

Autok and the others sat with the seers in their residence. Matu recounted their cleansing of the Alcaad's grave.

"That is very good." Moicha said and the other two seers nodded in approval. "Every act of cleansing will help our mountain...and us." He emphasized.

"Can you tell us anything from your journeys?" Autok inquired.

Moicha sighed heavily. "Yes, and no. Our mountain speaks in a language that is not easy for a human mind to understand. So, we must proceed very slowly and carefully as to not misunderstand nor be misunderstood."

"I see." Autok replied.

"We touched for a brief moment in the mountain's experience that would cover many human lifetimes. It has been difficult to bring that to much fewer words." He paused. "At one point in an age before human time, but after that of desert creatures, a small entity entered through an opening in the mountain. It was observed, but it did no harm, so the mountain overlooked its existence. We, also, do no harm and are permitted to inhabit this world. Even the miners are of such a small irritant that they are also permitted."

"The miners are not an irritant? But, they carve holes in the mountain." Interrupted Sendi.

"We have also made holes. But the mountain is large and its roots are deep, very very deep. A few holes are tolerated. It is as if a small insect burrows into a single leaf on a very large tree."

"This entity..." He continued. "...made its home in a cavern where water filtered through the mountain rock. But there was no sustenance for it there. It needed not the water nor the rock save as a place of refuge. So, it took to the desert to seek nourishment. There it found an energy that could allow it to slowly grow. When it returned to its place of shelter, the mountain became aware of a difference, a feeling of discontent, a noxious odor in the place where the entity dwelt. The mountain did not understand the source of this feeling other than association with the entity. In its search for the cause, it touched upon the thoughts of the smaller rock outcroppings which formed its neighbors in the surrounding desert. It entreated its neighbors to observe the entity. Having done so, the outcroppings relayed that the entity was observed to be feeding upon the energies given off by many of the small desert creatures. If a fox surprised a rabbit, the rabbit gave off an energy that the entity would swoop down on and absorb. This continued on and the entity slowly grew in size, and as it did, it also grew in strength. It came to the point of not needing the fox to startle the rabbit. It came to be able to alter its appearance such that the rabbit upon seeing the entity, readily gave off its energies."

"It was feeding on its fear?" Sendi asked.

"Yes. Now the mountain did not know fear and was not able to prevent the entity from dwelling in its cavern. Sending rock slides did not affect it as it had no substance. Its appearance was as a cold dark mist."

"That's what I saw!" Sendi exclaimed.

"You saw the entity?" Moicha asked.

"Yes. Or at least, I think I did...after we tended the grave of the Alcaad, we explored a little further and came to a lake. Above the water, my flashlight briefly lit up what appeared to be a dark cloud. But, when I panned the light back over it, I couldn't find it."

"Did it approach you or cause you fear?"

"No. As I said, I couldn't find it again. I wasn't afraid...more, just curious."

“Perhaps your light startled it and it sought shelter. At least you were not harmed.”

“Yes. Sorry, I interrupted you. Please continue with your findings.”

“There is no problem, and you have given us valuable information. It confirms our understanding of our mountain’s thoughts. And it indicates that the entity still exists.” He paused. “Much time passed without change in the existence between the mountain and the entity. Then there came from the sky a bright and thunderous force...a stone of great size fell to the ground and new entities emerged from its interior.” He paused to explain. “We understand this as a reference to the Alcaads’ arrival.”

Rexx and Sendi nodded in agreement. “We knew that they came from a distant star system.” She said.

“But, we didn’t know why.” Rexx added. “We did get the impression that they were escaping from an oppression during our journeying session.”

“That would explain the next message. The entity took great interest in these new arrivals. They provided more energy than the desert creatures. And their energy had many facets and refinements. It offered flavors that the entity had not encountered before.”

“Fear...other dark emotions.” Mused Sendi. “Things like anger, hate, etc. The colony would be in constant fear of being found by their oppressors. It would have been physically draining for them to live with these emotions.”

“Exactly...but as more time elapsed, the new arrivals built their home within the shallow roots of the mountain and had begun to stop producing their energies.”

“They felt more secure as their pursuers failed to arrive.”

