

THE UNDERFOOT

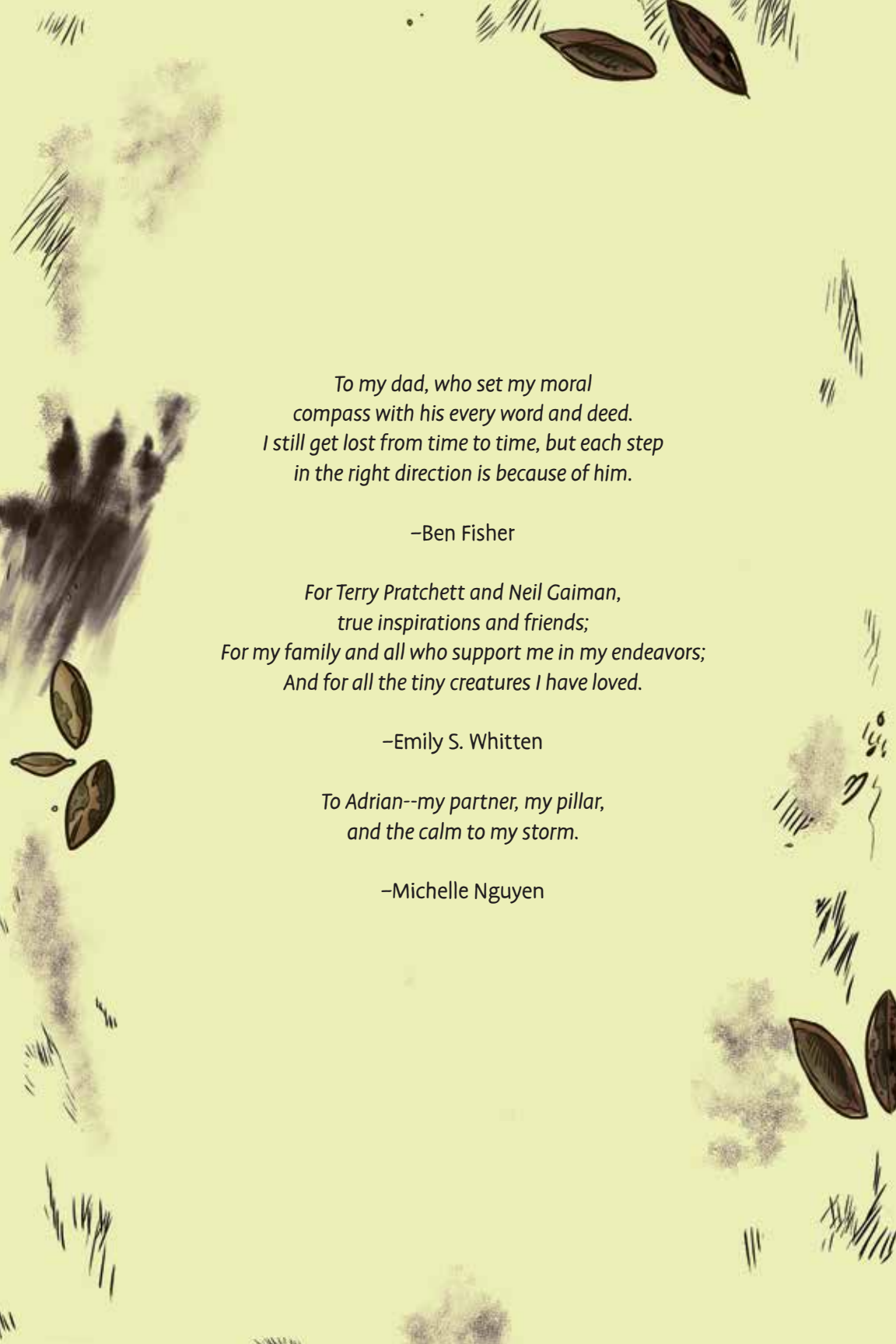
the mighty deep



Ben Fisher • Emily S. Whitten • Michelle Nguyen

THE
UNDERFOOT

the mighty deep



*To my dad, who set my moral
compass with his every word and deed.
I still get lost from time to time, but each step
in the right direction is because of him.*

–Ben Fisher

*For Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman,
true inspirations and friends;
For my family and all who support me in my endeavors;
And for all the tiny creatures I have loved.*

–Emily S. Whitten

*To Adrian--my partner, my pillar,
and the calm to my storm.*

–Michelle Nguyen

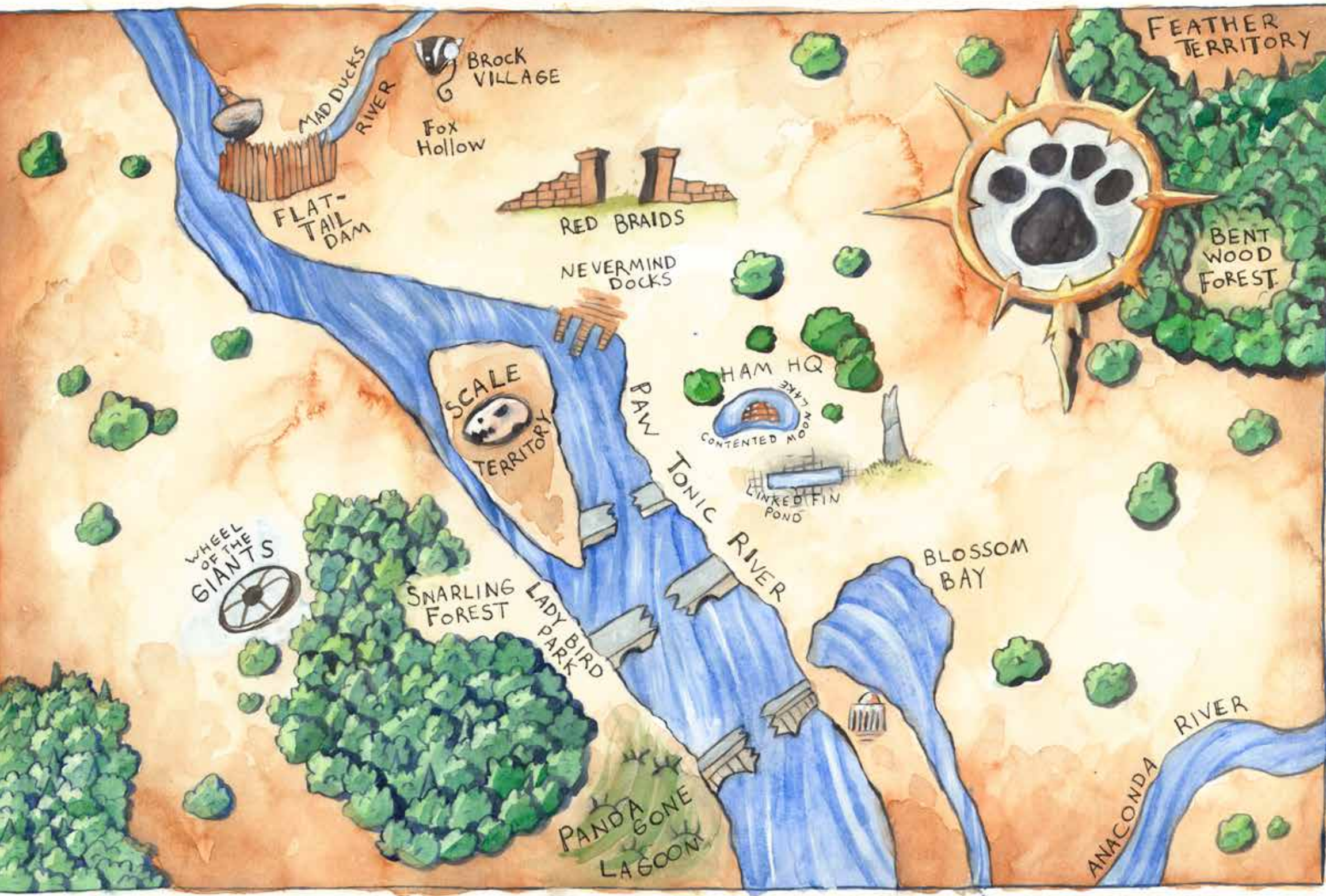
THE
UNDERFOOT
the mighty deep

BOOK 1

Written by Ben Fisher and Emily S. Whitten
Illustrated by Michelle Nguyen
Lettered by Thom Zahler



CARACAL™



FEATHER TERRITORY

MAD DUCKS RIVER

BROCK VILLAGE

Fox Hollow

FLAT-TAIL DAM

RED BRAIDS

NEVERMIND DOCKS

SCALE TERRITORY

PAW TONIC RIVER

HAM HQ

CONTENTED MOON LAKE

LINKED-FIN POND

BENT WOOD FOREST

WHEEL OF THE GIANTS

SNARLING FOREST

LADY BIRD PARK

BLOSSOM BAY

PANDA-GONE LAGOON

ANACONDA RIVER





Breeds and Differentiated Traits for Use with Hamster Adaptation Methods: Scientific Testing for Environmental Research

Syrian (Mesocricetus auratus) AKA "golden hamster" - Their cheek pouches, the largest among hamster breeds, are generally used for food storage, but unconfirmed reports indicate they can also be filled with air and used as flotation "pontoons." A hamster's head can triple in size when its cheeks are filled. The Syrian breed includes a "teddy bear" variant, which requires constant grooming to avoid tangles.

Campbell's dwarf (Phodopus campbelli) Named after C.W. Campbell, who discovered this Mongolian species in 1902. Notable attributes include small ears, a high-strung personality and lactose intolerance. The Campbell's dwarf has extremely poor eyesight and terrible depth perception, but compensates with extra scent glands on its face and cheek pouches.

Djungarian (Phodopus sungorus) The most "mellow" and easily tamed dwarf breed, with powerful back legs and fur that changes color during winter to hide from predators. Highly resistant to cold weather, the Djungarian can regulate the heat of its internal core to survive temperatures as low as -48.5 °F.

Chinese (Cricetulus griseus) Their long prehensile tails and delicate builds make them extraordinary climbers who can cling to most textured surfaces. Unlike most hibernators, the Chinese hamster awakens periodically to eat its stored food. They are also surprisingly fast for their size, making them difficult to catch.

Roborovski (Phodopus roborovskii) AKA "Robo hamster" - These are the smallest breed of dwarf hamsters, but are remarkable sprinters and can run the scaled equivalent of four human marathons every night. Because of their size, the Robo hamster has a reputation for being an escape artist. They are very difficult to tame.

All breeds proving useful for studying human survival during Projected Events. Manipulated differentiations, genetic expectations. Affects breath capacity, bone density, muscle mass, resilience levels, agility, and adaptability to atmospheric pressure variations are of particular interest.

Crepuscular and nocturnal behavior has begun to measurably shift.

Never wake a sleeping hamster. They consider this very rude!

Project: H.A.M.S.T.E.R.
V. Sallaska, Team Lead

CLASSIFIED

Condition Assessment - Specimen CRK-037

Condition healthy; alert; hyperactive

Size 17 cm, 125 g

Diet nutrition pellets, seeds, fresh greens

Notable modifications genetically induced remission of fifth digit appears to accelerate development of opposable thumb

Production of Genetically Modified Syrian Hamsters by Pronuclear Injection

The pronuclear injection technique was established with mice to introduce foreign genetic materials into one-cell stage embryos. The introduced genetic material births transgenic species with desirable mutations that



CHAPTER ONE











**GET
BACK!**



I HAVE BUSINESS TO DISCUSS, HAP.

WE'LL DISCUSS IT OUTSIDE.

AND I SWEAR BY *CHRRK* AND ALL THE GIANTS-THAT-WERE, THIS HAD BETTER BE IMPORTANT.



JUST LOOK AT THIS MESS.

WE KEEP OUR ENTRANCE HIDDEN FOR A REASON, MELL.

THE DEBRIS WAS SCATTERED PRIOR TO MY ARRIVAL.



OH? SO SOME OTHER CLUMSY OAF TRIPPED THE WIRE AND WOKE THE WHOLE BURROW?



IN FAIRNESS TO THE GUILTY PARTY--*WHOMEVER* THAT MAY BE--YOUR CONTRACTIONS ARE RATHER DIMINUTIVE.

WHICH, IN POINT OF FACT, IS THE *VERY REASON* I'M HERE. WE HAVE NEED OF YOUR CETE'S... *UNIQUE SERVICES*.

CLICK!



I HAD A *FEELING* YOU WERE GOING TO SAY THAT.

OKAY, THEN: WHAT CAN THE

HAMSTER AQUATIC MERCENARIES

DO FOR YOU?

THUCK!



YOU'RE RIGHT. THE ENTRANCE WILL BE PUZZLE-LOCKED AND THE PASSAGES FILLED WITH TRAPS, WHICH IS-- WAS--OATES'S SPECIALTY.

