

* *A continuation of 'Terrain' by the talented Dawgstein* *

Misplaced in Omphalic Gulch
By R.S. Dawgstein

A self muttered mantra of step, hand over hand, grip, breath and ease one's body upwards. Repeat. Rhythm and breathing. Do I need to breath to get Oxygen? Cane pondered. I'm on the small end of the flea scale! Am I, like a large mite or small flea, relying on diffusion for oxygen?

Force of habit came the conclusion. Cane doubted his lungs functioned as they normally did. Yet a sense of need demanded he do so.

The steep angled climb proved surprisingly easy for the dimensionally reduced canine provided he kept to a steady pace of traversing the tree trunk thick cylinders that lay curved and jumbled like downed trees from a windstorm. Each 'tree' was coated in a scaly bark of tan and brown. Gripping the vast fur strands had proved easy. Even his naked hind paws gained purchase. There was the faint sensation of 'down' felt from gravity. Limbs swam past resistance to movement and 'weight', yet no sensation of tiring.

The air felt thick, soupy and almost water like. Stray currents buffeted him. The surrounding scents of the so called 'fallen forest' was a mossy tangled riot of herbivore hide oil and underlying tissue. Rank with bacteria leavings. Far stronger than one could imagine. It permeated...everywhere. Cane wondered if he would ever get used to it.

Ahead, the 'terrain' curved oddly. The flea sized blueish being took a guess at locale, gauging a vastness that lay beyond. Feeling like a climber atop a mountain cordillera divide. Where the view revealed a continuing stair step jumps of continental terrain caked in white and tan contours. And far ahead, a distant cliff muzzled mountain with twin peaks of horn and ears.

Afternoons are truly the long dark tea time of the soul, Puff mused to himself. The solitary cervine sat in a woven fibered lawn chair recliner that had been placed in a pitted concrete basement break room. A depressing place lined with battered chairs and a Formica table with microwave and coffee maker. A box or two of tea, a few stacks of books and colored skin magazines complimented the decor. It was oddly, the only place free of security CCTV and microphones.

Puff's Tyvek lab coat had been carelessly tossed onto a nearby chair. Clothing as well. He wore only a braie round his crotch. And an hourglass shaped amulet on a beaded chain draped around his neck. He lazily sprawled atop the chair recliner, tracking the progress of a tiny blue speck edging just over his knee.

Tracking made easy by a genetic mutation that accounted for his green eyes and an eagle eyed definition extraordinarily uncommon amongst cervines and most mammals.

A glance at the pipette lying on an armrest. Deep textured nose twitching. Mischievous rising deep within. He reached for the pipette. Slowly edged his arm towards his left knee, bulb squeezed. Tip maneuvered over the blue speck.

Finger grip relaxed, blue speck vacuumed up. He guided the pipette to a spot centered several inches above his groin. Gently inserted the tip into soft and thick lower belly fur and squeezed the bulb.

I'm actually making things easier for him, Puff giggled to himself...

Once again, a frosted glass tornado had descended out of the sky and swept him up! Tumbling about in confusion and disorientation from hurricane force winds. And spat out into a tropical gloom of hide and fur strand forest tinged with that familiar tang of deer.

Lying prone, bluish muzzle lay buried against a smelly, bumpy terrain radiating warmth like a heated floor. Hand sized flakes of dead hide coated the underlying 'ground' like forest duff. Unlike the prior climb atop ankle and lower leg fur, this time he was embedded deep within it!

Cane managed to get up on his knees and leaned against a nearby, half meter wide tree trunk lined with giant fish like scales, translucent white in color and speckled in yellow brown spots. Surrounding forest packed tightly, roughly the same distance as their base thickness.

He sat, knees flexed, gazing up at the curving strands soaring above. Swaying not to a breeze, but to a series of gentle seismic motions. The ground itself flexing from a tidal like rise and fall. A slow pace that seemed longer than it should be. Was his sense of time that short and distorted?

He placed his clawed hand out and shoved it against the ridged roughen floor that yielded like burlap laced with an oily residue awash with the smell of deer hide. He thought he could feel another rhythm. Leaning over, he placed his ear against the smelly 'ground'.

Bass sounds, vast sounds. There was the majestic, hoo-whomp, ga-whomp. A periodic pulse that puzzled him till he identified the rhythm for what it was. It became drowned out by an erratic series of gurgling grumbles. Like magma shifting about in a volcano.

Finally it dawned on him what was driving the seismic spectrum. Breath flexing ground. Heart beat waves originating from a distant source. And he thought with a shudder, abdominal grumbings of that damn deer's digestive tract right underneath him!

Hunger and thirst knotted through his own, bluish furred gut. Without thinking, instinct drove his muzzle against the base of a fur trunk. Fangs and incisors chewing, gnawing and biting the 'ground', spitting aside oily fiber. Deeper and deeper. Muzzle raised. he watched his excavation slowly fill with a straw colored, oily ichor. He eagerly drove his snout into the bowling ball sized bead. Somehow, he managed to suck the thick liquid into his mouth and swallowed it.

Growling like a feral dog gnawing on leftover hide, Cane's tail wagged and wagged. He sat up, licking his chops. Give me several dozen million years and I might eat this whole damn deer!

Another deep snout dive and rough gnawing. And this time, the ground reacted by shaking violently. Seismic response driven by muscle strands reacting to peripheral nerve endings detecting a tiny insult. A flea like bite.

The jolting tremor ceased. Overhead, the sky dimmed from a descending dark cloud!

Puff's lazy nap was interrupted by an annoying ticklish sensation near the center of his belly. He was about to scratch the itch, when he paused, pulled back his hand and settled back in the chair once again. So that's where you are Dr. Cane, he thought to himself. Deer tongue licking over his own nose. Idly fingering the hourglass amulet nestled in his white furred sternum. The game is still on!

The storm cloud retreated and sunlight once again returned to the 'treetops'. Dr. Cane stood up. Hand resting against a scaly trunk of fur strand. I must move on! He gazed upwards and spotted four distant towers swaying about. Two cone shafted towers flanked by two curving tan colored Matterhorn like peaks.

Cane began the slow, clumsy hike through the 'forest' which grew above living ground awash with tidal rhythms of breath and heartbeat. Knowing that sooner or later, he would have to climb up to the 'treetops' and clamber like a monkey in the heights towards a vast metallic object afloat atop a furred sea of chest.

He tried, but failed to put aside a gnawing doubt. Would that damn cervine keep his end of the bargain?