“So, the entity used its ability to manifest as the shapes that had caused the small desert creatures to release their energies. But, this failed to work. The new arrivals were physically much larger and stronger. They resisted the manifestations. The entity was forced to return to its previous prey. This sustained it, but only adequately. Its hunger desired the new arrivals’ energies. But, as it hunted the small desert creatures, it began to observe how they hunted. The fox frightened the rabbit, whose fear fed the entity, but the fox was fed by the rabbit it killed. The entity began to experiment and found ways to add substance to its manifestations. It learned how to both appear to be the fox and become the fox. It ate the rabbit’s fear and learned how to eat the rabbit. It grew to like the new flavors of flesh and blood. It also became aware that the rabbit released yet another kind of energy at the point when it ceased to move. One that it came to desire greatly. These new energies gave it added strength and the new strength enhanced its abilities of substantial manifestation. It could now become larger and much more powerful. It also became aware that it would have to be cautious that it did not maintain substance or the mountain could crush it.”

Rexx and Sendi exchanged a quick glance as he mimicked holding the blast weapon.

“The entity experimented until it found a manifestation that could overpower one of the new arrivals. The energies that the entity consumed from this victory satiated it for a long time. At first the new arrivals expressed agitation over the loss of one of their kind, but, they could not find the missing member, and as the entity was satisfied, the loss was not repeated and was deemed accidental. A very long time elapsed before the entity again became hungry, so that the next loss was also not great enough of an incident to create alarm among the new arrivals.”

“I wonder how many were killed before they became aware that the entity existed.” Sendi mused.

“That is something that we will probably never know.” Moicha quietly replied.

"When the tribe arrived at the mountain, the entity sought more prey. Which brings us to where we are now." He concluded.

"And where...precisely...is that?" Rexx asked glumly.

"I think what we need to do now is find some way to communicate with the Alcaad. So that maybe together we can find some way to eliminate or remove this entity." She proceeded to describe the translation device that they found amongst their supplies. "And, so you see, we have a potential tool, but it has to be taught in order to work. Rexx believes that we need to do this in order that there will be a translation device in the future."

"I did say 'maybe'." Rexx said defensively.

"Yeah, well...anyhow, I think we may be back to journeying to establish a connection. We recorded both the child's shrine and the Alcaad's remains as a hope to demonstrate a common ground."

"I also recorded the Alcaad's grave after we tended it." Rexx added. "To show our respect."

Oh! I didn't notice." Sendi remarked.

"It was during our moment of silence." Rexx replied. "I didn't want to distract."

"Yes. I think those recordings will be of great help in establishing a common ground." Moicha agreed. "But, how to make a connection...our last attempt was not very successful."

"Though, ours was...in a way...as we learned some things about them and there was no violent reaction on their part." She replied. "So, I'm thinking maybe we try again. What do you think, Rexx?"

"Sure. It's worth a try. We could use agreeing to a temporary truce as a mission intent."

"Very well. I will alert Mana so that she can monitor you. When would you like to do this?" Moicha asked.

"Well, I think as soon as possible. Rexx?"

"Sure."

"So, whenever Mana's available. We don't want to take her away from her duties." Sendi said.

"I will have her make arrangements and let you know."

"Thank you."

"Yes." Rexx added. "And, thank you for all of the information you shared."

"Are you both comfortable and ready to begin?" Mana asked.

"I am." Sendi said.

"So am I." Rexx echoed.

"Moicha has related all that has been learned about the Alcaad and the entity since we were last together. There is indeed a lot of information here. Have you a direction that you wish to proceed in?"

"We were thinking of suggesting a ceasefire." Rexx suggested.

"Yes." Mana said. "But, first you have to make contact. How do you plan to do that? In your previous journey, you only observed from a distance."

"Hmm, I hadn't thought about that." Rexx admitted.

"The others received a rather hostile welcome."

"How to approach without raising an alarm...I suppose waving a white flag wouldn't work?"

"Maybe...maybe not. But, do you wish to convey a surrender?"

"No. I guess not." Rexx answered. "Do you have a suggestion?"

"I'm afraid I'm not the one to make a suggestion. It should come from inside your mind and your feelings. Please, take a few minutes to think about how you would approach someone that you don't know with the possibility that that person may not wish to communicate with you. And rely heavily on your emotional side as opposed to the rational. Think about how young children meet."

"I think this is going to be harder than we thought." Sendi remarked.

"Well, just let your imaginations run for a few minutes and see if anything comes to mind."

After a few minutes, Sendi said. "I got an image of a young girl standing with her hands to her sides but slightly forward with the palms of her open hands facing forward. I am approaching you and I hold no weapons. But, not advancing...just standing and waiting."

"That sounds very good to me. Images are much more convincing than words. You're not presenting a threat, but waiting for the other person to make a decision." Mana commented. "Rexx, do you have anything?"

"Not as good as hers, I'm afraid."

