

Matu was sitting at the table quietly staring at the Alcaad tool and slowly sipping a cup of coffee when Sendi entered the kitchen. He looked up. "Oh, hi." He said, and went back to staring at the tool.

"You OK?" She asked.

"Yeah." He mumbled and paused a moment. "Actually, no. I don't know what's going on, but when I woke up this morning, I had no idea where I was. None, at all."

"OK, that's really weird. The same thing happened to me."

"Uh...that's a bad sign. Where's Rexx?"

"I don't know. He was gone when I got up. I figured he was in here. So, you haven't seen him either?"

"No."

Just then, the front door slammed shut. And in a moment, Rexx entered the kitchen carrying a package.

"Hey! Where've you been?" Asked Matu.

"I got a phone message that our delivery was at the sorting center, so I went to see if I could pick it up."

"Oh, good. That'll give us time to install and test it before the demo." He moved the tool to one side as Rexx set down the package. Matu paused a moment then looked Rexx in the eye. "When did you get the message?"

"Oh, about a couple of hours ago, I guess. I got up early to use the bathroom and I saw my phone was blinking with a message, so I figured I'd get dressed and go get the package. Why?"

"Did you notice anything strange when you woke up?"

"Um, I don't think so." He paused "No, wait a minute. I did. I woke up abruptly and when looking around, I was totally disoriented. Like, I had no idea where I was. Then, after a minute or two, things sort of fell back into place. That's when I saw the message light."

Matu and Sendi shared a glance and nodded.

"Why?" Rexx asked. "What's going on?"

"We..." Sendi said slowly. "Um...had the same experience. No idea where we were."

Rexx sat down. After a long pause. "There are no coincidences. What's going on?"

Sendi shrugged her shoulders.

"Matu?" Rexx asked.

"Your guess..." He trailed off. "Maybe something here is affecting us?" His gaze lingered on the Alcaad tool.

Sendi's gaze followed. "We were exposed to that bright energy thing." She pointed to the tool.

"Maybe we should get out for a while...go take a walk, get some fresh air...maybe go out for breakfast, you know, just get out of here for a while?"

Sendi nodded. "Yeah, let's..."

Rexx stood up and glanced at the new package. He picked up the Alcaad tool and moved it onto the counter at the far end of the room. "Maybe we'd better keep this away from the regular unit...just in case." He looked at Matu and Sendi who were just staring at him.

"Well...breakfast?"

"Oh, yeah." She nodded, breaking out of her stupor.

"Right!" Nodded Matu. "Let's."

A moment after the front door closed, the Time Police appeared next to the dining table holding a small object in his hand. Passing directly through the power supply's exterior packaging, he placed the object next to the supply. He withdrew his hand, nodded and vanished.

Sendi was putting groceries in the fridge and Matu was fussing with the coffeemaker while Rexx was opening the package with a knife.

"I'm glad we stayed out longer. The walk in the park was relaxing and that long lunch was really satisfying." Matu said.

"Yeah, it was good." Sendi added with enthusiasm. "Glad we stopped for groceries, too. We were starting to get low on a couple of things."

"I was just thinking that it kind of cleared out the feelings of this morning."

"Yeah." She sighed. "It still feels weird that we all had the same reaction."

Rexx was reading the packing slip that was on top of the contents of the package. "Please find enclosed 1 Mach-902 Power Supply. If additional parts are needed, contact the following address...and so forth." He laid the paper on the table and reached in to take out the supply. As he pulled it out, a soft clunk was heard coming from the package. "What the...?" Rexx exclaimed. Putting the supply on the table, he reached into the package and pulled out a small cylindrical object. "What's this?" He held it up for view.

"Let me see!" Matu said, grabbed the object and started inspecting it. "What is it? Anything on the packing list about any additional parts?"

Rexx reread the list. "Nope."

They all paused and their eyes met.

"Oh, no." Matu said.

"Well, it looks like we're getting another adventure." Remarked Sendi.

Matu glared at her. Then he shook his head and laughed. "I guess I did ask for it." He held the object up to the light. "So, I wonder what this is and what kind of trouble it's going to get us into." He shook it slightly. "It seems pretty solid."

"Maybe, you shouldn't press your luck."

"Yeah." He nodded. "I'll just put it over with the Alcaad tool for now. Maybe they can have a chat about our future."

"You know..." Rexx started. "This seemed a whole lot easier when we didn't know he was helping and all we had to deal with was impending death. Now, we don't know what he's got ready for us next."

"I hate to have to agree with that, but you're right." Sendi commented. "It kind of removed that sense of living on the edge, you know, in the combat zone."

"So, how do we get that back?" Rexx asked? "Do we have to forget what we learned outside of time?"

