personal. I disagreed with some of your methods, that's all. If you do get the chance for our training it'll focus on how to manage from a foundation of mutual respect and loyalty from those you lead."

Locke nodded while looking to the floor. "So, does that mean you see me as a failure as a manager?"

"No." Jeremy replied softly. "As I said, that you were able to keep anyone from suspecting you had claustrophobia proves you are a capable leader. We think there is always room for improvement. We also recognize that we're still learning too. That's why we want managers like yourself. Our motive in asking you to join is to use your critique to help make the program better each time it's offered."

The otter stood looking up at Jeremy. He was clearly thinking over what had been said. "I appreciate that. I just hope I don't end up losing my place in Humboldt."

"I think you'll come back better than you think right now. You've been dealt a blow. Anyone would question their own capabilities at this point. We believe in you or we wouldn't have backed you up."

Harris smiled. "Thanks."

Jeremy saw that Mitchell had noticed the two of them talking. While he wasn't moving toward them his expression was one of clear interest. Maintaining eye contact with the dominant Jeremy said "I think Mitchell would like a word with you."

The otter's demeanor changed at the comment. He looked to his dominant and took a deep breath. Jeremy watched as he made his way over. Mitchell wrapped the smaller otter's shoulders with an arm. Jeremy smiled on seeing the dominant's paw pat the smaller otter's shoulder. It was a clear effort to reassure Locke.

The rest of the evening was spent in a futile effort to prevent the lawyers from slowly taking over the conversation. Jeremy sat at the fringes listening and felt his eyelids gradually get heavier. It was hard for him to maintain interest in the tedious and trivial specifics of the agreement being forged. He was further impressed with Mitchell. The otter dominant seemed to be able to not only keep interested but fully aware of the trend of the meeting.

It was several hours before a halt was called. Jeremy was glad to finally begin the trip back to the hotel. Hervoss, Mitchell, Gakota and Jeremy shared one SUV for the ride back. The topic of conversation turned to the planned training program for managers. Both Mitchell and Hervoss expressed an interest. Gakota spent most of the ride explaining the intent of the training and what would be covered. By the time they pulled up to the hotel he had verbal commitments to provide at least one session to each entity.

As a group they mingled in the lobby for a few minutes in light conversation. Eventually most of the group excused themselves and headed either to their rooms in the hotel or in the case of the lemurs their home. Jeremy and Gakota were the last to leave as they escorted Mitchell to the elevator banks.

As they waited for a car the otter looked to Jeremy and Gakota. "Thanks. I didn't know this was going to be such a productive arrangement."

"Honestly, neither did we." Gakota said with a smile as they entered the cab. The cat touched Jeremy's elbow as they followed the otter inside the cab. He understood the gesture.

Once the doors closed Jeremy speculated "It's likely to set The Bureau up for some great things in the future, and it'll all be thanks to you giving us the opportunity."

Mitchell smiled as he nodded. "Any chance on taking that into consideration regarding the fee you're charging us?"

Gakota rubbed the bridge of his muzzle with a finger for a moment before answering. "No." The smile he gave the otter was full of humor.

The otter chuckled. "No, I don't suppose I would either."

The elevator dinged denoting they'd arrived at the floor selected by Gakota. Jeremy followed the ocelot from the cab as they both bid Mitchell a good night. They stood together in the hallway facing the otter as the doors closed and the dominant returned the sentiment.

Gakota looked at the sign on the wall indicating which direction to find his room. "I'm in twenty two twenty nine." he said as he started to the right. Jeremy followed him. As they turned a corner he saw Makannish sitting on the hallway floor outside the ocelot's room. The fox stood with a smile as they neared.

Once inside Gakota's room he gestured for then both of them to sit and asked Jeremy "So, in your opinion, what is that thing?"

"I'm not sure what it is. When they showed it to me I couldn't detect any indication of subterfuge. Whatever it eventually turns out to be, it's the real thing."

The cat's eye ridges rose. "Well, whatever it is it dropped an amazing opportunity in our laps." He leaned back in his chair and looked at the fox. "What's your take on it?"

Makannish shrugged and glanced at Jeremy a moment. "This is going to sound like it's out in the tall weeds, but I think the explanation is going to be something along the lines of alien manufacture."

The cat hummed. "Honestly, that doesn't sound all that far in the weeds. I was thinking pretty much the same."

Jeremy looked at his two of his colleagues. "Really? You think that's the most likely explanation?"

Gakota grinned. "Likely? I don't know." He said and sat up straighter. "I'm personally not sure but these lemurs aren't backwards or stupid. If there was a mundane explanation they'd have discovered it by now."

He paused to look at Makannish and back to Jeremy. "So, what else has been going on?"

Jeremy took a little more than half an hour to brief them on what he'd discussed with the dominant lemurs and seen of their culture. He finished up with his assessment of Humbolt's personnel of which he'd interacted. A few questions followed that only took a few more minutes.

Once he was satisfied the ocelot took a deep breath and as he let it out looked at Makannish. The fox looked back and shook his head. "Well, great job Jeremy. I think an agreement will be settled in a day or two. After that we can finalize our own agreements with Humbolt and the local government. With any luck we'll be headed home by the end of the week at the latest."

"Sounds good." The fox said as a grin spread across his face. "We'd better get some rest. My eyelids can't take too much of lawyers bickering without getting heavy."

Jeremy laughed. "Yeah, I've felt the same myself."

"Let's call it a night then. See you both in the morning." The feline said as he stood. He saw Jeremy and Makannish to the door and exchanged a final farewell.

As Jeremy walked with the fox toward the elevator Makannish said "This could make us famous if we handle it right."

"I'm just interested in handling it right."

The fox stopped and looked up at him. "You do realize there's never going to be any agreement on what that thing is. We can't be committed to expressing an opinion of any kind."

Jeremy once again considered the multiple other mysterious events and findings in recent history and how it affected the credibility of those involved. "I know what you mean."

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Continuing the geography tour we turn east and the region to the east of the Cascade Range. With irregular borders and sizes is a collection of states filling most of the area we know as Idaho, Montana and southern British Columbia and southwestern Saskatchewan. While considered largely irrelevant economically and militarily the collection of states in the area have maintained peaceful relation with each other since the Continental Wars.

Of note is a small fairly new nation located we know as the junction between Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Now calling itself Haven this nation is the location the Wolverine species chose to make their home after the wars. Few other places worldwide have such concentrated populations of a single species. The wolverines population has recovered surprisingly well since having been devastated in the wars. Due to a number of reasons there is little known of their current sociability. They are known to be as peaceful to their neighbors as any other nation.