WYNTON, ADD A **COMPLEX MECHANISM APTITUDE TEST** TO THE PUPS' REGIMEN. WE'LL NEED TO FIND A **REPLACEMENT** WHO CAN GET US INSIDE.

WE'LL NEVER **REPLACE** HER, HAP. ESPECIALLY NOT WITH A **PUP**. BUT I'LL BRING YOU THE BEST WE'VE GOT.

THE CURRENT'S STRONG BETWEEN US AND THE DAM, SO WE'LL HAVE TO LAUNCH FROM THE **NEVERMIND DOCKS**. WE HAVE A LONG HIKE AHEAD OF US, AND I STILL HAVEN'T TOLD YOU THE **WORST PART**.

THE **FLAT-TAILS** RECRUITED AN **EAGLE**.

SOMEONE'S TELLING **STORIES**. FEATHER AND FUR **NEVER** WORK TOGETHER.

IT SEEMS THEY DO NOW. SO WE'LL NEED OUR BEST GUNNER.

WELL, IF I'M GOIN' UP AGAINST A **BALDIE**, I GET T' WEAR MY HAT.

WEAR WHATEVER YOU'D LIKE, BUDDY, JUST GET THE **JOB DONE**.

WE ARE THE **UNDERFOOT**. **SMALLER** THAN THE GIANTS' OTHER CHILDREN. WITH THINNER HIDES AND SHORTER CLAWS. YET WE HAVE SURVIVED BY TRADING THE UNIQUE SKILLS WE **DO** HAVE FOR FAVORS FROM OUR LARGER FUR BRETHREN.

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO DISRUPT THIS BALANCE OR LOSE A SINGLE ALLY, SO WE WILL ACCEPT THE MISSION, FEATHERS OR NO. IS THAT **UNDERSTOOD?**

YOU **HEARD** THE MATRIARCH. THE GIANTS--THAT WERE LEFT THE WORLD IN OUR PAWS. LET'S PROVE WE DESERVED IT.

DISMISSED.

H.A.M.
COUNTDOWN:
SEVENTY-TWO
HOURS UNTIL
OPERATION
LAUNCH.

ISH THERE
SHOMETHING
YOU BRATSH
WANNA SHAY TO
MY FASHE?

WE DIDN'T
MEAN
ANYTHING BY
IT, MAC.

YEAH, HONEST
AND FOR TRUE.
WE JUST--

YOU JUSHT
WANT TO KNOW
WHY I HAVEN'T
GRADUATED
PUP-SHKOOL
YET?

YES!

NO!

I MEAN,
NO?

I **EXPECT**
THIS FROM
YOU, MAC.
BUT NOT THE
TWINS.

ALL **THREE**
OF YOU JUST
EARNED
DEBRIS DUTY
AFTER SWIM
PRACTICE.

YOU PUPS SHOULD
BE **ASHAMED**
OF YOURSELVES.



IT WASN'T MAC'S FAULT.



WHAT WAS THAT, LITTLE ONE?

IT WASN'T HER FAULT. TORI AND ANI WERE MAKING FUN OF HER, AND THEN--

RUBY, DO YOU KNOW THE ONLY THING I LIKE LESS THAN A BULLY?

A TATTLE-TAIL. SO YOU'LL BE TAKING MAC'S SPOT ON THE DEBRIS CREW.



ANYONE ELSE HAVE SOMETHING TO ADD?

HOW ABOUT YOU, BECK? ANY LITTLE SECRETS YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH THE CLASS?

NO, SIR!



GOOD.

EVERYONE IN THE WATER FOR TEN LAPS, THEN REPORT TO THE CLASSROOM FOR A SPECIAL PROJECT.

BECK, YOU LEAD THE PACING. AND RUBY?



NO SWIMMIES.

SEVENTY-ONE HOURS UNTIL OPERATION LAUNCH.



WELCOME, TRAINEES. I TRUST YOUR SWIM WAS--

RUBY, WHAT HAVE WE SAID ABOUT WET FUR IN THE CLASSROOM?



I DON'T SWIM AS FAST AS THE OTHERS, MISTER WYNTON. I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO DRY OFF.



YOU ARE TRAINING TO BE AN **AQUATIC** MERCENARY, RUBY.

IF YOU CAN'T KEEP UP, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD TRANSFER BACK TO MAINTENANCE CLASS.

THEY WON'T TAKE ME BACK. MISTER ELTON SAYS I'M TOO DISRUPTIVE. BUT I WAS JUST FIXING THINGS!



WE'LL DISCUSS THAT LATER. RIGHT NOW, WE HAVE A **VERY** SPECIAL GUEST TO HELP EXPLAIN THOSE **BOXES** IN FRONT OF YOU.

ONE OF THE **FINEST** H.A.M. TO EVER HOLD THE POSITION OF AEGIS.

TALLIS!



IS IT *TRUE* YOU ONCE FOUGHT A CATFISH ALL BY *YOURSELF*?

A GOOD H.A.M. ALWAYS RELIES ON *TEAMMATES* WHEN--

HOW MANY PUSH-UPS CAN YOU DO?

DIDN'T YOU *JUST* ASK A QUESTION?

THAT WAS *ANI*. I'M *TORI*.

I FORGOT WE HAD TWINS IN THIS CLASS! HAS YOUR *PSI-LINK* MANIFESTED YET, OR--

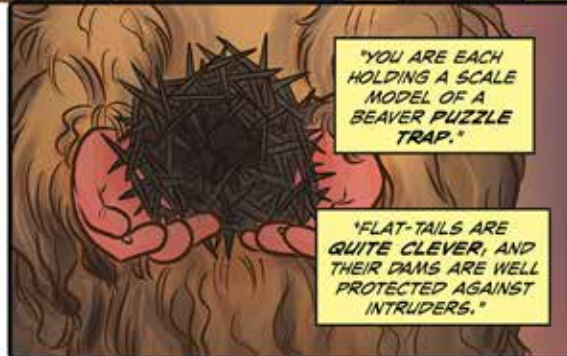
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE YOU NEED IT, BECK. WE'RE ALL EXPECTING *BIG THINGS* FROM YOU.

WHAT STRENGTH TRAINING WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?



BUT I'LL ANSWER *ALL* YOUR QUESTIONS LATER.

FOR NOW, LET'S GET STARTED.



"YOU ARE EACH HOLDING A SCALE MODEL OF A BEAVER PUZZLE TRAP."

"*FLAT-TAILS* ARE QUITE *CLEVER*, AND THEIR DAMS ARE WELL PROTECTED AGAINST *INTRUDERS*."



"INSIDE EACH BOX IS AN *EGGSHELL* FRAGMENT. YOUR ASSIGNMENT IS TO *RETRIEVE* THE FRAGMENT, *UNBROKEN*, WITHOUT SETTING OFF THE TRAP."

"YOU HAVE *THREE DAYS*."



OH, AND ONE *LAST* THING:

THE PRIZE FOR SUCCESS...



"...IS *GRADUATION*."



SEVENTY HOURS UNTIL
OPERATION LAUNCH.

THERE
YOU ARE, HAP.
BEEN LOOKING
ALL OVER FOR
YOU.

HEY,
IVES.

JUST CHECKING
THE TRIP LINE. MELL
WAS ADAMANT THAT
HE DIDN'T SET IT
OFF.

HEARD ABOUT
THE MISSION.
THOUGHT YOU
MIGHT WANT TO
BRING YOUR BEST
SHIPMASTER
ALONG.

I WAS HOPING
YOU'D VOLUNTEER.
GOT A FEELING
THIS ONE'S GOING
TO BE ROUGH.



THE *CHRONICLE*
IS STATIONED AT
NEVERMIND DOCKS.
YOU SURE YOU'RE
READY TO GET BACK
TO ITS HELM?

YOU SURE
YOU'RE READY FOR
A MISSION WITHOUT
OATES?

...

ALL THIS
LOSS... I'M
TIRED, IVES.

TEAM
COMMANDERS
DON'T GET TO
SLEEP, HAP.

WAIT.
YOU HEAR
THAT?





THE BIG ONES ALWAYS MAKE THE MOST MESS.



GOOD THING YOU'RE SO **SMALL**. RIGHT, **TATTLETAIL**?

I DIDN'T--

IF YOU CAN'T LEARN TO SWIM, AT LEAST STOP DRAGGING THE REST OF US DOWN.

HOW ABOUT I DRAG YOUR FASHE INTO MY FIGHT?



WE WERE JUST TALKING TO HER, MAC.

YEAH, JUST TALKING. WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE ANYWAYS?

SHUPERVISING YOUR CLEANUP.



YOU TWO FINISH UP THEN.

YEAH, WE'VE GOT **BETTER** THINGS TO DO.

YOU KNOW, TECHNICALLY WE'RE **STACKING** THE DEBRIS FOR CAMOUFLAGE. NOT **CLEANING**--

IT WASH A METAPHOR!



I DIDN'T NEED YOUR HELP IN CLASSH, BY THE WAY. I CAN SHPEAK FOR **MYSELF**.

I KNOW. BUT SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER WHEN **YOU** AREN'T THE ONE SAYING IT.



WHY? BECAUSE OF HOW I TALK?

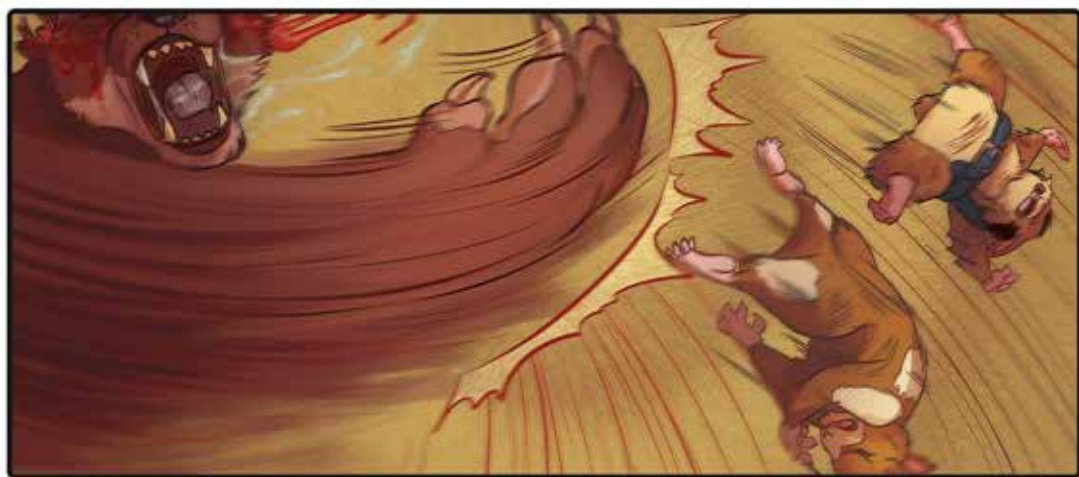
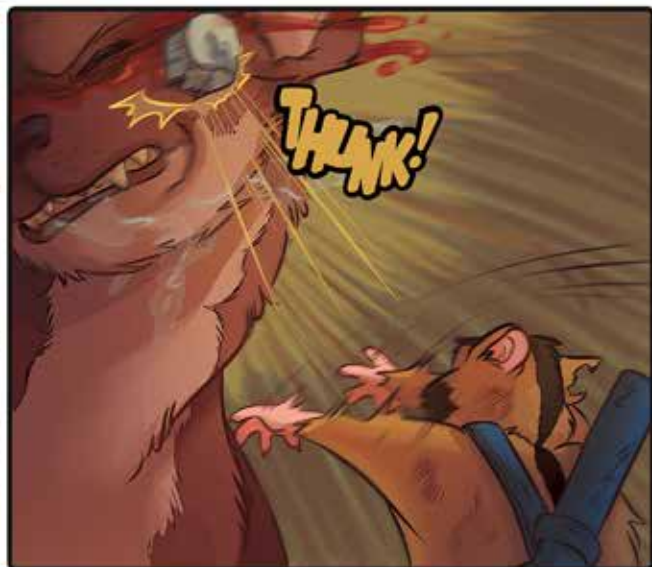
NO--BECAUSE THE MATRIARCH'S LOOKING FOR **ANY** EXCUSE TO KEEP YOU OUT OF H.A.M.













LOOKS LIKE IT WASN'T MELL WHO SET OFF THE TRIP WIRE AFTER ALL.

YEAH. WE'RE LUCKY THE PUPS WEREN'T HURT.



IT WASN'T LUCK. MAC PULLED RUBY OUT OF THE WAY.

WHAT WAS IT DOING?

THE ONLY THING PLEEBOS EVER DO. IT WAS HUNTING.

AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT BOX?

THIRTY-FOUR HOURS UNTIL
OPERATION LAUNCH.