"Yeah, I see what you mean." She sighed. "It does make the prospect of death a lot less scary. I don't know. But, I do miss the excitement of the pending unknown. No, wait, excitement's not the right word, but there is a kind of thrill when you don't know what's going to happen next. I mean, well, within, oh, how do I say this, the expected parameters. Now, we've got a little green man adding the completely unimaginable possibility."

"You guys are beginning to scare me." Matu said. "I was never in a military, so this kind of talk is a little foreign to me."

"Yes, but you hunted, didn't you? Isn't going after game a little exciting? You have all your senses alive and aware and ready for the unexpected, don't you?"

He thought for a moment. "Yeah, I guess you're right. I just never thought about it that way...concentrating on the search actually takes away any analysis of the situation."

"Yeah." She considered for a moment. "We had to analyze while we were on the go...I guess the stakes were higher. I don't know anymore...been too long since I was there." She laughed. "It's only a few centuries ago."

"But, you showed those skills often enough when we were confronted with danger."

"Did I?" She blinked. "Oh, yes...I guess that was just conditioning, you know, training. 'Just summarize and do. Don't stop to question too much.' That's what they taught us."

Matu pointed to the Alcaad tool and the new object. "But, now we know better, and we do have to question. Like, what is that? Why is it here? And what is it for? And why were we so disoriented this morning?"

"Yeah." She nodded. "Yeah, we do. Why were we?"

"Did either of you have any strange dreams, or remember anything from during your sleep? Like, any discomfort, or pain, or anything like that?"

Rexx and Sendi exchanged a glance.

She shrugged. "Let me think about it for a bit. I know I've felt kind of strange off and on since we got here. This whole experience since we left the mountain has been a bit weird."

"Only, a bit?" Rexx asked. "And going back in time to the mountain didn't?"

"Well, yeah, but, we kind of had a normal routine of eating and sleeping in between the demon fighting." She paused. "Well, we do have sort of a routine here, but, going out of time and coming here is just...well, I know too much for things to feel normal." She turned to Matu. "So, why did you ask? Did you have some kind of premonition or something?"

"Not sure. Just wondering if maybe we had been doing some journeying during our sleep. That could explain the disorientation, if we came back too fast. I sort of woke up suddenly, and Rexx said he woke up abruptly. What about you?"

She thought a moment. "Yeah, I guess I did too. I felt like I hadn't even been asleep...like I didn't remember even falling asleep. And as far as dreams..." She shrugged. "I don't remember a thing."

"OK." Rexx interjected. "This does sound like all three of us did something, and I would guess it was journeying. Were we together, or at least, on the same quest?"

Matu shook his head. "I don't know."

"OK...so what were we doing last night before we went to sleep?" She asked. "We were talking about how to do this presentation...is there anything in that...anything that would have prompted journeying?"

"You mean like asking for some kind of guidance?"

"Yeah, that's a possibility. I mean we're under a kind of pressure to do this job right and we really don't know how to do that. You guys, at least, have some knowledge of mining to draw from."

"Well, I wouldn't say I had that much knowledge." Rexx said. "Matu, worked in a mine that was about selecting certain rocks. Geological engineering is more about removing unwanted rocks."

"Still..." She said. "You know about the kind of tools that enable that."

"OK, I'll accept that, though we come from different eras."

"Maybe we were trying to get an understanding of what a miner would want to see...what his point of view would be."

"Well, that does sound like a reasonable quest for a journey." Matu commented. "Does that feel like a possibility to either of you?"

"I think maybe so." She nodded. "Not sure, though..."

"So, getting into this customer's head, then..." Rexx started. "Do you think we succeeded?"

Matu shook his head. "I don't know. I wish I could remember something from the night, but my mind is a total blank."

"I understand." Sendi agreed. "My mind is blank too, but I have a kind of feeling that we accomplished something. But, what? I don't know."

"This is so frustrating!" Matu slammed his fist on the table. "I just can't shake the feeling of disorientation from this morning." He got up and crossed to where the new object sat. He picked it up. "What are you? And why are you here?" He tapped the top of the cylinder with his finger, then set it back down. Something went "click", then it began to emit a soft whirring sound.

Sendi jumped up from her chair and crossed to where Matu was standing. Rexx followed.

"What did you do?" She asked.

"Um...I'm not sure. I picked it up, and think I tapped the top of it and then set it back down. I'm not even sure why I did it."

She stared at it closely. "What's that sound it's making?"

Matu looked at her in shock. "You think I know?"

Rexx picked up the cylinder and held it up to Matu. "Where did you tap it?"

"Uh...here, I think." He pointed to the center of the flat top."

Rexx tapped the spot. It went "click" and the sound stopped.