"Well, think about it a little longer. I think that for this journey, it would be sufficient to only present yourselves to the Alcaad and wait for their reaction. We can present the concept of meeting to discuss opinions only after there is the desire for dialog. Take some time to relax and try to envision yourself in the presence of one of the Alcaad...standing, waiting for their response. Try to display a calm mind, devoid of emotion and see where that leads. OK? I will be right here, and as before, if you feel you need to end the session, simply return your consciousness to here, feel the couch you are laying on, smell the fragrance of the flowers beyond the window, breathe deeply, and all will be as normal."

Rexx and Sendi both settled down on their couches and began to prepare. After a few minutes, Mana checked their breathing and settled herself to wait.

As Sendi and Rexx both began to stir, Mana said softly. "Slowly...slowly orient yourselves to your surroundings. Don't try to move too quickly."

"Mmm-huh." Murred Sendi. Rexx just grunted softly.

"Rest for a few minutes and gather your thoughts. Your experiences will fall into place as you allow them their space."

After a bit, Sendi slowly stretched her arms and opened her eyes. Rexx sat up and dropped his legs to the floor. He rubbed his temples. Sendi followed to a sitting position as well.

Mana pointed to a basket on the nearby table. "Have some food and drink. It will help to refresh you."

As Sendi slowly sipped her tea, she commented. "I'm not sure what really happened, if anything. I tried to imagine myself as clearly as possible as to how I appear now and in the position that I described before as non-threatening. I tried to imagine myself standing before one of the Alcaad. But, in my imagining my eyes were closed. I guess that's because my eyes were closed...I mean my physical eyes. I felt like I was being observed. But, no matter how I tried, I couldn't open my eyes to see who was there. Weird."

Rexx put down his drink. "I tried to also imagine myself standing in front of one of them, but I was imaging myself seeing the Alcaad's remains, then the grave as we cleaned it, then the child's shrine, trying to tie the experiences together. I also felt like someone was watching my series of events. But, I couldn't see anyone there."

"So, you both felt watched, but couldn't see anyone. Does that prompt any other thoughts?" Mana asked.

"I think 'observed' might be a better description. There was a sense of anticipation or expectation of something further." Sendi added. "Though, in my case, I didn't feel that it was in any way threatening...more, just curiosity."

"What about you, Rexx?" Mana asked.

"I guess more or less the same. I didn't get any real feeling of emotion attached to the observation."

"Anything else?"

"No. Not really."

"So, where do we go from here?" Sendi asked. "We presented our case, but didn't get any reply."

"Well, you may have to give them time to think things over." Mana replied. "I'm sure that being confronted in this manner might have come as a surprise, or even, a shock. They would have to have time to process the experience, just as you took time to process the experiences from your first encounter. And, speaking of which, neither of you has taken much time to reconsider this experience. Take some time to rethink what you have just said about your journey. See if there are any overlooked nuances."

"Hmm, you're right." Sendi agreed. "The 'I couldn't open my eyes' thing is kind of playing on my mind."

"Yeah, me too. I guess it was kind of like speaking to a recorder...not to a real person. I'm thinking about how Paimu saw the big bug. The Alcaad saw the seers and then, somehow, turned to Paimu. Was the Alcaad in a journeying or dreaming state? Or was he wide awake, walking around conscious? And, what about the one that I think I was addressing? The seers were journeying, but Paimu was wide awake...even eating, so he was very grounded."

"That's a lot of very good questions." Remarked Mana.

"Yeah. I have the same kind of questions about the one that I think I was addressing." Sendi added. "How would we know? And, how much difference would it make one way or the other?"

"Well, I would think being awake would have a much greater impact than being asleep or journeying, because anything there could be dismissed as a strange dream." Rexx suggested.

"Did either of you...think about this...have any feeling that your observer was in any way connecting with your message? When you observe an event, you contribute to it." Mana proposed.

"Yes. I had heard about that with experiments with atomic particles." Rexx said. "If the scientists conducting the experiments expected or wanted a particular result, the stronger their desire was, the more likely that would be the result."

"Really?" Sendi asked.

"Yes. What Rexx said is true. The observer is part of the equation and the mind is a very powerful tool."

"I'll have to think about that." Sendi paused. "Since I couldn't open my eyes, I couldn't see if anyone was there or not. But, I felt as though I was being observed. So, does that mean that my observer was giving me feedback?"

"Yeah, same here." Rexx added.

"I would guess that it was probably so." Mana replied. "Now, can you analyze the quality or flavor of that feedback?"

"Wow..." Sendi began. "...now, I didn't feel threatened, so if it was curiosity, then he or she was likely considering the possibility of the validity of my message. Would that be a fair conclusion?"

“It might be too soon to use the word ‘conclusion’. But, likely ‘possibility’ is fair...you, Rexx?”