FASTER! WHEN
THE **LONG RAIN** THAT
DROWNED THE **GIANTS**
FALLS AGAIN, ONLY
SWIMMERS WILL
SURVIVE.

RUBY,
TAKE THOSE
THINGS OFF
YOUR ARMS!

MAC, WHAT IN
THE NAME OF
CHRRK ARE YOU
DOING WITH
THAT BOX?

OTHER THAN
BECK, I SWEAR
THIS BATCH IS JUST
FLOATING **HAIRBALLS**.
AND **BARELY**
FLOATING AT THAT.

CAN'T SAY I'M
SURPRISED. OATES
WAS THE BEST, AND
EVEN **SHE** TOOK FIVE
DAYS TO SOLVE IT.

ANYONE
FINISH THEIR
PUZZLE?

NOT
YET.

FIVE WOULD BE A
LUXURY. THE BADGERS
WILL BE UNDERWATER IN
HALF THAT TIME.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS UNTIL
OPERATION LAUNCH.

THAT PUZZLE
ISN'T FAIR. MINE
BROKE TOO
EASY!

WHAT IF YOU
SOLVE *YOURS*
AND GET INTO
H.A.M., WITHOUT
ME, TORI?



WE COULD
JUST TAKE *TURNS*.
NOBODY CAN TELL
US APART ANYWAY.

DON'T WORRY,
EVEN IF YOU *DO*
PASS THAT DUMB
TEST...

...NO WAY
ARE ANY OF YOU
PUP-SQUEAKS
GETTING INTO H.A.M.
BEFORE *ME*.

HEY!



AT LEAST
YOU TWO CAN
SWIM.

I DON'T
EVEN KNOW
WHY RUBY
KEEPS
TRYING.

BECAUSE I
CAN'T GET IT
RIGHT YET!



AND WE
ALL KNOW THE
RUMORS
ABOUT MAC.

THAT YOU'LL
NEVER GRADUATE
BECAUSE THE
MATRIARCH
KEEPS HOLDING
YOU BACK.

WHAT
RUMORSH?

YEAH? WELL,
THIS TIME
I'LL *PROVE*
I'M GOOD
ENOUGH!



LOOK, I KNOW EVERY
HAMSTER WANTS TO BE
A H.A.M., BUT ONLY THE
VERY BEST GET TO
JOIN.

AND, I
MEAN, JUST
LOOK
AT
ME.



TWENTY-ONE HOURS UNTIL
OPERATION LAUNCH.

FIRST ONE
TO THE FLAG
GETS A **WETMELON
SEED**. SECOND
PLACE GETS A
**KICK IN THE
RUMP**.

YOU DO
NOT WANT THE
PRIZE FOR
LAST PLACE.



YOU KNOW
WHAT MIGHT
HELP YOU GO
FASTER, MAC?

YOU
SHUTTING
UP?

WHAT WAS
THAT?

NOTHING,
MISH DOLLY.



WINNER!

WHO CARESH?
I'LL GET MY
OWN SHEEDS.

YOU CAN HAVE
MINE. I DON'T
WANT THE
SEED. I JUST
WANT TO BE A
H.A.M.

ALL RIGHT,
YOU TWO, HURRY
DOWN FROM
THERE.

AND COULD
SOMEBODY
UNTANGLE ANI
FROM THE ROPE
LADDER?

I'M
TORI!


EITHER
WAY.



TEN HOURS UNTIL
OPERATION LAUNCH.



WE GATHER
TODAY BENEATH
DEEPWATER DOME
IN HONOR OF OATES.
ALTHOUGH SHE IS
LOST TO THE *DEPTHS*,
HER MEMORY
LIVES ON.




MAY SHE SWIM
FOREVER WITH THE
GIANTS-THAT-WERE IN
THEIR GREAT *WET*
CITY.



BUT TODAY
IS A DAY OF
CELEBRATION!
TODAY WE ADD A
NEW MEMBER
TO H.A.M.

THIS IS THE
NOBLEST OF
PURSUITS. H.A.M.
IS THE LIFEBLOOD
OF OUR COLONY.



"YOU WERE EACH TASKED
WITH SOLVING A PUZZLE.
IT IS TIME TO SHOW THE
RESULTS OF YOUR WORK."



TORI AND ANI, ARE YOUR SHELLS UNBROKEN?



I SEE.



AND YOU, RUBY?

LIKE I TOLD MISTER WYNTON, MINE WASN'T *BUILT* RIGHT.

WE NEED *SOLUTIONS*, NOT *EXCUSES*.

WAIT, I--



MAC, I BELIEVE YOUR BOX SPEAKS FOR ITSELF.

THAT'S NOT *FAIR*; YOU'RE NOT EVEN LETTING ME *ESHPLAIN*! YOU *NEVER--*



YOU WILL ADDRESS ME WITH THE *RESPECT* BEFITTING MY TITLE, PUP!



I AM YOUR *MATRIARCH*.

PERHAPS *NEXT* TIME YOU WILL APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR PERFORMANCE REFLECTS ON... *ALL* OF US.



BECK, THIS COLONY HAS HIGH HOPES FOR YOU. DID YOU MASTER THE PUZZLE?

I STAYED UP ALL NIGHT, AND GOT VERY CLOSE... BUT MY HANDS ARE--



--BIG.

I WAS VERY CLOSE.



IT WAS A VALIANT EFFORT. BUT WHETHER A BODY IS IN *TWO* PIECES OR *TWENTY*, THE EFFECT IS THE SAME. *UNBROKEN* IS THE ONLY RESULT THAT MATTERS.



WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

I DON'T KNOW. WITHOUT A TRAPSMITH, WE DON'T HAVE MUCH CHANCE.

MATRIARCH? MISTER HAP? I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTOOD.



MY *SHELL* ISN'T BROKEN. I GOT IT OUT WHILE WE WERE IN CLASS. IT'S THE *PUZZLE* PART THAT WAS ALL WRONG.

SO I *FIXED* IT.

SEE? I WANTED TO SPELL H.A.M., BUT IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO GET IT EXACTLY RIGHT.

I'M SORRY.



YOU SOLVED THE BOX? IN *CLASS*?

WELL, IT LOOKS AS IF WE HAVE OUR *TRAPSMITH* AFTER ALL.



CONGRATULATIONS, LITTLE ONE. WE'LL NEED TO DISCUSS YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS LATER, BUT FOR NOW...

WELCOME TO *H.A.M.*!



BUT SHE CAN BARELY *SWIM*!

WYNTON'S RIGHT. SHE MAY BE SMART, BUT HER *OTHER* SKILLS...

THE BADGERS WILL LOSE THEIR HOMES WITHOUT OUR HELP, AND WE CAN'T HELP WITHOUT A *TRAPSMITH*.

BUT--

MY DECISION IS *FINAL*.





OPERATION LAUNCH.

I'LL TAKE POINT. EVERYONE STAY CLOSE AND TRY TO KEEP UP. IT'S TWO THOUSAND WHEELIES TO THE NEVERMIND DOCKS, AND I DON'T WANT TO BE UNDER THE GREAT WIDE ANY LONGER THAN NECESSARY.

STAY LOW AND FAST. YOU'LL BE FINE.

SO NOW WE'RE BRINGING *TWO* PUPS? WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

THAT I DON'T WANT TO LOSE ANOTHER TRAPSMITH.

EVERY TIME I WAKE UP, THE FIRST THING I SEE IS OATES'S EMPTY BED.

I WON'T LET A MISSION END THAT WAY AGAIN.

WHATEVER YOU TWO ARE TALKING ABOUT, CUT IT OUT. IT'S MAKING THE MOOD GRIM.

IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, WE'RE STROLLING UNDER THE GREAT WIDE WITH PACKED *EXPLOSIVES* ON OUR BACKS. AND THERE'S ONLY ONE *PROPER* WAY TO FEEL ABOUT THAT.

GLORIOUS.







MUCH
WORSE.

HAP

SPECIES: SYRIAN
(MESOCRICETUS AURATUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. TEAM COMMANDER
ASSESSMENT: OUR MOST EXPERIENCED
H.A.M., WITH EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP
SKILLS AND UNFLINCHING LOYALTY.
HIGHLY SKILLED IN TACTICS, CLOSE
COMBAT, AND AQUATICS.

EXHIBITS SIGNS OF DESPONDENCY
FOLLOWING THE TRAGIC LOSS OF OATES.

NOTE: ASSIGN OATES'S BUNK
TO REPLACEMENT.



RUBY

SPECIES: ROBOROVSKI
(PHODOPUS ROBOROVSKII)
POSITION: MAINTENANCE, ~~INVENTORY~~, ~~FORAGING~~
H.A.M. TRAINEE
ASSESSMENT: DOES NOT FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.
POOR SWIMMER. TIMID.

REJECTED FROM MULTIPLE VOCATIONS.
DISMAL REPORTS FROM INSTRUCTORS ---

MAINTENANCE (ELTON) - "DISRUPTIVE, DOES NOT
RESPECT BOUNDARIES."
SUPPLIES + INVENTORY (ABBA) -
"ORGANIZATIONAL METHODS ARE UNORTHODOX."
FORAGING (VANCE) - "CAN'T CARRY MUCH;
DIRECTIONALLY IMPAIRED."

NOTE: INITIAL ASSESSMENT FROM WYNTON
SUGGESTS H.A.M. IS ALSO NOT AN OPTION.



WYNTON

SPECIES: CHINESE DWARF
(CRICETULUS GRISEUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. SWIM + DIVE INSTRUCTOR
ASSESSMENT: CRITICAL BUT FAIR, HOLDING
EQUALLY HIGH STANDARDS FOR ALL
STUDENTS. UNPARALLELED AQUATIC SKILLS.

REPLACED JANIS AT MY REQUEST. NEW
SAFETY MEASURES HAVE PROVEN INVALUABLE.

NOTE: DESPITE INITIAL RESERVATIONS,
CONSENTING TO WYNTON'S RETIREMENT
FROM THE FIELD HAS BEEN PROPITIOUS.







To: Plick, J. - DOP
From: Hassel, C. - DOP
Subject: M.F.C. and fungal fuel

Joe,

Our most promising research indicates that development of **microbial fuel cells** with fungal fuel as a source of renewable energy may be key as we prepare for Projected Events.

Current experiments have concentrated on the *Panellus stipticus* ("bitter oyster") fungus, which emanates a low green bioluminescence. This mushroom is currently used in bioremediation due to its proclivity for detoxifying environmental pollutants. It's a temperamental species, but if we can stabilize its environment, we may have finally discovered a means to produce electricity organically.

We are adapting the current structure of anodes and cathodes for more optimal results based on our current data, and intend to produce a full report to you within two weeks.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Best,
Christiane

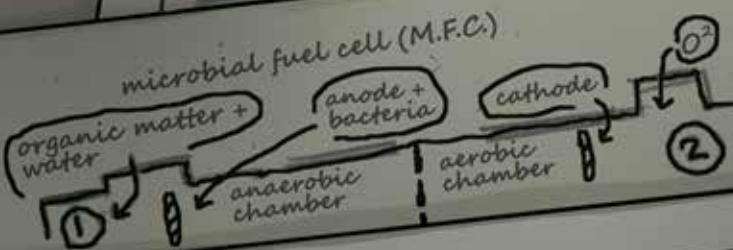
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NEWS IN BRIEF: Biofuel Cells: Tree Fungus Lets Current Flow

Scientists have discovered how to use tree fungus for the production of electricity. "Biofuel cells" use living organisms to produce electricity, which conserves resources and is environmentally friendly. Such cells require protein enzymes for catalysts, enabling electrochemical reactions that generate power. The enzymes are obtained from renewable materials. However, the life span of organic enzymes is short, limiting their effectiveness.

A new concept solves this issue: scientists continually supply the biofuel cell with *Trametes versicolor*, a tree fungus found in temperate climates. The fungus releases a biocatalytic enzyme (called "laccase") into a solution surrounding the positively-charged pole of the cell (the "cathode") where it enables the electrochemical conversion of oxygen, allowing for a sustainable organic power supply.

...ve this could effectively turn



CHAPTER TWO



MATRIARCH?



YOU MAY DISPENSE WITH THE FORMALITIES, BASIE.

"LUCIANA" IS FINE.




SORRY TO DISTURB YOU.

BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH THE EMEFFCEE.




I KNOW YOU'RE BUSY COORDINATING THE SEARCH FOR BECK, AND I WOULDN'T NORMALLY REQUEST A PERSONAL VISIT.

BUT YOU REALLY SHOULD SEE THIS FOR YOURSELF.




I DON'T KNOW
IF WE ERRED IN OUR
CALCULATIONS OR SIMPLY
MISJUDGED REGROWTH RATES.
BUT EITHER WAY, THE SITUATION
IS QUICKLY BECOMING
CRITICAL.