Matu stared at him. "OK...so, you found the off switch. Now what?"

Sendi laughed and shook her head. "That can't be all it does. Tap the top again and see if it does anything else."

"Are you sure?" Matu asked. "What if...?"

"What if what? You think it will explode or something?"

He shrugged. "Who knows..."

Rexx turned the cylinder over. "The bottom looks that same as the top." He tapped it on the bottom. The cylinder went "beep, beep, beep...beep, beep, beep... beep, beep, beep" and stopped.

"What was that?" Sendi asked.

The cylinder went "clunk" and a crackly voice said. "Rexx! Glad you called. We've been wondering when you would figure out our little phone."

They all looked at each other.

"Uh...Mr. Time Police?" Rexx said.

"Yes, of course! Who else?"

"This is a phone?"

"Yes. Something we found while digging through some abandoned spacecraft. Cute, isn't it? And, hey, try twisting the lower part of the cylinder to get a better signal. You're breaking up a bit."

Rexx looked at the others and then at the bottom of the cylinder. He tried turning the lower section. "Hey! It does turn." He spoke to the cylinder. "Is that better?"

"Yes, much better."

Sendi turned to Matu. "Since when does he need a phone?"

Matu stifled a laugh and just shook his head.

"So, what was the whirring sound the top button made?"

"Dial tone...waiting for you to dial...then you hung up."

"He knew?" Matu said to Sendi.

She glared at him. "He's everywhere."

"And, all the beeping?" Rexx continued.

"Speed dial."

Rexx shook his head in wonderment. "Why do we need a phone to talk to you? You see our thoughts?"

"Well, here's the thought. Say, you're in a group of people and want to consult. A phone will give you something to talk at instead of just talking into space and have people start to distance from you."

"OK...point taken." He paused. "So, why did you want to talk to us?"

"Well, we've been watching you and your preparing for these demonstrations you're going to be doing. You're holed up in this little apartment rehearsing a lot of potential thoughts, but you have no actual idea of how to talk to these people."

"Yeah...and?"

"Get out and meet some people! Mingle with the populace! Talk with them. This is supposed to be a new life for you...go out and live it!" The phone went quiet.

Rexx turned to the others. "I think he hung up."

Matu and Sendi exchanged a glance and they both broke out laughing.

"OK." Rexx said. "In a way he's right. We do need to get involved with this lifetime. Not just sit around and observe it from a distance."

"I get what you are saying." Sendi commented. "But, in a way, I'm kind of intimidated about talking to strangers. I can't just say I'm from the future, they'll think I'm crazy. I just don't know what to say." She paused and shrugged her shoulders. "So, basically, I don't say anything."

"OK, maybe we need to work on a comfortable back story."

"Like what?" She asked.

"Well, at least I can talk about the mine." Matu said.

"The one that's in your future?" Rexx commented.

"Oh, yeah...sort of forgot about that aspect."

"So, we're all in this together."

A voice echoed across the ceiling. "Don't forget that you have something to tell people."

"What was that?" Sendi asked.

"A reminder, I guess." Said Rexx.

"Of what?" Asked Matu.

"Of having been out of time, I guess." Sendi said. "We've been places that most, well, all people have, but they don't remember being there. But, we remember."

"Yes. That's a very sobering thought." Rexx said. "But how do we talk about things like that?"

"Maybe what it was like before we found a better...no, that's not a good way to phrase it...maybe, a more comfortable place...a place where we felt we could understand things better...something like that...maybe. Oh, I don't know."

"You mean like tell people that what they have been believing wasn't the best way to look at things, or maybe there might be something better they could look forward to...something like that?"

"Something...but that sounds a little harsh. I think we maybe need to prompt some latent memories."

"How?"

She grimaced. "I really wish you wouldn't ask those kinds of questions. I don't know!"

Matu stared at them for a moment. "So, are you suggesting that we just go out and start up a meta-philosophical conversation with a total stranger on the street. I don't think that will play out very well."

"No, you're right." Rexx conceded.

"I think, it's best if we let them ask the questions and we try to answer as best we can. Otherwise, it will seem like we are know-it-alls and that just sounds like we're preaching."

"Yeah...preaching is never a good idea. The ones that will agree with you are already 'in the know', and the ones that don't won't be convinced by idle words."

"But, so this just brings us back to how do we start a conversation and with who? Total strangers usually aren't very chatty."

"Yeah." Agreed Sendi. "Most people only start talking when they are in a similar situation with someone else."

"You know..." Matu started. "This conversation is making me feel worse. Anybody want to go out for another walk? It's still early."

Outside on the sidewalk, Rexx asked. "Which way? Parks or the city center?"