“Hmm, my message was more complex, so there may have been confusion on the observer’s viewpoint...I got the feeling of ‘blank stare’. Still though, that’s better than rejection, I guess.”

“I’m thinking we may want to try a follow up journey.” Sendi suggested.

“I think I agree.” Rexx echoed.

“Then, I would strongly suggest that you take some time to both rest and compose your intent for the next journey. Please take at least a few hours to thoroughly ground yourselves. Then send me word through Matu when you wish to reconvene and I will make arrangements.”

As they walked down the corridor away from the seers’ residence, Sendi paused by the rock ledge where they had sat before. She walked out and sat on the ledge. Rexx followed and sat next to her.

“Whatcha thinking?” He asked.

“Oh, I don’t know...it just seems like I sorta have an idea of what we need to do, but I have no idea of how to get from here to there. The big obstacle seems to be communication. And I have no idea how we get around it.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. It almost seems like the only way is through journeying.”

“So, we made our initial presentation, what do you think our next intent should be?”

“Let me think...” He leaned back against the rock wall and went silent.

Meanwhile, she quietly stared off into the distant desert.

Matu stuck his head through the opening. “There you guys are. I was coming to look for you. Mana said you had left the seers’ residence.”

“How did you know?” Rexx asked.

“We do have other communications beside foot traffic.” He held up a small radio phone. “So, what are you doing?”

“Speaking of...we’re trying to figure out how to attempt communications with the Alcaad.”

“Oh.” He sat down on the ledge. “Any luck?”

“No.” Rexx replied glumly. “We were hoping that presenting ourselves as non-threatening and showing that both the tribe and their people were suffering the same kind fate, that it would open a channel for understanding, but...”

“...but?” Matu continued.

“But, no response. Or, at least, no obvious response.”

“We thought we’d try again with a different intent.” Sendi added.

“And?”

“Well, that’s sort of where we are...at ‘and?’.”

“I see.” He stated.

“We need to figure out how to tell them about the entity. Then, maybe, we can work together to eliminate it. Then, maybe, there won’t be this war in the future...or something like that...I mean...we were assuming that they were the bad guys, and I’m guessing maybe that they think we are the bad guys, and somehow we need to tell them about the real bad guy...” She trailed off.

“Moicha’s explanation was pretty long. That’s a lot to put into a brief intent.”

"Yeah..." She continued. "...and I'm the only one that's seen it, at least, I think. We don't know whether any of the Alcaad has seen it and survived...and I don't want to give the impression that it is a weapon that I am in charge of against them, either."

"There is that." Rexx agreed.

"Aagh! This is so frustrating!" She buried her head in her hands.

"I know, Sendi, I know." He patted her shoulder.

"Here's a suggestion...see what you think of it." Matu began. "If you present to them the same as you did before and briefly describe what the entity has been doing and request communication with them...I don't know...but, maybe that's a start. Maybe that might prompt them to come forward."

"I guess it's worth a try." She said. "I can't come up with anything better."

"And..." Rexx continued. "We can always try again, if that doesn't go anywhere."

"Look..." Matu suggested. "...let's take a walk outside, and then get something to eat...get you well grounded...then with a clear head you can formalize your intent and I'll have Mana make the necessary arrangements. OK?"

"Sure." Said Rexx. "I think I could use a walk."

"Why don't we go over to the dome?" Sendi asked. "Maybe seeing it again might prompt some ideas for the intent."

Standing at the edge of the dome, Sendi was staring at the partially cleared section. "They don't seem to have been all that concerned with completely covering it back up, do they?"

"No." Rexx agreed. He removed a piece of brush to better see through the transparent dome.

"I'm getting an idea...I'm going to suggest meeting them here at the edge of the dome...saying that we know they're here and we're not going to do anything to harm their colony."

"That's bold." Matu said. "Maybe, even a bit reckless, I might add."

"Well, it's going to have to happen sooner or later."

"Yeah, but..." Rexx added. "...what if they come armed for a fight?"

"If they do, they do." She said. "How else do we prove our point?"

"Well, I don't know. What if..."

"What if, what if..." She cut him off. "We came here to right a wrong. I'm going to suggest it...and request an answer."

"We still have the communication issue." Matu ventured.

"Yeah, but, I think establishing a truce has to be a first step."

In the kitchen, Rexx poked at a piece of sausage.

"Do you still think it's a bad idea?" Sendi asked.

"Yes...I mean...I think we should go slowly, cautiously."

"OK, I get your meaning. I will go slowly. But, I think a physical meeting is necessary. I will gently suggest, not demand, and see what the reaction is."

"How soon do you want Mana to prepare for your session?" Matu asked, holding the radio phone.