KEEPING THE
EMEFFCEE ACTIVE
ISN'T *OPTIONAL*,
BASIE.

IT POWERS THE
ENTIRE BURROW.
I DON'T HAVE TO
TELL YOU WHAT WILL
HAPPEN IF IT
FAILS.



THAT'S
EXACTLY WHY I
BROUGHT YOU DOWN
HERE, MATRIA--
LUCIANA.




AND SINCE
IT'S BEEN A WHILE
SINCE YOUR LAST VISIT,
ON BEHALF OF ALL THE
EMEFFCEE OPERATORS,
LET ME BE THE FIRST
TO SAY...



WELCOME
TO THE
**BURROW'S
HEART!**

80%
4%




THE EMEFFCEE THRIVES, PROVIDED WE FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS LEFT TO US BY THE GIANTS-THAT-WERE. IN THEORY, IT GENERATES ENOUGH POWER TO KEEP OUR BURROW SEALED UNDERWATER UNTIL THE LONG RAIN RETURNS.



OF GLOWSHROOMS. I KNOW. WHAT I *DON'T* KNOW IS WHY I CAN BARELY SEE YOU.


BUT THIS REQUIRES A CONSTANT FUEL SUPPLY--

THAT'S THE PROBLEM. WE'VE HARVESTED ALL GLOWSHROOMS WITHIN TRAVELING DISTANCE, AND OUR USAGE NOW OUTPACES THEIR REGROWTH.



WE REMAIN UNABLE TO REPLICATE A SUSTAINABLE GLOWSHROOM ENVIRONMENT. AND THE EMEFFCEE IS ALWAYS HUNGRY.

IN SHORT, OUR SUPPLY IS DWINDLING RAPIDLY. IF WE DON'T FIND A WAY TO INCREASE OUR HARVEST RANGE SOON, THE HEART WILL DIE.



THEN FOCUS ALL OF YOUR EFFORTS ON A SOLUTION, BASIE.

OTHERWISE, WE'LL BE LEFT WITH ONLY ONE OPTION:

EVACUATION.













YOU HEADED
FOR THE DAM? THE
FLAT-TAILS HAVE GOT
EVERYONE TALKING.
NOBODY'S EVER SEEN
ONE BUILT LIKE
THAT.

I WAS SORRY
TO HEAR ABOUT
OATES, BY THE
WAY. I ALWAYS
LIKED HER.



ME
TOO.





LET'S
FIND A PLACE
TO SETTLE
SOON.

THE
NINE-LIFER CAN
GO 'TIL SUNRISE,
BUT THE REST OF
US NEED SLEEP.

MISHTER
TALISH, SHIR?
IF WE'RE
TAKING A
VOTE...



I THINK RUBY
WOULD JUSHT ASH
SHOON SHTOP
HERE.





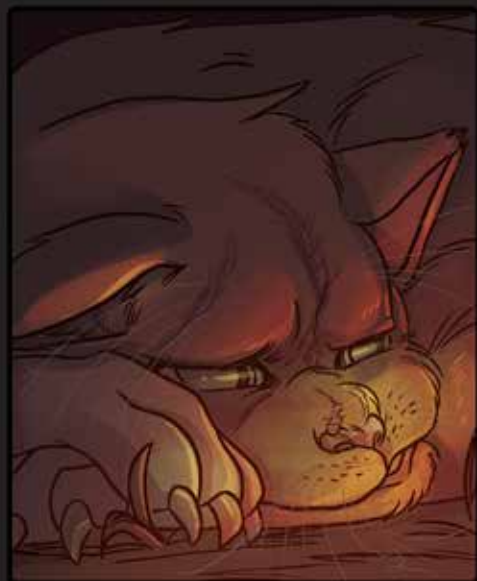
YOUR EYES
HAVEN'T LEFT
YOUR FRIEND
SINCE WE
MET.

ARE
YOU STILL
NERVOUS
ABOUT MY
LITTLE
JOKE?



I *KNOW*
YOU WERE JUST
KIDDING. BUT MY
JOB ISH TO KEEP
RUBY SHAPE.

EVEN FROM
BIG BULLIESH
LIKE YOU.



THAT'S ADMIRABLE,
MAC, BUT THERE'S NO
NEED FOR INSULTS.
BASTIAN WOULD NEVER
HARM US. OUR KINDS
HAVE BEEN ALLIES
SINCE THE LONG RAIN.

DO YOU
KNOW THAT STORY?
MAYBE IT WILL HELP
YOU SLEEP.

"AT THE START, ALL CREATURES WERE WILD PLEEBOS--FUR, FIN, FEATHER, SCALES, AND SQUIBS ALIKE. BEFORE THE LONG RAIN WASHED AWAY THE GIANTS-THAT-WERE."



"BUT THE GIANTS FORESAW THEIR OWN DOOM, AND IN THEIR WISDOM GAVE US, THEIR FAVORED ONES, THE TOOLS TO SURVIVE."



"SO WE WERE BLESSED WITH LONG LIVES, STRONG LUNGS TO HOLD OUR BREATH..."



"AND THE INTELLIGENCE TO USE THESE GIFTS."



"AFTER THE LONG RAIN FELL, OUR NOBLE FOUNDER, CHRRK, LED OUR KIND TO FREEDOM."






I KNOW
ALL THOSH
SHTORIESH,
MISHTER
HAP.

*EVERYONE
KNOWSH THEM.*




AH, BUT YOU
DIDN'T LET HIM
GET TO THE
BEST PART.



"YOUR ANCESTORS
COULD HAVE LEFT
THAT DAY WITHOUT
LOOKING BACK."

"BUT THEY
DID LOOK
BACK..."



"AND THEY
SAW US."



"OR, RATHER, THEY SAW MEEKAL AND PAK, THE FIRST OF MY KIND TO BE CHANGED BY THE GIANTS-THAT-WERE."



"DESPITE HIS FEAR, CHRRK DECIDED TO LEAVE OLD PREJUDICES BEHIND WITH THE OLD WORLD."



SKLICK!

"AND BEGIN ANEW."





IF IT WASN'T FOR THE UNDERFOOT, MY ANCESTORS WOULD HAVE SEEN THEIR END INSIDE THOSE CAGES.

THAT STORY WAS MEANT TO CALM YOU. WHY DO YOU STILL LOOK SCARED?

I'M NOT SHCARED OF YOU.

HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

I'M SHCARED OF THAT.



TALLIS!
I NEED YOUR
HELP HERE!



YES!
CHECK ON
BASTIAN!



BUDDY!

REM!



DO
WHAT YOU DO
BEST.

SHAMMMMM!

SLAMMMMM!

I CAN FEEL THE AIR
SSSSLEEPING
FROM YOUR
LUNGSSSSS.

SSSTOP
RESISTING.
SSSCALES HAVE
ALWAYS BEEN FUR'S
SSSUPERIOR.





YOUR GRIP
WILL WEAKEN SSSOON
ENOUGH. YOU SSSHOULD
HAVE CHOSEN LESSS
HELPLESSS FRIENDSSS.

AND LESSS
TASSSTY.

I DON'T
KNOW ABOUT TASTY,
BUT ONE THING WE
DEFINITELY ARE
NOT...

...IS
HELPLESS.







NICE WORK, TEAM.
BUT WE'LL NEED A NEW
SPOT TO BED DOWN. SCALES
ALWAYS COME BACK, USUALLY
WITH GREATER NUMBERS.

WHERE'RE
THE PUPS?







BECK

SPECIES: SYRIAN (VARIANT?)
(MESOCRICETUS AURATUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. TRAINEE
ASSESSMENT: EXCELS IN PHYSICAL SKILLS,
ALL FORMS OF COMBAT, AND TACTICAL
MANEUVERS.

ASPIRES TO H.A.M. LEADERSHIP.

NOTE: OVERCONFIDENT. HAS DIFFICULTY
PRIORITIZING TEAMWORK OVER INDIVIDUAL
ACHIEVEMENT.

MISSING

REM

SPECIES: DJUNGARIAN WINTER WHITE
(PHODOPUS SUNGORUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. DEMOLITIONIST
ASSESSMENT: OPTIMISTIC AND ADVENTUROUS.
NATURAL MENTOR FOR NEW RECRUITS.
EXPERIMENTAL EXPLOSIVE TECHNIQUES ARE
ALTERNATIVELY EFFECTIVE AND ERRATIC.

HAS LOGGED UNUSUALLY HIGH HOURS IN
THE ARCHIVE STUDYING LORE RELATED TO
"ENERGETIC MATERIALS."

NOTE: EXHIBITS ALL THE QUALITIES OF
FUTURE TEAM COMMANDER ROLE.



TALLIS

SPECIES: SYRIAN
(MESOCRICETUS AURATUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. AEGIS
ASSESSMENT: EXPERT COMBATANT - STEADY,
RELIABLE, AND FEARLESS.

RELISHES HIS STATUS AS ROLE MODEL
FOR THE PUPS.

NOTE: HAVE TALLIS REWORK THE OBSTACLE
COURSE WITH DOLLY.






To: Coulter, C. - DOP
From: Reeves, S. - DOJ
Subject: OMG have you seen this?

Hey Chris,

I'm sure you're buried trying to coordinate the lab upgrade, but Dee sent this my way and I know how much you love weird architecture, so I had to share. Some Victorian swindler named Whitaker Wright got rich selling junk mining bonds in the 1880s. He desperately wanted to fit in with the high-class English society, so he used his money to build a mansion on a 9,000 acre estate--and added a ballroom beneath an artificial lake. Apparently, you could watch fish through the glass ceiling! Whitaker died in prison, but his underwater inferiority complex remains watertight to this day. You've got to see the pictures. They're wild.

So forget the new patio -- I'm thinking your next home improvement project should be a man-cave under the swimming pool.

See you at happy hour Thurs.
Steve

 100 Wonders: The Underwater Ballroom.pdf

***This message may contain information that is classified, privileged, confidential, or otherwise exempt from disclosure under applicable law. Do not disclose without consulting your legal Counsel. If you think you have received this email in error, please notify the sender.

Interior Electromagnetic Locks

Note: Only "fail safe" maglocks meet federal safety regulations for allowing manual control of exits during business hours. Unlike "fail secure" locks, which remain locked when power is lost, "fail safe" devices demagnetize during outages, allowing personnel to leave the building.

Battery backup is recommended to compensate for the fail safe electromagnetic locks in buildings with higher security requirements.

Lab Security Upgrade Report due 7/2
Cross-check budget requirements

Whitaker's Underwater Ballroom



Mitch's Maglocks

Serving the D.C. Area Since 1999

How does it work?

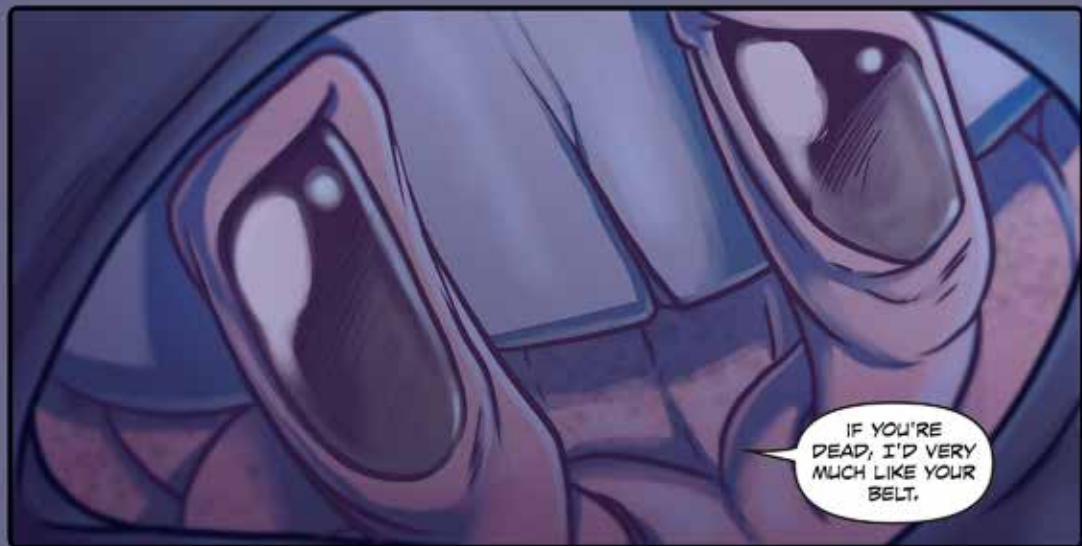
When electricity passes through the electromagnet, it excites the electrons, creating a magnetic field that attracts the magnet to the metal plating on the opposite side. Single door electromagnetic locks can typically withstand up to 1200 lbs. of force and use less energy than a single light bulb to maintain.