"The center, I think." Matu said. "I feel like I want to be around people...lots of people."

"Start up a conversation?" Sendi asked.

"Hmm, no, not really thinking of that. More like I just want to shake off this other worldly feeling."

"Other worldly...?"

"The being out of time thing...I want to feel like I'm human again."

"OK." She nodded. "I think I understand."

"How about we find a cafe or something like that to hang out in?" Rexx suggested.

"Sounds good. Let's see what we can find."

A couple of blocks later, they paused in front of a cafe to look over the menu posted on the window.

"Anything look interesting?" Rexx asked.

"I don't know...not really hungry." Matu answered.

Sendi peered past the menu into the cafe's interior. "Looks kind of empty...only a couple of customers."

A man walked up and glanced at the menu. "Is this a good place to eat?" He asked.

Matu shrugged. "Don't know. We're new in town."

"Oh, OK. Thanks." The man turned and walked away.

Sendi stared questioningly at Matu.

"What?!"

"You just missed an opportunity for a conversation."

"About what? Food I haven't eaten in a cafe I've never been in? That's not much of a conversation."

"Well, you could have asked him where he thought a good place to eat was."

"Well, so could you...!"

She paused. "You're right. That wasn't fair of me. I guess I rationalized that since this is closer to your time...and you're more familiar with this world...I expected you to take the lead. Sorry." She shook her head. "I guess I'm still too intimidated to want to speak out."

"Guys!" Rexx said. "It's nobody's fault. We're all intimidated. We don't know this world...we don't know what to say or do. We weren't born into this world with a whole childhood to grow up and begin to understand it. But, we're going to have to get over that if we want to survive."

"Yeah." Sendi acknowledged. "It's too tempting to just ask the Time Police to rescue us from an inconvenient disaster."

"It actually feels kind of strange to realize that we are on our own." Matu looked at the other two. "We are, aren't we?"

"As far as I know, we are, unless we choose to bale. But, if we do, then we're chickening out...we're admitting we're cowards, and can't handle the challenge."

"Hmph!" Commented Rexx.

"What?" Sendi asked.

"I just realized how much more of a challenge it is, not starting out as an innocent. Yeah, we're versed in language and the skills we learned in another time and place, but here we know as little as a child, but because we are adults, we will always be expected to know everything that adults do. In a way, being 'foreigners' gives a little excuse. But, because we're world traveling 'business men', we have to be above that naivete." He shook his head. "Wow, what a messy situation!"

Sendi sighed. "You're right. Wow, indeed. Where do we take a crash course in contemporary culture?"

"...the streets of Johannesburg, is my guess." Matu said staring down the street. "Let's get closer to a more populated area."

"You know...most of these cafes we've looked into...the people are either alone or are in small groups...they're not really interested in speaking to anyone outside of their group." Matu observed. "Maybe we should try a bar. Beer might loosen a tongue or two. Remember that saloon where we watched that guy who wanted to be a 'cowpoke'? He didn't seem to have any problem wanting to talk with strangers."

"You have a point." Sendi said. "It's worth a try. And, it's getting into early evening, so that's about the time when people are ending their workday and wanting to relax a bit. Let's see what we can find...maybe a small place where there's a lot of conversation going on...you know where people already know each other and a couple of strangers might be welcomed to join in."

"What do you think of this place?" Matu asked peering into the window. "It's kind of a British pub."

"I like it." Sendi said. "It's well lighted, not dark...looks cozy."

"It's not too crowded, several empty seats." Rexx added. "Sure, let's give it a try."

In the pub most of the people seemed to know each other. They were gathered in comfortable chairs around a few small tables and were engaged in casual conversation.

"I'll get us some drinks." Matu said as he went over to the bar.

"Mind if we join you?" Rexx asked as he and Sendi approached the group.

One of the men pointed to a chair. "Sure...pull up some chairs and make yourselves comfortable. I'm Mike." He pointed to a couple other fellows. That's Pat...and over there's Jeff."

"I'm Rexx, and this is my wife, Sendi. That's our friend, Matu, getting drinks. We're kind of new in town...here on a business trip. So, we don't know our way around very well."

"Well, welcome to Johannesburg! What kind of work do you do?"

"I guess you could say we're kind of traveling salesmen." Rexx chuckled. "We work for a company that manufactures mining equipment and we provide demonstrations for prospective clients."

"Big toys, or little ones?" Pat joked.

"I'm afraid it's the little ones." Rexx laughed. "We're showing off a cutter for delicate ores."

"Well, don't know if you'll catch much fish here. Must of what's mined here is either gold or diamonds...far as I know." Mike drawled.

"Then, again..." Pat cut in. "Can your gadget cut diamonds?"