"I would say soon, but whenever's convenient for her, you agree, Rexx?"

He nodded.

"OK, I'll call her." Matu walked to the open air ledge where the reception was better. A couple of minutes later, he returned. "She said to come up in about an hour, she's just finishing a lesson with one of her students. Oh, and to bring a basket of food and drink. I'll go arrange that."

“Good. That’ll give us time to refine our intent.” Sendi said. Matu turned back to the food preparation area. Turning to Rexx, she added. “I think we should both present the same image...a request to meet at a given time and show the translation device...for whatever it’s worth. I wish we could contact the person who is most in charge, but, I’m not sure how to approach that.”

“I’m kind of guessing that it might be the big guy that confronted Paimu. He seems to be very psychically inclined...for that matter, he would probably be the one who would be most likely to hear our signal.”

“True.” She acknowledged.

In the seers’ residence, Rexx and Sendi were just starting to stir as they returned from their journey. Matu sat patiently by as Mana repeated. “Remember, return slowly. Feel your surroundings. Enjoy the physical sensations and take a few deep breaths.”

Rexx’s eyes popped open. “Woah!” He exclaimed.

“Go easy, Rexx.” Mana reinforced. “Sendi’s not completely back yet.”

“Actually, I am.” She said softly. “I’m just trying to fully integrate what just happened.”

“I fully agree.” Rexx echoed. “I think I need a few minutes to think this through.”

“Take all the time you need.” Mana replied.

Matu got up and began to pace. “Matu, I think you’d better take that outside.” Mana chided.

“OK, OK, I’ll go out in the hall...I’m just anxious. Call me when they are ready to talk.”

Sendi chuckled softly.

After a few minutes, Rexx sat up. “How are you doing, Sendi?”

“I think I’m good.” She replied as she sat up.

“I’ll go get Matu...he won’t want to miss anything.” Mana volunteered. “Meanwhile, help yourselves to something to eat and drink.” She indicated the basket.

As Rexx and Sendi selected some rolls and tea, Mana returned with Matu in tow. “He was quite a way down the corridor.” She explained.

“So, what happened?” Matu pounced.

Sendi laughed, then said. “I think our request for meeting was granted...if I read the images correctly. I saw us together showing an unknown audience...we tried to suggest whoever was in charge, but I’m not sure if that was conveyed correctly...anyhow, we showed our translation device and pictured us standing by the dome. I pictured looking at the sky with the sun directly overhead. Then, we waited. There was a long pause. Then one of the Alcaad stepped forward and just stood there facing us. That’s about it.”

Matu turned to Rexx. “And, you?”

“Yeah, pretty much the same thing. We tried to rehearse our intent before hand so that we would be as spot on as we could be. I’m sure we had some slight variations in our experiences and interpretations, but, I’d say I got a similar response.”

“So, when is this meeting?”

“Well, since it’s currently late afternoon, I’d say tomorrow at noon.” Sendi replied.

“Who’s going to be there?”

“Hmm, I hadn’t thought about that. What do you think, Rexx?”

“Well, obviously us...and I guess anyone else that wants to.”

“Though, there shouldn’t be too many of us...we don’t want to appear to be an army.” Sendi qualified.

“Well, count me in!” Matu volunteered. “I’ve got to get some of the action...lately, I feel like just a tag along messenger boy.”

“Well, if you insist.” Sendi chuckled.

Rexx turned to Mana. “What do you think of all of this, Mana? You’ve been pretty quiet.”

“Yes, I have.” She replied. “This is a pretty monumental step. I do agree that it should be completely voluntary. And, I agree that it should not be a group of too many people. I am hesitant to approach any of the visionaries after their previous encounter with the Alcaad, and I would also be hesitant to be personally involved. You, two, seem to have a sort of protection, being not of our culture. I hope I am making my feelings understood.”

“Yes, you are, and I understand completely. This is, after all, our task...it’s why we were brought here.” He turned to Sendi. “What are your feelings?”

She nodded thoughtfully. “Yes, I agree, it is our task. Others can be involved later, once things are further in diplomatic process.”

“Hey!” Matu interjected. “What about me?”

“You’re sure?” Rexx asked.

“I went all the way to the Alcaad’s remains with you...that should count.” He demanded.

“OK, Matu, you are my brave soldier after all.” Smiled Sendi, emphasizing the “are”.

“Good!” He said grumpily.

Mana intervened. “I think though we should inform Moicha and Autok of your plans. They should know if things might possibly go astray and be prepared.”

“Yes.” Said Rexx. “That would be wise.”

“Then, I will inform them. You have enough to do to prepare for this meeting.