At Mitch's Maglocks

CHAPTER THREE



ARE YOU
DEAD?





I'M NOT DEAD.

OH, THAT'S WONDERFUL NEWS!



YOUR WEAPON WAS LOST TO THE CURRENT, I'M AFRAID.



I MIGHT HAVE A REPLACEMENT IN HERE.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.



I GUESS YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH USE FOR A BELT NOW.

JUST AN OBSERVATION.



I REALLY HAVE TO GET GOING.

SO SOON? BUT YOU JUST GOT HERE!



WHERE IS HERE, EXACTLY?!

LINKED FIN POND. YOU FLOATED PRETTY FAR DOWNSTREAM BEFORE I COULD GET YOU TO SHORE.



SO WHERE WERE YOU HEADED?!

PANDA GONE LAGOON. I HEARD AN EX-H.A.M. NAMED BURL WENT TO LIVE THERE AFTER A FALLING-OUT WITH THE COLONY.

MAYBE HE'LL APPRECIATE ME.



OH DEAR, I DON'T KNOW ANYONE BY THAT NAME, I'M AFRAID.

BUT I DO KNOW A PLACE YOU CAN REST UNTIL YOUR WOUNDS HEAL.



OKAY, MY NAME'S BECK.

THANKS FOR SAVING ME, GUNTHER.

I'M GUNTHER.

YOU'RE VERY WELCOME, BECK.



BUT YOU CAN'T HAVE MY BELT.









UNTIL THE GIANTS THAT WERE RETURN, OLD FRIEND.



UNTIL THEN.



I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THE *CHRONICLE*. BIZKIT FROM THE NURSERY SAYS IT BELONGED TO BURL.

IVES MIGHT HAVE A DIFFERENT RECOLLECTION, BUT I WOULDN'T BRING IT UP. SOMETIMES THERE'S NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEMORIES AND BAD DREAMS.



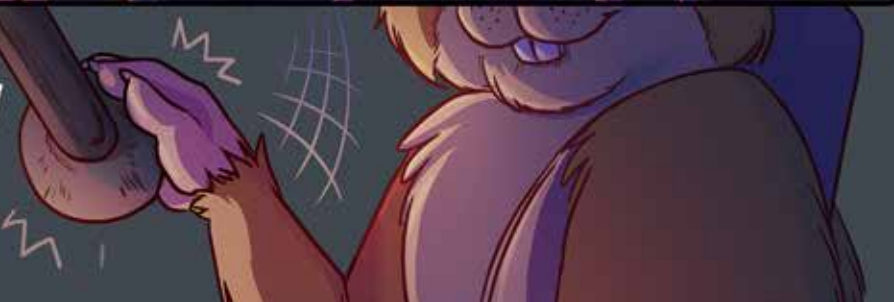
SHPEAKING OF IVESH... WHERE DID HE AND THE OTHERSH GO?



BELOW US.

BELOW?

CLICK!





AAAAAAAAAH!



HEY!
THANKS FOR
DROPPING
IN!

SHE TELLS
THAT JOKE
EVERY TIME
WE USE THE
SLIDE.

DON'T
SEE WHY THIS
PLACE CAN'T
GET A PROPER
ELEVATOR.

THWUMP!



BECAUSE LICKTRICK MACHINES DON'T WORK WITHOUT THE BURROW'S HEART.

BUT WE'VE GOT MORE PRESSING CONCERNS.



TALLIS, HELP IVES PREP THE *CHRONICLE* FOR LAUNCH.

BUDDY, MAKE SURE ITS WEAPONS ARE LOADED. IF THERE REALLY IS A BALDIE UP THERE IN THE GREAT WIDE, WE'RE GONNA NEED ALL THE COVER FIRE WE CAN GET.



WHAT ABOUT *ME*, MISTER HAP?

I WANT *YOU* TO REST, RUBY. ONCE WE'RE INSIDE THE DAM, WE'LL ALL BE COUNTING ON THAT BRAIN OF YOURS TO KEEP US ALIVE.

AND ME?

RIGHT NOW, MAC?

YOU CAN BE HER *PILLOW*.



REM, I KNOW YOU LIKE TO CUSTOMIZE YOUR FIREWORKS AHEAD OF TIME.

BUT WE'VE NEVER SEEN A DAM LIKE THIS.



SO THE ONLY THING I CAN TELL YOU FOR SURE...



*"MAKE
'EM BIG."*

STOP

Philipp's Cafe
Philipp's Cafe
Philipp's Cafe



ANI!
TORI!!

SCRITCH.
SCRITCH.
SCRITCH.



IT'S RATHER
DIFFICULT TO
AVOID THE
TEACHER'S
GAZE...



WHEN YOU'RE
THE ONLY
STUDENTS IN
CLASS.



HAND IT
OVER, ANI.

I'M
TORI.

WHICHEVER.



RUBY AND MAC GRADUATED, AND BECK MAY NOT RETURN, SO I NEED YOU BOTH *EXTRA* FOCUSED ON YOUR TRAINING.

NOW WHAT WAS SO IMPORTANT THAT IT COULDN'T WAIT UNTIL RECESS?



WHAT IS *THIS*?

JUST SOMETHING I DREAMED.

I HAD THE SAME DREAM!



HUMPH. TWINS DON'T USUALLY MANIFEST ABILITIES UNTIL THEY'RE OLDER, BUT IT'S NOT UNPRECEDENTED AT YOUR AGE.

WHAT DOES "UNPRECEDENTED" MEAN?



IT MEANS YOU'RE BOTH ON SEA-DEE SORTING DUTY FOR PASSING NOTES IN CLASS.





CLUTTER? THESE
BELONGED TO THE
*GIANTS-THAT-
WERE!*



I COLLECT
THEM FROM THE
RIVERBED.




WHY? WHAT
ARE YOU
BUILDING?



OH,
GOODNESS, I'M
NOT BUILDING
ANYTHING.

I'M KEEPING IT
HERE FOR WHEN
THEY RETURN.



BUT I'M NOT
VERY *GOOD* AT IT.
THE SCALES KEEP
BARGING IN AND
TAKING WHATEVER
THEY WANT.

SOMETIMES
THEY GET
PRETTY
MEAN.





EVER SHINGHE
I WASH LITTLE, I
HEARD SHTORIES
ABOUT HOW *GREAT*
IT WASH TO BE A
H.A.M....



AND
THEY WERE
TOTALLY
TRUE!



STAY FOCUSED, MAC. REMEMBER THAT WE'RE THE *UNDERFOOT*.

THE MINUTE WE STOP PAYING ATTENTION IS THE MINUTE THE *BIG PAW* DROPS.



SOMETHING'S WRONG. WE *STILL* HAVEN'T SEEN A FLAT-TAIL AND THE GREAT WIDE IS EMPTY.

THIS IS *TOO* EASY.



MAYBE LUCK IS ON OUR SIDE FOR ONCE. IF WE CAN SAVE THE BROCK'S HOME AND GET BACK TO THE COLONY WITHOUT ANOTHER WHISKER TWITCH, I WON'T COMPLAIN.

STILL, THAT DAM GIVES ME THE CREEPERS. WHAT'RE ALL THOSE EXTRA BITS EVEN *FOR*?

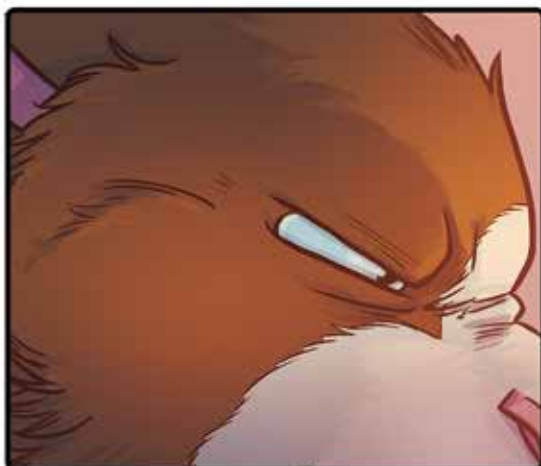


MISTER IVES, IS IT TRUE THIS USED TO BE BURL'S SHIP?

WHAT GAVE YOU THAT IDEA?



THIS.





TURN!



IT'S A BOAT, BUDDY. IT DOESN'T JUST "TURN"!



WELL, DO SOMETHING!



YOU BROUGHT A SHIPMASTER FOR A REASON. I'LL DO SOMETHING, ALL RIGHT...

BUT YOU AREN'T GONNA LIKE IT.



HOLD ON!



WHOOOOOSH!



NICE WORK, IVE!

ISH IT OVER?

ACTUALLY, IT JUST GOT WORSE. **HEADS UP, H.A.M.**



CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SAYIN' THIS, BUT MELL WAS RIGHT.



FEATHERS INCOMIN'!

Slissssshh!

TAKE HIM DOWN, BUDDY!

ON IT!

BUDDA-BUDDA-BUDDA!

PLOUUUCH!

SCRAWWWW!

WHAT IN THE NAME OF CHRRK IS GOING ON UP HERE?

I'M TRYING TO WIRE UP A **BIG BOOM** AND WE'RE JUMPING AROUND LIKE A NINE-LIFER IN A DOWNPOUR.





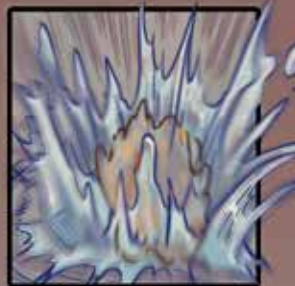
CRAACKK!

**BUDDA-
BUDDA-
BUDDA!**

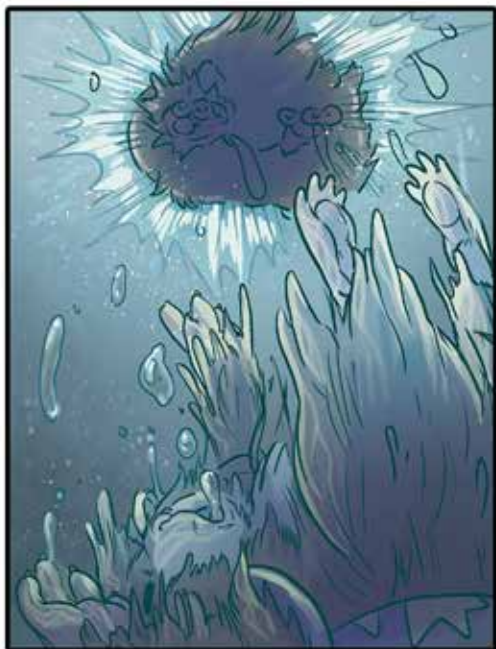
SLASSSSH!

SHHHRAAK!

SKRRRAASSH!











SO: WHAT CAN THE
**HAMSTER AIRBORNE
MERCENARIES**
DO FOR YOU?



ARE YOU GOING TO TELL ME WHAT WAS SO URGENT THAT YOU HAD TO **STORM** INTO MY CHAMBERS **UNANNOUNCED?**

OR DO YOU INTEND TO JUST **STAND** THERE SCOWLING?



I INTEND TO GET **ANSWERS**.



THE TWINS ARE BEGINNING TO PSI-LINK. THEY'RE **FAR-SEERS**-- SOMETHING THIS COLONY HASN'T HAD IN MANY YEARS.

WE ALWAYS KNEW TORI AND ANI WOULD BE **SPECIAL**. TWINS ARE A **BLESSING** FROM THE GIANTS--THAT--

THEY SAW BECK, HURT AND ALONE, SOMEWHERE UNDER THE GREAT WIDE.



I KNOW YOU'RE UPSET, BUT WE'RE DOING ALL WE CAN TO FIND HIM.

DO NOT LET ANGER CAUSE YOU TO FORGET YOUR STATION, WYNTON.



I'M NOT ANGRY, I'M **CONCERNED**. AND NOT JUST ABOUT BECK.

TODAY, THE TWINS DREW **THIS**.





**"I KNOW YOU GOVERN
THE COLONY, LUCIANA,
BUT THE HEART
POWERS IT."**



**"IF WE LOSE THAT
POWER, THEN OUR
LICKTRICK MAGIC-NETS
FAIL. AND IF THAT
HAPPENS..."**



**"THE LONG RAIN'S
RETURN WILL BE THE
LEAST OF OUR
PROBLEMS."**

BUDDY

SPECIES: CAMPBELL'S DWARF
(PHODOPUS CAMPBELL)
POSITION: H.A.M. SHARPSHOOTER
ASSESSMENT: TOUGH AND COCKY, WITH
THE SKILL TO BACK IT UP.
HER ATTACHMENT TO THAT TACKY TOY
COWBOY HAT IS UNFORTUNATE.

NOTE: NEED TO FIND ANOTHER H.A.M.
WITH COMPARABLE MARKSMANSHIP TO
STOKE HER COMPETITIVE SPIRIT.