"Yes, actually it can...not its primary function...but, with a few adjustments, it can do."

"Well, then maybe you can sell some. There're a few big boys here that might be interested."

"Thanks for the tip! I'll remember that when we're doing the demos."

"Remember what?" Matu asked as he set down the drinks.

"Matu, this is Pat and Mike." Rexx introduced the men. "They were telling me there may be a market in diamond cutting for our ore slicer."

"Oh? Hmm, hadn't considered that." Matu nodded as he sat down. "Definitely have to look into adjusting the settings for that hardness...and delicacy. Cutting gemstones can be tricky. We saw that back at the mine I worked in."

Sendi shot Matu a quick glance. "Careful." She mouthed.

Matu saw and gave a quick nod.

"Oh, and where was that?" Mike asked.

"Oh, just a small affair in the Australian outback...wasn't there very long. It was part of the training for this job. They sent us around to various sites for a week or so to get the feel of different operations. To tell the truth, I don't remember where half of the places were."

Rexx leapt in. "So, what kind of work are you guys in?"

"Mike, here works in the railroad...supervisory role." Pat said. "I'm sort of closely related...I work nearby...import of coastal trade...seafood mostly...don't actually do it, just the paperwork."

"You enjoying your stay here?" Mike asked.

"Well, we've only been here a week or two and haven't really gotten out much. We've been stuck in our apartment going over paperwork and calibrating our machines. The most we've seen of the city is a cafe or two, grocery store, and an occasional walk in a nearby park. Guess we've been business recluses."

"Yeah." Matu added. "Tonight we decided to hang it all up and go out and see some of the real world. Too much cabin fever, I guess." He chuckled. "So, here we are."

"Well, glad you dropped in. Small local pub here, don't get too many outsiders. So, where're you all from?"

"Sendi and I are from California...Los Angeles. Matu, here, is from Australia. We met through the company."

"Yeah. The head guy thought we'd work well together. So, he put us on the same team."

Sendi stifled a laugh.

"Something funny?" Pat asked.

"No...not really. Sorry. It's just that I hadn't really thought of that description before. But, he's right, though. We do work well together...I guess we're like minded or something." She thought a moment. "I guess what struck me funny was how easily and quickly we struck a common chord...like he said, we were being put on the same team by the head guy because we worked together well."

"Yeah." Rexx chimed in. "The head guy is pretty intuitive about what makes a good team."

Sendi cast him a quick scornful glance, then smirked. "Yeah." She agreed. "Though, sometimes I like him and sometimes I don't...he can be a bit of a know-it-all at times. But, I guess we all feel that way about our bosses."

"Well, that's true." Mike nodded.

Pat laughed and nodded in agreement.

"Whew! We nearly blew it back there a few times." Sendi commented as they were walking back to their apartment. "I really hate lying like that, but what else are we going to do. We can't tell the truth...they wouldn't believe us."

"Yeah. I know what you mean." Rexx added.

Matu stopped in his tracks. "Say! Mr. Time Police?"

"Yes?" The question hung in mid-air.

"Could we talk for a few minutes?"

"Of course!" As he appeared next to them. Rexx looked around hesitantly. "Oh, don't worry...no one can see us."

"How does what we said back there affect things?" Matu continued. "I mean, I'm a young boy back in the mountain right now. Is my life going to be affected by what we're saying and doing?"

"Of course. Everything is inter-connected."

"But, does it change who I am now?"

"Yes. But, it changes you as much as you let it. There are many things constantly affecting each of your lives, but it is your choice how you qualify those things. You can and will attribute causes to those effects that fit within your mental construct at the time. And as you choose to allow or dismiss these effects, it builds your outlook on life."

"Can you expand on that a little?" Sendi asked.

"Sure. Maybe an example or so would help. Earlier we visited a scene where a man attempted an assassination of a political opponent. This was a real situation within a real war between two countries and it was occurring while you, Matu, were a young boy. Did you ever hear about this war?"

Matu shook his head. "No, I don't think so...or if I did, I don't remember."

"Yet, although it was not a large war, it had a major effect on the entire world, mostly economic. The effect was definitely felt by your isolated community, but because of the choices made by your community, you did not notice what these effects were. Perhaps certain supplies were late in coming, delayed by shipping lanes affected by bombing strikes. The cause could have been dismissed as bad weather and the result would have been the same. But, the label of the cause could produce a different result in your mental and

emotional states. 'Weather' can be dismissed as something beyond your control...shrug your shoulders and get on with life. 'Bombs' are something that may have stirred your emotions...'I want to defend my allies or oppose the enemy'...and that could set your mind to perhaps wanting to become a soldier when you grew up. Do you see how these qualifications can change you, although the actual cause did not change?"

