

“Well, what did they say?” Sendi asked, as Rexx came back into the kitchen.

“They were very understanding.” He said as he sat down. “They acknowledged that being on the road was a very hard way of life. We are to load up the van with all of their equipment and tools and a courier will pick it up in the morning. We will receive an extra month’s pay and we can stay in this apartment until the end of this month...and, of course, we can keep the clothes they provided for us.”

“So, all is good, huh?”

“Now, we just have to figure out what we are going to do.” Matu said. “Any thoughts?”

“Well, I think the first thing we need to do is to buy a car if we’re planning to travel, since the van goes away tomorrow.”

“Travel...visas!” Matu leapt up and ran off to their rooms.

“What...?” Sendi asked.

A moment later he returned with their documents. He dropped them on the table. “How do you like that? We’ve got extended visas. Just like that. Out of the blue.” He sat down. “Who would have thought?” He shook his head in slight disdain. “Sometimes it’s just too easy.”

“And, the rest of the time...” Rexx smirked. “...it’s not.”

“Yeah...tough as...” Sendi started, then paused. “I don’t know...what’s really tough?”

“Kangaroo tail.” Matu said absently.

“Huh?”

“It’s all muscle...takes forever to cook.”

“Oh. Uh, OK.” She exchanged a glance with Rexx. “Anyhow, mostly, life is tough.”

Matu nodded.

“So...” Rexx started. “I guess we should start sorting our stuff out from theirs and get the van loaded.”

Matu stood looking down into the tool box.

“What’cha doing?” Rexx asked, as Matu reached down into the box. He pulled out the Alcaad tool.

“Well, they’re certainly not getting this.” He held it up.

Rexx nodded his head in agreement. “You’re right! No, they’re not.” He laughed. “But, what are we going to do with it, now that we’re not enhancing mining units?”

Matu smiled. “I guess that’s for the future to tell us. Lovra did say it was for cutting and joining metals. I’m sure it will be handy if we become farmers.”

“Then there’s this.” Rexx held up the alien telephone. “If the Time Police is going to go back into the physical world, will we still be able to contact him through this?”

“Of course.” Said a voice from the ceiling. “Just because I’m physical, it doesn’t mean that our non-physical part won’t be available to you. We’ll always be there when you need us.”

“You’re here?” Asked Sendi. She laughed. “Oh, of course you are.”

“Yes. We have to look after our proteges.”

Matu set the last box on the floor of the van and closed the door. "Well, I guess that's the last of it." He handed the keys to Rexx.

"I'll call them and let them know it's ready." They walked back to the apartment as Rexx dialed the phone.

Inside, Sendi was organizing the remaining boxes.

"So, how much stuff do we have." Rexx asked.

"Not really a lot. There's just our clothes that were in our suitcases when we first arrived, the clothes the company gave us, and a few odds and ends souvenirs we've acquired along the way. It just kind of got spread out in all these boxes, because we had so much spare room in the van."

Rexx chuckled. "Souvenirs, yeah...glad you thought of buying those towels. Some of these apartments sure do skimp on bath towels...one towel for three people is a bit meager." He shook his head.

Matu surveyed the lot. "Well, all this will easily fit in the trunk of a standard car. We shouldn't need anything special...just enough room for the three of us to be comfortable."

Rexx nodded. "So, shall we go shopping? I think I remember seeing some car showrooms a couple of kilometers down the road...that's not too much of a walk."

Sendi paused to look at a sign outside of one of the dealers.

"Are you actually reading that?" Rexx asked.

"Uh, huh...I think so. I thought I recognized this alphabet and the occasional words we've picked up. Of course, these photos help." She pointed.

"I thought you didn't have language training."

"Well, not formally. But, I guess it came through in reading technical manuals, listening to lectures, and other related stuff."

"So, what's it say?"

"Oh, it lists the features of this brand of car..." She pointed. "Roomy cargo hold, comfy seats...Oh! The seats are heated, too, for 'winter comfort'.....stuff like that."

Matu stared at the sign. "Well, it's Greek to me...sort of."

"What do you mean?" Rexx asked.

"Looks kind of like Greek...we learned some of the Greek alphabet in school...used it in math and physics."

"Yeah..." Sendi said. "They still used them in our time...uh, will use...oh, whatever...you know what I mean."

"So, is it Greek?"

"No. It's very close to what I knew as Russian...though there's a few letters I don't recognize."

"Well, our time is a few centuries in the future." Rexx commented. "I'm sure there's been some changes during that time."

"So, can you speak it?" Matu asked.

"Yeah...a little, I think." She shrugged. "I knew some people from there...uh, here, future here, I guess...when I was in intelligence training. Smart people...knew a lot of technical stuff."

"Well, since I'm the car guy, you'll have to translate some of it for me."

"Hope I can." She looked skeptical. "Since I know nothing about cars, the internal stuff, I mean, you know, how they work."

“Hmm.” Rexx said.

“What?”

“What you said before about learning the local language...I guess it’s about time we should start seriously considering that.”

She nodded. “Though if we’re traveling around the country, I don’t see much opportunity for studying.”

“True...maybe something on the computer...remote lessons?”

“We could start...” Matu said. “...with you teaching us what you already know.”

“OK. I guess that’s better than nothing. But, don’t get your hopes up. What I learned is centuries from now. No idea if I can even pronounce anything in today’s language.”

“Well, it’s a start. Point to some of the alphabet and tell us how you think it’s pronounced. We’ll figure it out in conversation. At least we can use the translators to correct it as we go.”

“Hmm...” Rexx mused.

“What?” Sendi asked.

“With what’s coming in the future and we don’t know when any of it will start, I just got the feeling that we should make a point of learning anything we can...no matter how unusual or trivial it might seem. We don’t know what might be useful or important.”

“Did somebody just put that thought into your head?” She chuckled.

“Maybe.” Rexx nodded.

“I think we had better pay good attention to these ‘thoughts’.” Matu added.