MAC

SPECIES: SYRIAN - TEDDY BEAR
(MESOCRICETUS AURATUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. - JAMMEE
H.A.M. SPECIAL GUARD (PROVISIONAL)
ASSESSMENT: TEACHERS REPORT SHE IS
PHYSICALLY SKILLED BUT AWKWARD AND
"PRICKLY."

NOTE: EXHIBITS DIFFICULTY MAKING FRIENDS,
NEGLECTS GROOMING, AND REFUSES TO
SPEAK PROPERLY.

NOTE: I DESPAIR OF HER BEHAVIOR AND DON'T
KNOW WHERE SHE INHERITED SUCH TRAITS.

NOTE: AFTER CURRENT MISSION, CONSIDER
TRANSFER TO BURROW MAINTENANCE.



IVES

SPECIES: CHINESE DWARF - ALBINO
(CRICETULUS GRISEUS)
POSITION: H.A.M. SHIPMASTER
ASSESSMENT: UNPARALLELED AT THE HELM
OF WATERCRAFT. EXCELS IN MELEE COMBAT
AND AQUATICS.

IVES'S SKILL SET IS HIGHLY REMINISCENT OF
HIS TEMPERAMENT IS,
FORTUNATELY, MUCH MORE RELIABLE.

NOTE: EXHIBITS A POSSESSIVE ATTACHMENT
TO THE CHRONICLE, DESPITE HIS RELUCTANCE
TO ACTUALLY BOARD THE VESSEL.



Anthropogenic Climate Change

Ron - Elimination of climate change information in the public arena and self-serving denial in the political lexicon have severely slowed our funding and preparations. DOP continues to play catch-up in attempts to prepare for Projected Events.

Less dire, wendi has discovered an ancillary use for those "bitter oysters" by mixing them with vinegar to create invisible ink. So check your stationery for inappropriate limericks before using.

The current global warming trend is recognized with near unanimous scientific consensus by geologists and climatologists, who directly attribute the temperature increase to modern era human activity. Evidence suggests that this increase is occurring roughly ten times faster than the average rate of ice age recovery warming, an unprecedented acceleration. Carbon dioxide, released by humans into the atmosphere, traps heat on the planet's surface, which has caused an approximately 1.62°F temperature increase since the late nineteenth century. Even this minor variation dramatically affects weather patterns, melts Antarctic ice caps, and causes sea levels to rise.

Unless d
has a un
should

Certain
unrelat
suggest
unfortu

Solutio
could o
Earth
entropy
research

NEWS IN BRIEF: Near-Earth Asteroid Detected

Sixty-six million years ago, an asteroid the size of a small city collided with Earth and wiped out seventy-five percent of all life. The sulfur vaporized by the impact blocked the sun for decades, dropping worldwide temperatures by 50°F.

More recently, we've had a few close scares (at least by astronomy standards). The relative danger that an asteroid poses to life on Earth is measured by the Torino Impact Hazard Scale. In 2004, it was believed that there was a 2.7% chance that the 1000'-wide asteroid 99942 Apophis (a Level 4 on the Torino scale) would strike the Earth by 2029, although those odds have since dropped to zero. On average, it is expected that at least one level 4 asteroid will impact the Earth every 80,000 years.

Although there
including the

VIROLOGY TODAY: Scientists Condemn Creation of Deadly Airborne Flu Virus

Scientists have artificially recreated the deadly 1918 Spanish flu strain by using "reverse genetics" to combine existing virus fragments, but mutated the result to make it airborne. Researchers claim the experiments are crucial for understanding the health risk posed by viruses currently circulating in wild birds, but critics condemned the studies as reckless. Many fear that this heightens the risk of a global pandemic.

Most airborne viruses are passed from person to person by contact with respiratory droplets generated when a person coughs or sneezes. Respiratory droplets can be propelled into the eyes, nose, or mouth over short distances. Safety precautions would include...

Yellowstone Plateau

The Yellowstone Plateau, located in the states of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, is centered on an active volcanic system with pressurized boiling water, subterranean molten rock (magma), and a variety of active fault lines. Within the next few decades, significant earthquakes and hydrothermal explosions are certain to occur.

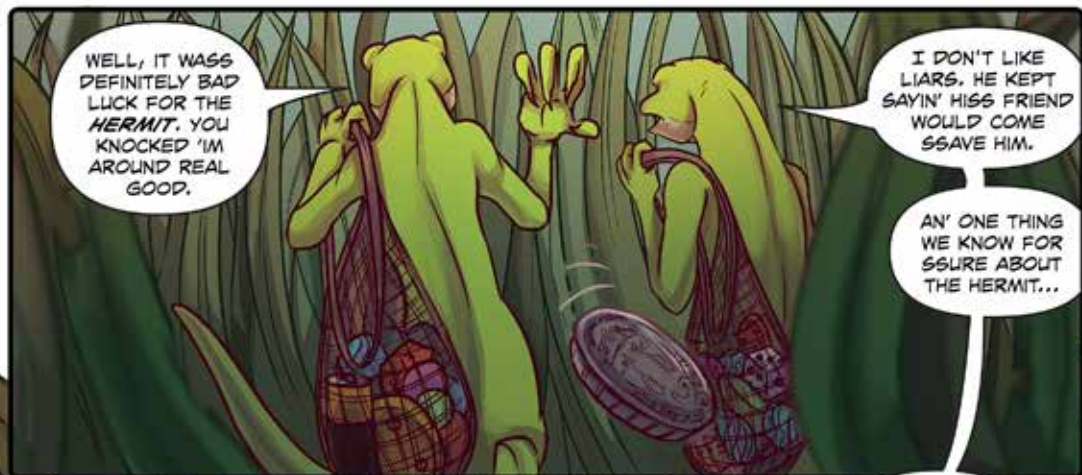
The culprit is a "supervolcano" beneath the surface, which is expected to release over 240 cubic miles of debris directly into the atmosphere when it finally erupts. The resulting fallout will devastate the landscape for thousands of miles in every direction. In fact, much of the American Midwest would become buried in over three feet of ash.

The full extent of environmental repercussions are incalculable, although a... has been developed by the Department of Preparedness. Contamination of water supplies and a reduction in breathing...

CHAPTER FOUR







WELL, IT WAS DEFINITELY BAD LUCK FOR THE HERMIT. YOU KNOCKED 'IM AROUND REAL GOOD.

I DON'T LIKE LIARS. HE KEPT SAYIN' HISS FRIEND WOULD COME SSAVE HIM.

AN' ONE THING WE KNOW FOR SSURE ABOUT THE HERMIT...



HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY FRIENDSS.



NO. NO. NO.



GUNTHER!









--ARE YOU??

AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?



I'M URSULA, OVERSEER OF THE HAMSTER AIRBORNE MERCENARIES. WE'RE HERE TO TAKE DOWN THAT DAM.

I'M HAP, AND YOU CAN GO HOME, BECAUSE THE BROCK ALREADY HIRED US.



DON'T KNOW ANY BROCK. THE HOPPERS TOLD US THE DAM WAS FLOODING THEIR BURROWS.

WELL, NO OFFENSE, BUT I'VE NEVER HEARD OF THE HAMSTER AIRBORNE MERCENARIES.

NONE TAKEN, SINCE WE'VE NEVER HEARD OF YOU EITHER. I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY HAMSTERS WHO SURVIVED THE MIGHTY TREMORS.



THE WHAT?

THE MIGHTY TREMORS THAT SHOOK THE GIANTS-THAT WERE INTO THEIR FLOATING PARADISE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? THE GIANTS ALL WASHED AWAY IN THE LONG RAIN.



THE WHAT?

WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM, OVERSEER. OUR SCOPES DON'T SHOW ANY TOPSIDE ENTRANCES.

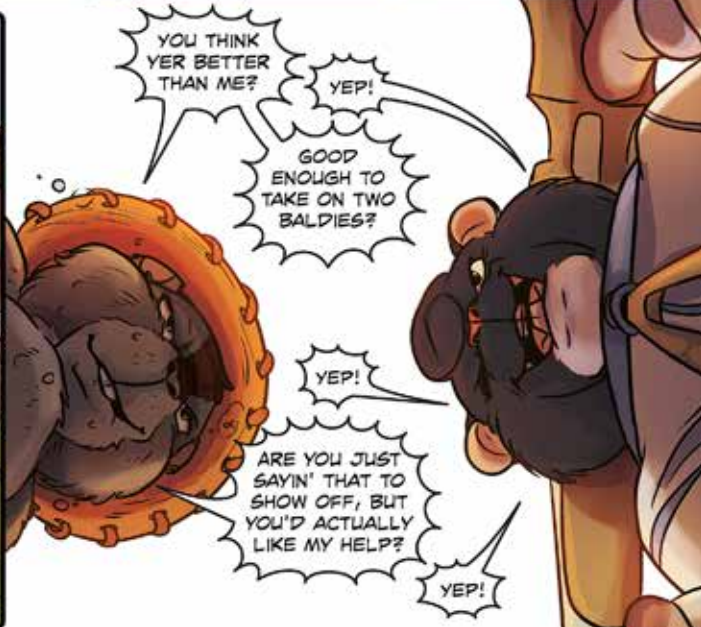
FLAT-TAILS KEEP THEIR HATCHES UNDERWATER. HAVE ANY OF YOU EVEN BEEN INSIDE A DAM BEFORE?



OUR TARGETS ARE USUALLY MORE... ELEVATED, BUT WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT ONCE WE SET DOWN. DON'T NEED MUCH ROOM. NEIL CAN LAND HIS WHIRLY-BIRD ON AN ACORN.

THAT'S NICE. BUT UNLESS HE CAN HOLD HIS BREATH LONG ENOUGH TO SOLVE THE LOCKS, THAT WON'T DO MUCH GOOD. DO YOU HAVE A TRAPSMITH?

A WHATSMITH?



LET'S
GET THIS
HAMSTER A
RIFLE.

I LIKE
HER.



BUDDY AND
TERRY ARE
RIGHT. WE COULD
HELP EACH
OTHER.

MAYBE. BUT EVEN IF WE
GET PAST THE FEATHERS, HOW
DO WE BREAK THE DAM? WE'D
PLANNED TO PULL IT APART
WITH OUR WHIRLY-BIRDS, BUT
IT'S TOO BIG.

YOU
LET *ME*
HANDLE
THAT.

ALL RIGHT,
THEN. I'LL PREP
MY TEAM.

I'LL
DO THE
SAME.

H.A.M.,
PREPARE TO
MOVE OUT!

H.A.M.,
PREPARE TO
MOVE OUT!

WHAT
DID YOU JUST
SAY?





Matriarch?
It's time.

I know.
That's why
I'm here.



In the **Naming Room**? This is hardly a place to find critical salvage.

We can name pups without the aid of sea-dees.



Of course we can. Everything sentimental will be abandoned when we evacuate.

I'm just reflecting on the difficulty of those decisions.

Choosing what we hold on to...



... and what we let go.



SPEAKING OF SENTIMENT, I'LL MAKE THE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE HEART.



ARE YOU SURE? THE LICKTRICK MAGIC-NETS ARE LOOSENING--IT ISN'T SAFE.

IT MAY BE A LONG TIME BEFORE ANY OF US IS SAFE AGAIN, BASIE.



WE WON'T NEED MASKS THIS TIME. I MEAN, WE NEVER NEED THEM IN THE ROBIC CHAMBER. BUT THE ZYMEY LEVELS HAVE GOTTEN SO LOW IN THE HARVEST CHAMBER THAT WE DON'T NEED THEM IN *THERE* EITHER.




THE EMEFFCEE CONTINUES TO FAIL RAPIDLY, AND WE HAVEN'T FOUND ANY SOLUTIONS IN THE ARCHIVES.




I ALWAYS FEARED THIS DAY MIGHT COME. THE GIANTS LEFT US SUCH *MERCURIAL* INSTRUCTIONS.

AND LIKE A FLAT-TAIL'S PUZZLE, EACH ONE IS AS *MYSTERIOUS* AS IT IS *ASTOUNDING*. THERE'S SO MUCH WE STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND.



WHY DID THEY BEQUEATH US STRONG LUNGS AND BUOYANT FLUR, YET CONTINUE TO HIDE THEIR WET CITY FROM THE LIVING UNTIL THEIR RETURN?


AND EVEN *MORE* PERPLEXING ARE THE *TERMS AND CONDITIONS* OF THEIR RETURN, HANGING ON THIS VERY WALL. FOR WE HAVE DONE ALL THEY ASK, YET DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS...



RETURN POLICY

Guaranteed return
thirty (30) days after
proof of value, provided
all remain free
of water damage

WE REMAIN
ALONE.



ATTENTION, FELLOW COLONISTS. THIS IS YOUR *MATRIARCH*. I HAVE A MATTER OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO SHARE WITH YOU.