"Yes, I think I see what you mean." He nodded.

"So, your few, more or less, casual words over drinks in a remote pub will probably not have a major impact on the world...unless..."

"Unless?"

"Well, unless you're quoted by a major news broadcaster and your mother begins to worry where you've run off to."

"Funny." Matu remarked sarcastically. "But, seriously, how do we know how far these few words will travel?"

"Well...you don't. But, you don't know how far any act you commit will travel, nor how much of an impact it will have where and when it lands." He shrugged. "It's called life, we're afraid."

"So, what can we do?" Sendi asked.

"Well, the best you can do is keep your words, your stories, as close to what your conscience will allow as truth, without betraying your actual lived truth."

"Sounds hard."

"Not really, just let your heart lead...you'll find it's not so hard after all and it will be easier to remember what you said and avoid any contradictions."

"It felt hard, though, trying to talk to those guys back there in that pub. It felt like I really didn't know what to say and was making things up just to have something to say."

"I know." Rexx admitted. "I felt the same way. We knew what we couldn't talk about and that sort of prevented me, at least, from thinking of anything else."

"You, too, huh? Thought it was just me." Matu added. "I...hey! Where'd he go?"
Matu glanced around.

Rexx chuckled. "I guess he felt he was done answering our questions and left."

Sendi paused, looking around. "It's early yet. Let's walk a bit more. I'm not ready to just go back and sit around in the apartment."

"OK. Anywhere in particular?"

"No...just somewhere." She looked around. "Oh, I don't know."

"We haven't been down this way." Matu pointed toward the next street.

They turned and walked for a bit. "Hey, I think I hear a train. We must be near the rail station." Matu said. "Pat and Mike said it wasn't too far away. Guess that's why they meet at that pub after work."

Sendi glanced at a small pile of trash in the gutter. "Kind of dismal around here."

Matu pointed at an old factory building across the street. "Yeah. A lot of graffiti too."

"Is it abandoned?" Rexx asked, pointing at the yard. "It's really over grown with weeds."

"I don't think so. See?" Matu said. "There's a couple of cars parked near that service door by the loading dock. And, they're not wrecks or anything. And, hey, there's a light on in that room." He pointed.

Just then a man dressed in a worker's uniform came out of the service door and crossed to one of the cars.

"See. Somebody works there."

"Yeah." Sendi acknowledged. "Anyhow, it's early evening, so I'm guessing it's past normal working hours. Probably, everybody else has already gone home for the day."

"Still, though, the place really looks run down." Rexx commented. "Wonder why they don't keep it up better. I mean, doesn't it kind of give your business a poor reputation when you don't keep up maintenance?"

Matu shook his head as they continued down the street. "Maybe, they just can't afford to."

"Well, he was wearing a uniform...that's a company expense, isn't it."

Matu shrugged. "Don't know...maybe, recent hard times."

"I don't know." Sendi added, looking back at the factory. "That's not recent decay. That building's been run down for a long time."

Rexx paused. "You know, looking around, this city's not really in the best of shape."

"No." Sendi agreed. "Is this going to influence our ability to sell these ore slicers? Maybe that's what the Time Police was getting at when he said we had to get out and live. We really need to understand the people that we're trying to sell to. I mean, if they're not well off, they're not likely to want to buy an expensive item."

"Well..." Rexx started. "Pat did say that there were some 'big boys' in the diamond mines that might be interested in gem cutting. It seems like they should have money to spend."

"Yeah." Matu said. "I'm sure they would really be interested if they can cut out the middle man and go straight for the retail market."

"I sure hope so." Said Sendi. "If we're not salesmen, I don't know what we will be doing. Not that I really know how to sell stuff."

"From what I've heard..." Rexx chuckled. "It takes the 'gift of gab'."

"Do we have it?" She asked.

"If not, we'd better learn soon." Matu laughed.

"Well, you're the comedian in this group." She commented. "Guess, you'd better start coming up with some good lines. Maybe that will help lighten the mood with our customers."

"I guess it couldn't hurt as a conversation helper." He nodded. "Seriously, though, not necessarily making jokes, but creating a friendly atmosphere isn't a bad idea. After dinner, let's discuss what we can talk about at these demos."

"Speaking of...I'm getting hungry." Sendi said. "Let's head back to the apartment and I'll start dinner."

As Sendi finished putting away the dishes, Matu said. "I don't think we can get away with praising the local area as we really don't know much about it and we certainly haven't seen any of the tourist attractions."

"You're right about that." Rexx agreed. "I think the best we can do is play innocent and ask for recommendations about the local highlights."

"You mean like where's good to eat, and what's interesting to see that we can tell the folks back home? That kind of stuff?" Sendi asked as she joined them at the table.

"Yeah." Rexx nodded. "That kind of stuff, if we have to do small talk. We should show that we are interested in their country, their culture...show them we care about them and we're not just doing this for the money."

"Well, we had talked about trying to help out the smaller miners by providing them with a better product." Matu reminded.

"Yeah. That's true...and I agree." Rexx said. "But, our itinerary doesn't give us a lot of information on who is who. We don't really know which are the big guys and which are the ones who are struggling to make a profit."

"I guess that's where the small talk is going to pay off." Sendi said. "We'll have to chat with them before we do the demo so that we show the enhanced model to the right guys."

"Hmm, right." Rexx thought a moment. "We don't really want to have both units set up, because it will be obvious that one will outperform the other. I'm thinking we have a short meeting in the morning to see what their needs are, and that will give us the opportunity to assess whether they're a big company or not. Then we take a lunch break...Sendi, you and I can keep talking with them during lunch, while Matu sets up the correct unit...then we do the demo after lunch and continue the discussion for as long as it takes. How's that sound?"

"OK, so, in the morning, we meet with one of the potential buyers. Are we ready? Any thoughts?" Rexx asked.

"Well. I just hope we don't come across as being too strong." Sendi said.

"Strong?"

"Well, you know, too hard sell, pushy, or something like that."

"I think that if we keep the talk to addressing their needs, we should be alright."

"So, when and where are we?" Asked Matu.

"Oh, I've got the info right here." Rexx picked up his phone. "The company's booked a room at a business conference center downtown. The meeting's set for ten and the custodian will let us in at eight. That should give us time to get our stuff organized."

"What about the lunch?" Sendi asked.

"The conference center has a nice restaurant and the company has already made the reservations. We've got the room for the entire week as we have several companies to see."

"What about our stuff?" Matu asked. "I'm not happy about leaving these units in a conference room...locked or not. I don't want anyone to have access to the enhanced unit."

"They gave me a map of the center. There's a back door to the room we're using that opens directly onto the parking garage. So, we'll be able to keep whatever we want in the van and access it as need be. We can leave the brochures and other non-essentials in the room."

"I guess that takes care of everything, then." Sendi commented.

"Not quite." Rexx added. "There's one more detail." He got up and walked into the hall.

Matu and Sendi looked at each other questioningly.

"What?" Matu asked.

Sendi shrugged.

Rexx reappeared carrying three large boxes marked "Samaya's Clothiers".

"What?" Sendi asked.

"Business attire...for the three of us." Rexx opened the top box and displayed a folded suit, dress shirts, ties, socks and shoes."

"Nice!" Remarked Sendi. "What do I get?"

"Here's yours." Rexx opened the middle box. "It appears to be a very nice dress with matching shoes...and..." He opened a smaller box. "Jewelry and perfume." He opened the bottle and smelled it. "Very nice...light and vaguely floral."

"Wow!" She laughed. "I guess they really want us to impress."

"Oh, and there's also this." Rexx opened a large envelope and dumped the contents onto the table. "Badges...with the company logo and our names. We, apparently keep all of these throughout our tour."

"How do you feel about this demonstration Mr. Magaleye? Is it up to the standards of what you need?" Rexx asked.

"Yes. I think so. Though it is a bit on the pricey level."

"I understand. It is a prestige item. Though it will increase your output, it's more to impress your customers with your ability to produce quality ore than to dramatically affect your yield. We do understand if you have some hesitancy and we would be glad to provide you any additional demonstrations."

"No, your demonstration has been quite adequate."

Rexx hesitated slightly. "So, are you interested in purchasing one of these units?"

He paused, then nodded slowly. "Do you mind if I take a few minutes to consult with my colleagues?"

"No, no problem what so ever...please...take all the time you need."

The representative left the room.

The three of them exchanged glances.

Sendi sighed. "Well, what do you think?"

"I think he'll go for it." Matu said. "There are a lot of big customers that want to see increased production from his mine."

Sendi nodded. "I see." She paused. "So, our jobs here...selling, well, promoting this product...will we get fired if he doesn't buy it?"

"Hmmp." Remarked Rexx. "I don't know...like, no clue, how important we are to this project. We have no background...how did we get here...were we hired...did we inherit the job...what?"

"Yeah." She acknowledged. "I really feel like we have no idea of what we are doing here."

"You mean like when you first arrived in the mountain?" Asked Matu.

Rexx and Sendi just looked at each other, and then laughed.

"Yeah." She said. "Exactly."

"Wow! You really nailed that." Added Rexx. "How do you do that? Analyze human behavior so well?"

Matu looked blank. "I donno...maybe it was something I learned in the journeying training."

"But, you always seem to know what's next."