I SPEAK TO YOU TODAY FROM THE *BURROW'S HEART*. A PLACE WHERE, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER, THE MAGIC HANDED DOWN BY THE GIANTS-THAT WERE IS EVIDENCED IN ALL ITS *GLORY*.



TODAY,
THAT MAGIC HAS
FAILED.



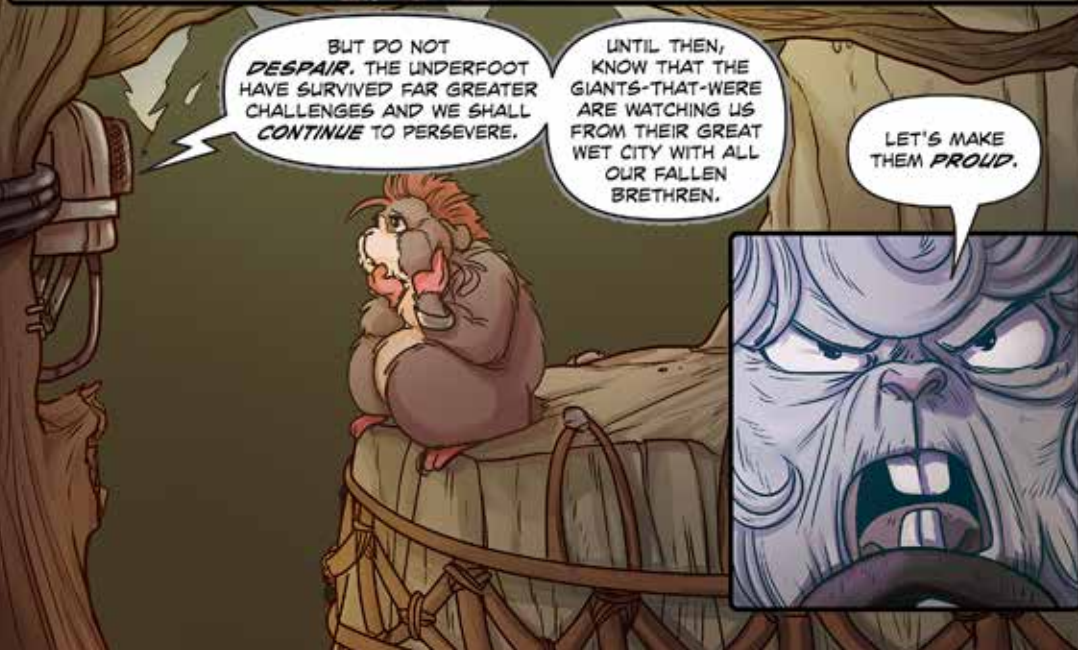
THE RISING WATERS
AROUND YOUR PAWS
WILL SOON BECOME
A FLOOD.

BUT BEFORE
THAT OCCURS,
THERE IS MUCH
WORK TO BE
DONE.



EVACUATION
WILL BEGIN IN
TWENTY-FOUR
HOURS.

USE THAT
TIME TO GATHER
YOUR NECESSITIES
AND BID FAREWELL
TO THE ONLY HOME
WE HAVE EVER
KNOWN.



BUT DO NOT
DESPAIR. THE UNDERFOOT
HAVE SURVIVED FAR GREATER
CHALLENGES AND WE SHALL
CONTINUE TO PERSEVERE.

UNTIL THEN,
KNOW THAT THE GIANTS-THAT-WERE
ARE WATCHING US FROM THEIR GREAT
WET CITY WITH ALL OUR FALLEN
BRETHERN.

LET'S MAKE
THEM *PROUD*.







CHRRK? THE FIRST OF OUR KIND, WHO RELEASED THE OTHER FUR WHEN THE LONG RAIN FELL?

YOU MEAN *MSKKI*, THE FIRST OF OUR KIND, WHO RELEASED THE GIANTS' *EYE-QUE SERUM* INTO THE WILD WHEN THE MIGHTY TREMORS TORE APART THE LAND?



OH, FOR THE LOVE OF-- DIDN'T YOUR MATRIARCH TEACH YOU ANYTHING?

OUR *WHAT-RIARCH*?

FORGET IT. I HOPE *BUDDY* AND *TERRY* ARE HAVING A PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION, AT LEAST.



IT'S SO PRETTY I WANNA *CRY*.

SOMETIMES I KEEP IT UNDER THE BEDDING WHILE I SLEEP.

SOMETIMES I TALK T' MINE IN A SOFT WHISPER.



SPEAKIN' OF WHISPERS, MAYBE WE SHOULD KEEP OUR VOICES DOWN.

WHY?

I DUNNO, I JUST... YOU EVER GET THE FEELIN' YOU'RE BEIN' *WATCHED*?



WELL, *NOW* I DO.

I'M JUST THINKIN' A SOMETHIN' THE *SCALES* SAID WHEN THEY *AMBUSHED* US. LIKE THEY *KNEW* WE WERE GONNA BE THERE.







PILOT NEIL
REPORTING.
WHIRLY-BIRD
SERENITY IS EN
ROUTE. OVERSEER,
DO YOU COPY?

COPY
THAT. URSULA
REPORTING FROM
WHIRLY-BIRD
CYGNUS.



WE'RE RIGHT
BEHIND YOU,
NEIL.



WHY'D
WE LEAVE IVES
BEHIND?

WE'RE
OVERCROWDED AS
IT IS. BUT MORE THAN
THAT, HE NEEDED
SOME TIME ALONE.

THE
CHRONICLE
WASN'T JUST A
SHIP TO
HIM.



"IT WAS A
BRIDGE TO
THE PAST."



IT FEELS LIKE MY STOMACH IS IN MY THROAT.

YOU GET USED TO IT.

WHY WOULD YA WANT TO?



I'VE GOT EYES ON A FEATHER.

ANY IDEA WHY THEY'RE HELPING THE FLAT-TAILS?



MAYBE THEY DON'T HAVE A *CHOICE*. I SAW SOMETHIN' ON THE OTHER ONE. A COLLAR BUILT WITH THE SAME STUFF AS THE DAM.

I THINK THEY'RE CONNECTED SOMEHOW.

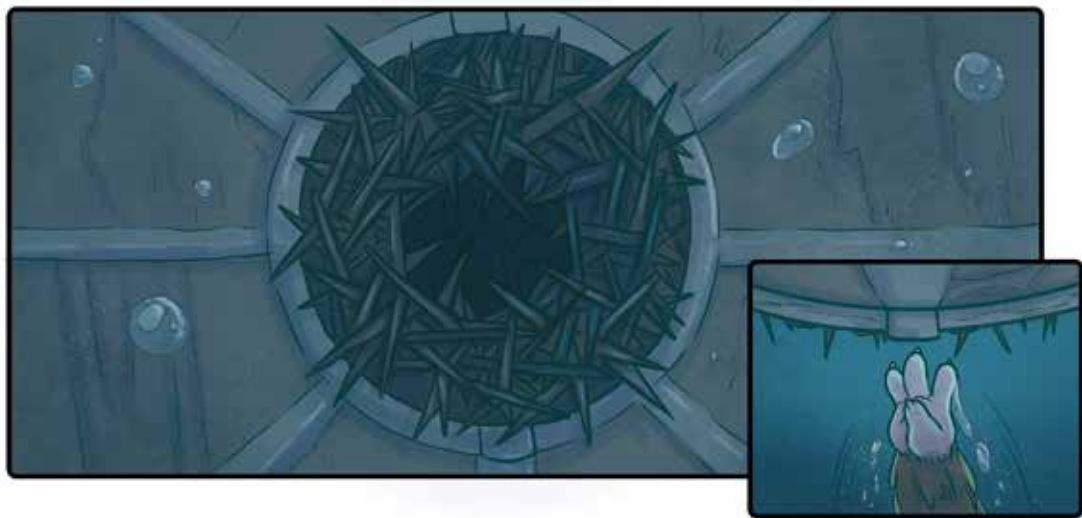


THEN HOW ABOUT WE *DISCONNECT* THEM.













NNNGGGH...
COULD YOU
MOVE
ALREADY?

SMASH!



LOOKS LIKE
HAP WAS RIGHT TO
BRING YOU ALONG,
MAC.




MOVE IT, H.A.M.
WE'VE GOT TO FIND THE
WEAK SPOT IN THE MIDDLE
OF... WHATEVER ALL
THIS IS.

AND WE NEED
TO DO IT **ON**
THE DOUBLE.
HOWEVER
DANGEROUS IT IS
DOWN HERE...



"IT'S A LOT
WORSE OUT
THERE."




NONE OF THESE ARTIFACTS WOULD HELP DIVERT WATER. THEY'RE SCANNERS... IT'S LIKE THEY'RE *LOOKING* FOR SOMETHING.

SORRY.

GO EASY ON THE LITTLE ONE. SHE UNLOCKED THAT HATCH IN RECORD TIME.

STAY FOCUSED, RUBY. THE *REASONS* DON'T MATTER. WE'RE TAKING THIS WHOLE THING APART.




AND DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED *LAST* TIME I WENT EASY ON A TRAPSMITH?

WHAT HAPPENED TO OATES WASN'T YOUR FAULT, HAP.

IT'S NOT ABOUT FAULT, REM. IT'S ABOUT *RESPONSIBILITY*.

NOW KEEP MOVING.




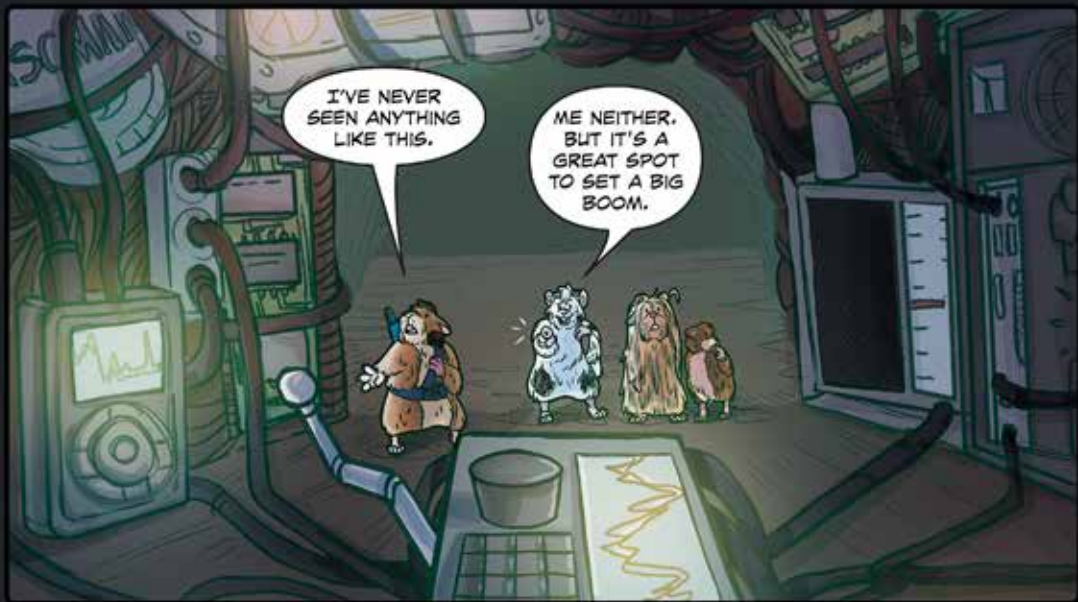
DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. HAP HAS BEEN TEAM COMMANDER FOR A LONG TIME.

BUT NOT HAP.

WE'VE *ALL* SEEN FRIENDS LEAVE THIS WORLD TO JOIN CHRRK IN THE WET CITY. AND MOST OF US KEEP THOSE WE'VE LOST DEEP IN OUR HEARTS.

"HE CARRIES EVERY ONE OF THEM ON HIS SHOULDERS."





I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS.

ME NEITHER, BUT IT'S A GREAT SPOT TO SET A BIG BOOM.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I THINK I CAN CONNECT TO THAT FUNNY HEADGEAR THE OTHER H.A.M. WEARS.



FIRST OF ALL, **WE'RE** THE ONLY H.A.M.

AND I TOLD YOU TO **FOCUS**. THIS ISN'T--

HAP? IS THAT YOU?



WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING IN THERE, I'M SURE IT ISN'T EASY.

BUT IF I COULD MAKE A SMALL REQUEST?



DO IT
FASTER!



GET THOSE
CHARGES READY NOW,
REM. URSULA'S IN
TROUBLE.




AND IT'S
NOT GOING SO
GREAT IN HERE,
EITHER.

WHRRRRRRRRRR!



THERE'S SO MANY.



YOU CAN DO THIS, RUBY. JUST THINK OF IT AS ANOTHER PUZZLE. BUT THINK QUICKLY, BECAUSE...