"Do I?"

"Yeah, you do. Was that why it was so easy for you to take that huge step into the unknown just to be with us?"

Matu shook his head. "I really don't know. It just seemed to be the right thing to do."

Sendi sat still for a few moments. "What if...what if there really isn't any company?"

"Huh?" Asked Rexx.

"I mean...all we have is this gadget, a van, and lots of papers. We haven't met anyone, except this potential customer. OK, and the guys at the pub. We came here out of nowhere...literally, nowhere...into this life that we know nothing about. Is it real, or all made up, you know...make believe, like a children's play?" She paused. "We have looked into the void, and run screaming back into life."

"Yeah." Murmured Matu quietly. "We did."
Rexx just fell into silence.

A few minutes later, Mr. Magaleye returned with a few of his associates.

"Sir," Rexx began. "Is there anything further that we can say to better address your needs?"

"Hmmm..." He paused. "You said the lead time on delivery was weeks?"

"Yes. That's true. Depending on the delivery location, it could take several weeks. These units are made to order, which normally isn't the issue, as manufacture is only a few days. But, the availability of a carrier in remote areas can definitely cause a problem."

"I see." Mr. Magaleye crossed to the unit still humming on idle. He touched the controls lightly. Then stood still, contemplating the unit.

The three exchanged glances.

"You say you don't have any of these in stock."

"The only items we stock are the demo units for our representatives' use. The reason is that each customer has slightly different needs that are then custom installed into their respective units."

"I see." He repeated, with a nod, and paused. "We like what we've seen with this unit. And you've said that this particular unit has been enhanced. Could you go into a little more detail on those enhancements?"

"We have taken the initiative..." Matu leapt in. "...to make some internal adjustments to the power source of this particular unit which has greatly increased the efficiency of its output. After speaking with you this morning and understanding your particular situation and your relationship with your end users and their time-frame, we took the liberty to demonstrate this unit instead of the standard one. Our thought, should you agree, would be to offer you this unit instead of a factory issued one. Our company has given us the go-ahead to sell any demonstration unit at a discounted price. Our only requirement would be that the customer not take possession of the unit until the end of our presentations at the end of this week."

Sendi pulled Rexx to one side. "Can we do that?" She whispered.

Rexx glanced at his phone. "Replacement units are already in a local warehouse." He whispered back.

"Oh...huh? How?"

Rexx shrugged.

"Oh." She whispered.

"I see." Mr. Magaleye said. "Very well, we will accept your offer."

"Wonderful! I am sure you will be well pleased with your decision. I will have the main office draw up the paperwork and they will contact you directly with the payment information. Once all has been approved, we will contact you to get the particulars for the delivery of your unit.

As Rexx showed Mr. Magaleye and his associates out of the conference room and shook their hands goodbye, Matu hastened to Sendi. "We'd better get them to send a replacement unit fast."

Sendi held up Rexx's phone and pointed to the message.

"What?!" Matu exclaimed. "How??"

Sendi smiled. "I asked the same question."

"Why is he doing this? Isn't he past this 'talent scout' thing? Haven't we satisfied his curiosity yet?"

"I don't know. Unless, he's just trying to help us in this 'crash course' life thing."

"OK." Matu shook his head. "Maybe you're right."

Rexx joined them. "Guess we'd better pick up a unit on the way back to the apartment so we can modify it...we might need it for tomorrow's demo."

"Should we get more than one?" Sendi asked.

"Nah, we don't need to get too far ahead. It only takes a few minutes to process it."

Matu retrieved the paperwork from the printer and affixed it to the unit. "Well, that takes care of that. Guess we should keep this unit at the apartment until we get the address to deliver it to. I don't feel secure just leaving it in the van in the garage."

"Well, I guess that does it." Rexx commented as he locked the conference room door.

Matu loaded the units and boxes of brochures into the van. "Yep, three fat cats ordered directly from the factory and two special deals for the needy ones. Pat and Mike were sure right about those diamond guys. They really ate it up."

"You know, speaking of...I could use a cold beer right about now." Rexx admitted.

"How about we park the van at the apartment and take a walk over to that pub? We could chat with those guys a bit and let them know how things went."

"A little more 'chit-chat' practice?" Sendi smirked.

"Exactly!"

"I really feel that we did well with small talk during those business deals. We got to where it seemed that they felt they were comfortable with us and we could quickly assess their needs, and then everything went smoothly from there." Matu added. "I feel like I can actually talk to people now."

"Yeah. Me, too." Sendi nodded. "Though, I'm still a little hesitant when it comes to talking about back story...since we really don't have any, at least that we can talk about, and I hate trying to make stuff up. I wish I could be a little quicker on shifting the conversation to something current."