...WE'RE...



...RUNNING...



...OUT...

WHRRRRRR!



...OF...



... TIME!







EVERYONE
GET TO THE
WHIRLY-BIRD!



WAY
AHEAD
OF YA!

START MOVIN',
NEIL--WE GOT
A BALDIE
T' CATCH!



IT'S *NO USE*.
THIS THING CAN'T
MATCH A FEATHER'S
SPEED.

DON'T BE MAD,
MISTER NEIL, BUT I
NOTICED THAT YOUR
ENGINE TORQUE WASN'T
EFFICIENT. PLUS, THE
WIRES WERE MESSY.



SO I
FIXED
THEM.



WHOOOOOOOOOSH!



I LIKE THAT PUP.

HOLD YER APPLAUSE 'TIL WE SAVE URSULA AND TALLIS.



SURE, BUT--HEY, WHERE'S HAP?



OH.





"FINALLY, WE GET TO THE SIMPLEST BIT OF ALL."



"WE JUST LET TALLIS... BE TALLIS."



IT'S A LOT TO TRANSPORT, MATRIARCH. MAYBE WE SHOULD COLLECT ON SOME FAVORS OWED BY OUR LARGER CLIENTS.

ABSOLUTELY *NOT*. THE DAY WILL COME WHEN WE NEED EVERY *ONE* OF THOSE FAVORS. FOR NOW, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO--

WHUB WHUB WHUB!

WHAT'S ALL THIS?

I COULD ASK *YOU* THE SAME THING.

AND I *INTEND* TO. JUST AS SOON AS YOU TURN OFF THAT BLASTED CONTRAPTION.

HAP...

I'VE BEEN MATRIARCH SINCE YOU WERE A PUP, TALLIS. I KNOW WHAT IT MEANS WHEN A H.A.M. DOESN'T RETURN.

I WANT A FULL REPORT IN THE BRIEFING ROOM. *RIGHT NOW.*

I TRUST NO ONE MINDS GETTING A BIT *WET.*



IT WOULD APPEAR THE PUFFS SUCCEEDED, MELL.

I NEVER HAD THE SLIGHTEST TREPIDATION, LIEF.



STRANGE, I SEEM TO RECALL A DISTINCT *LACK* OF CONFIDENCE WHEN THE WATER WAS AT OUR DOORSTEP.



WELL, IT'S RECEDING NOW, SO JUBILATION IS IN ORDER.

YOU'RE JUST LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO GATHER THE NEIGHBORHOOD ON YOUR BIRTHDAY.

EVERYONE *FORGOT* LAST YEAR!



SO WHAT DID THE PUFFS WANT FOR THEIR HELP?

SAME THING THEY WANT FROM *EVERY* CLIENT--"A FAVOR TO BE NAMED LATER."

I DON'T KNOW WHEN THEIR MATRIARCH WILL COLLECT, BUT *WHATEVER* SHE'S SAVING UP FOR...



...IT MUST BE SOMETHING *BIG*.



WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?
IT'S MY TURN!

YOU ALREADY HAD YOUR TURN! BESIDES, THEY'RE ALMOST DONE.



--AND DESPITE OUR LOSSES, I AM GRATEFUL FOR ALL YOUR EFFORTS TOWARDS COMPLETING THE MISSION. WITH *SPECIAL* THANKS TO OUR TRAPSMITH.

I'M AFRAID A *PROPER* CELEBRATION WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL A REPLACEMENT BURROW IS SECURED AND OUR SUPPLIES ARE UNPACKED.



AS FOR OUR NEW FRIENDS, PLEASE TAKE WHATEVER YOU NEED FOR YOUR JOURNEY HOME.



ABOUT THAT, I THINK MAYBE YOU CAN UNPACK THOSE CONTAINERS.



WE'VE DECIDED TO LEAVE THE WHIRLY-BIRD WITH YOU. AFTER *THIS* ONE'S MODIFICATIONS, IT SHOULD INCREASE YOUR RANGE FOR GATHERING GLOWSHROOMS *TEN-FOLD*.

SO THERE'S NO NEED TO ABANDON THIS FACILITY.

MISS MATRIARCH? I *KNOW* THAT YOU DIDN'T WANT MAC TO BE A H.A.M., BUT SHE SAVED MY LIFE. LIKE, A WHOLE *BUNCH* OF TIMES. I DON'T WANT TO BE A TRAPSMITH UNLESS SHE'S THERE, TOO.



AT NEVERMIND DOCKSH, HAP CALLED ME A PILLOW. I WASH ANGRY THEN, BUT NOW I REALIZHE HE WASH *REALLY* CALLING ME AN AEGISH. LIKE TALLISH.

IF RUBY'SH YOUR TRAPSMITH, THEN *I'M* HER PILLOW. ALWAYS.

WELL, IF YOUR TEAM'S *WALKIN'* HOME, THEN I'M GOIN' WITH YOU.

I DON'T NEED PROTECTION!

ARE YOU JUST SAYIN' THAT TO LOOK TOUGH, BUT YOU'D ACTUALLY LIKE ME TO COME?

YEP!



SHOULD WE HOLD PAWS?

YEP!

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. HAP HAD STRONG FEELINGS ABOUT THE NAME OF HIS TEAM, AND AFTER WHAT HE DID...

WE WANT TO SHOW OUR RESPECT.



SO I'D LIKE TO RE-INTRODUCE THE **HAMSTER AIRBORNE PARATROOPERS!**



I MEAN, IF YOU THINK HE WOULD HAVE LIKED THAT.

I THINK HE WOULD HAVE LIKED THAT VERY MUCH.



SO BE IT. AND TIME IS ONCE MORE OF THE *ESSENCE*.

WHOEVER WAS BEHIND THE DAM'S CREATION INTENDED SOMETHING FAR WORSE THAN *FLOODING*. SOMETHING THAT I FEAR MAY SOON THREATEN US ALL.

I THUS PROPOSE AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN H.A.M. AND H.A.P. SO THAT WE MAY AID EACH OTHER WHEN DANGER ARISES. BUT FOR NOW--

DISMISSED!





AND LO, IT IS *DONE*, MY FLOCK!
TAKE THIS MOMENT TO REFLECT UPON
THE *BOUNTY* OF OUR *SUCCESS* BEFORE
WE RETURN TO THE *ISLAND*.



SUCCESS?
THE DAM IS *RUINED*,
THE FEATHERS
ESCAPED, AND
THE SHOO-FLY GOT...
SHOOED.



OH YE OF
LITTLE FAITH,
TURR.

FLIES ARE
BEGAT FOR THE *SSWATTER*. THE
FEATHERS *RETREAT* TO THEIR
NESTSS HIGH ABOVE THE FRAY.
FORGET THEM BOTH.



AND THE DAM
SSERVED ITS PURPOSE:
TO FIND THE MOST
PRECIOUS FOSSIL OF
THE GIANTSS-THAT-
WERE, AND WASSH AWAY
THE EARTH UNDER WHICH
IT WASS BURIED.

AND LO,
REJOICE!
FOR IT IS
LAID *BARE*
BEFORE YOU.




"BEHOLD! THE
INSTRUMENT OF
OUR *SSSALVATION!*"



AMEN!



3PST!
QUIET BACK
THERE!




I'VE NEVER SEEN
A GATHERING LIKE
THIS. *WHATEVER'S*
GOING ON, IT'S GOTTA
BE *BAD* IF *SCALES*
ARE INVOLVED.

THEY SAID
SOMETHING ABOUT
AN ISLAND. THAT'S
GONNA BE A
PROBLEM.

WELL, I
KNOW I'M NEW
TO THE TEAM, BUT
IF *WATER* IS A
PROBLEM FOR THE

**HAMSTER
ALL-TERRAIN
MOUNTAINEERS...**



I MAY HAVE A
SUGGESTION.

END.

HAMSTER DIFFERENCES

SYRIAN



ROUND EARS
ROUND CHEEKS
OVERALL ROUND FEATURES

alt. SYRIAN Design



LONGER EARS w/ SLIGHT DIVET
LONGER SNOUT + HEART NOSE

Teddy Bear



LONG FUR
ROUND CHEEKS
ROUND FEATURES



CHINESE DWARF



TEAR DROP EARS
EAR DIVET
MORE SQUARE JAW



RUSSIAN DWARF



ROUND EARS w/ DIVET
ROUND CHEEKS
OVERALL SMALL



DWARF



ROUND EARS
ROUND CHEEKS
OVERALL LIKE THE SYRIAN.

SUNFIRE BUNGARIAN DWARF



ROUND DIVETS
WARM RED FEATURES

Why hamsters?

Emily: I've had pet rodents throughout life. I got my first hamster back in 2012 and she was a delight. Hamsters are adorable, soft, and dainty. They are quick, smart, and agile. They can be tamed, with patience, and even taught to do tricks. In spending time with my hamsters, each of them bonded with me and became my special little friend. And, of course, they are pretty easy to care for.

I've always loved tales of small creatures working together against the odds to succeed—as in *Watership Down*, or *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. Like the characters in those stories, my pets have all had their own unique personalities. My first hamster, Ysabell Sto Hamsterlet (Izzy!), was a sweet, inquisitive little lady. I started imagining the adventures she had when I was not home; and this turned into Izzy sharing her thoughts on Twitter. One day, another little hamster replied to her, and a storytelling partnership was born ...

ORIGINAL CHARACTER SKETCHES



What was it like working with a co-writer on The Underfoot?

Ben: I was nervous at first about collaborating with another writer. Would we argue incessantly over plot details? Would there be enough time to mansplain hamster sleeping habits?

But our process quickly became a refreshingly organic exchange of ideas offered, considered, accepted, and (often) discarded without ego or attachment. Our goal, always, is to tell the best story we can, for as broad an audience as possible.

It also helped tremendously that Lion Forge downloaded our collective consciousness into a glowing box of buttons and coils, from which scripts are printed and delivered to Michelle. They say this is now standard industry practice, and that we're free to re-enter our host bodies after volume three.

If anyone's reading this, please feed my cat.

ORIGINAL CHARACTER SKETCHES



What research did you do while creating the art for this story?

Michelle: Don't worry, Ben—I'll feed Fizzgig for you! As for the art, both before and after starting to draw *The Underfoot* I watched a *whole* lot of hamster videos online. I also took a few trips to local pet stores to watch them in action (and by action, I mean mostly sleeping). It finally clicked in my brain that hamsters kind of look like stick figures trapped in really poofy onsies cinched at the hands and feet. This helped me with their movement quite a bit.

As for other research, being an illustrator (especially in comics) means you have to be able to draw anything and everything. This requires the ability to cobble together references, and use them to turn your illustration into something believable and outstanding. For example: it takes multiple rounds of research and finding relevant images when creating a scene where a large fresh-water fish jumps over a hamster-driven boat made of an umbrella, children's toys, and a water bottle—because, let's be true, that hasn't happened in real-life . . . yet.

CREATORS

BEN FISHER is an attorney and author whose work spans a broad spectrum of genres and subject matter, but always with an underlying thread of humanity (and a bit of his trademark dry wit).



His father, a recipient of the NAACP Humanitarian Award, helped ensure that a thread of optimism was woven into even Ben's darkest tales, while his mother first set him on the storyteller path by giving him the *Dungeons & Dragons* "red box" while he was still in grade school.

He writes and performs "geek-centric" music under the name Tesla Deathray Survivors Anonymous, and his first album, *This Is Canon*, was released in 2017.



EMILY S. WHITTEN is an attorney, fiction writer, pop culture journalist and host, and media personality who also occasionally runs genre conventions. She has published columns and webcomics with the likes of ComicMix, MTV Splash Page, Reelz.com, and Movers & Shakers Unlimited, and has had recurring appearances on the *Fantastic Forum* radio and TV shows and the podcast *Made of Fail*.

Emily co-founded The North American Discworld Convention, and continues to assist in its management. She resides in the greater D.C. area, and in her copious spare time, she enjoys crafting and looking after her tiny hamster.

MICHELLE NGUYEN is an Eisner and Ignatz-winning illustrator and comic artist based in Portland, Oregon. She studied fine arts at the University of Puget Sound and Portland State University. She has previously contributed to *The Misadventures of Grumpy Cat and Pokey* and the *Elements: Fire* anthology.



THOM ZAHLER is a comic book creator and letterer. He created the Line Webtoon hit series *Warning Label* as well as the Harvey-nominated *Love and Capes*, *Long Distance*, and the time-traveling wine comic *Time and Vine*. He also writes and draws for IDW's successful *My Little Pony* series. He has lettered for numerous companies, including Warner Brothers, Claypool Comics, Antarctic Press, and more.

ADRIAN RICKER — Flattening/Coloring Assistance
ERIC ORCHARD — Maps



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