

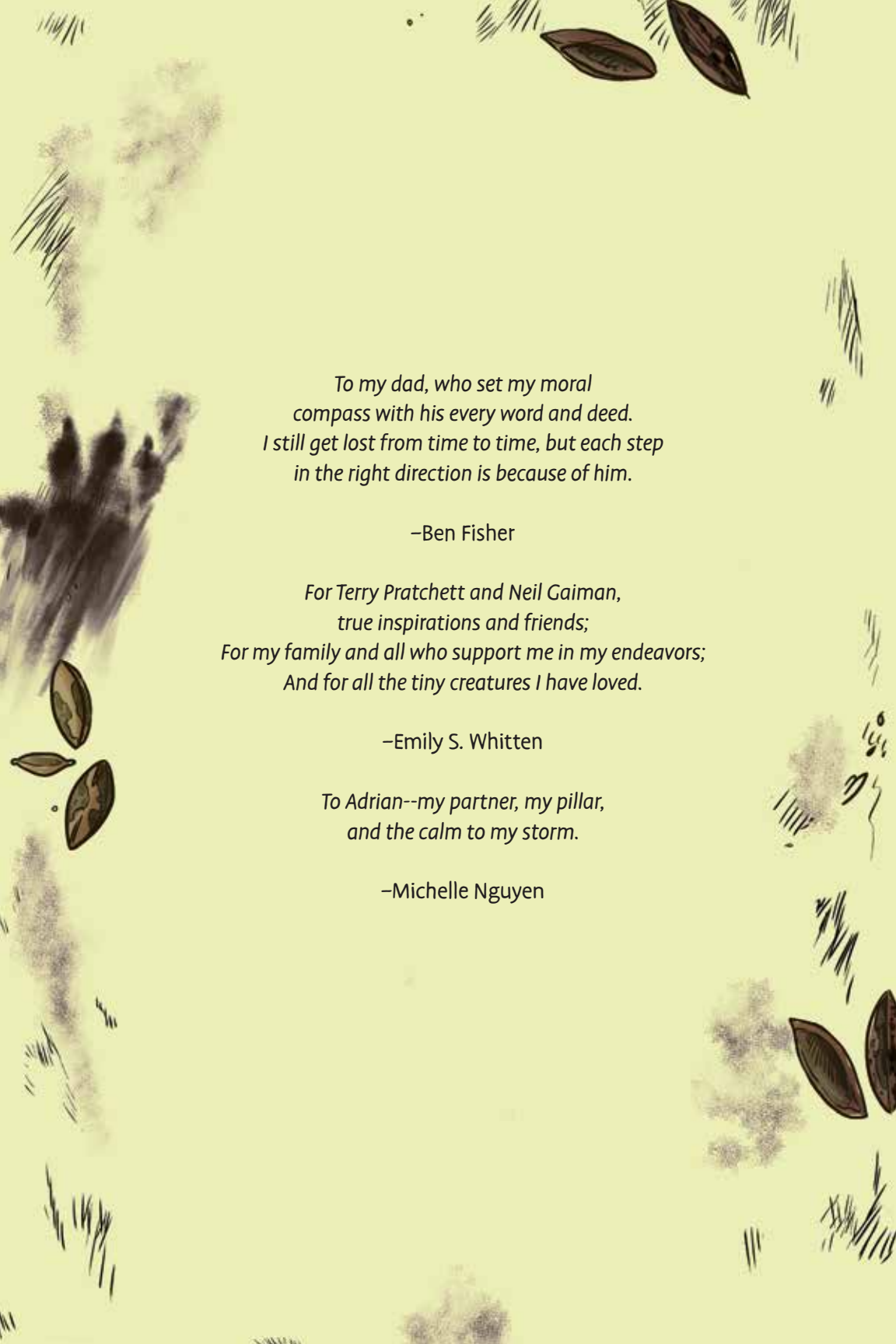
# THE UNDERFOOT

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

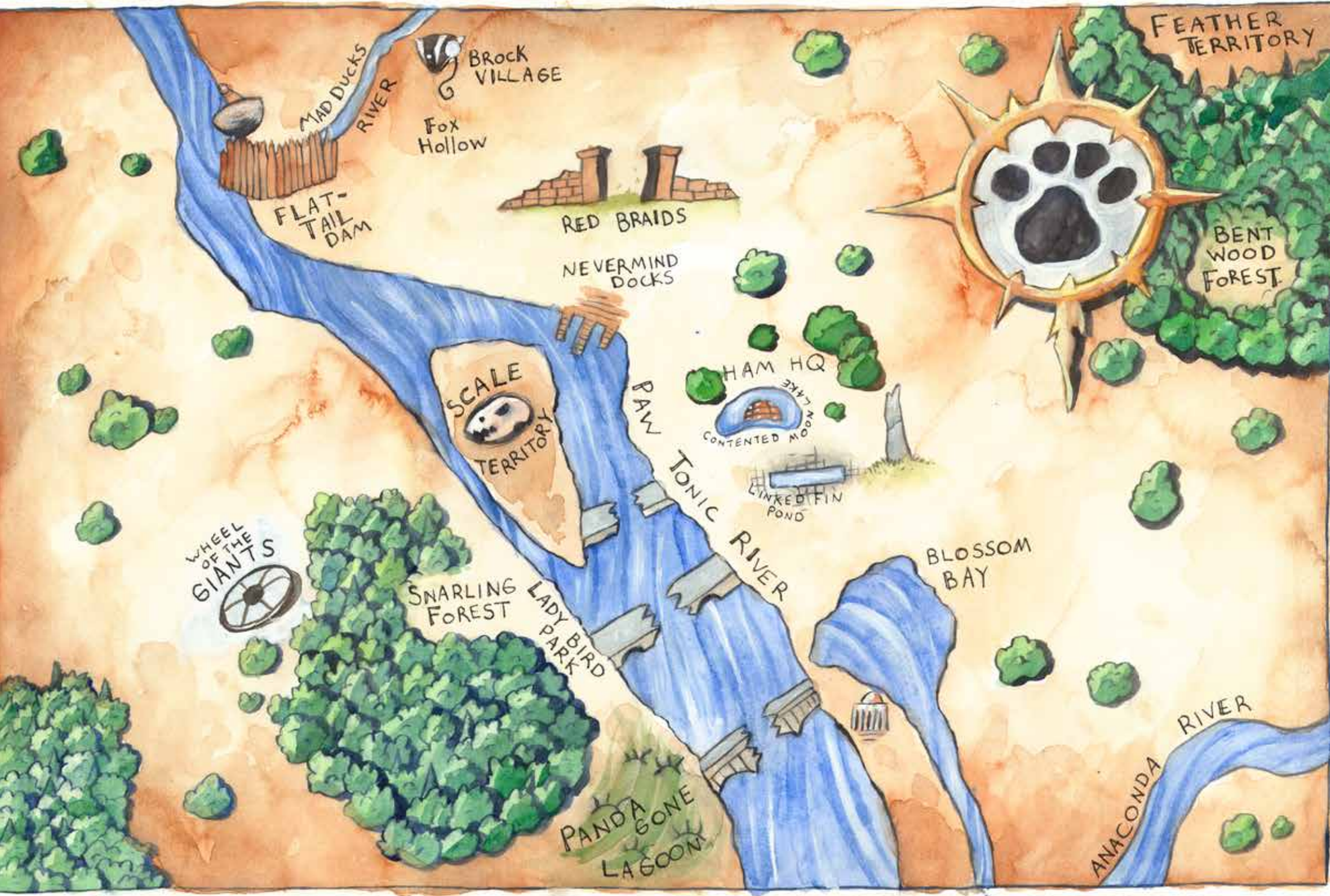
Illustrated by Michelle Nguyen

Lettered by Thom Zahler



CARACAL™





FEATHER TERRITORY

BROCK VILLAGE

Fox Hollow

MAD DUCKS RIVER

FLAT-TAIL DAM

RED BRAIDS

NEVERMIND DOCKS

SCALE TERRITORY

HAM HQ

CONTENTED MOON LAKE

LINKED FIN POND

TONIC RIVER

BLOSSOM BAY

ANACONDA RIVER

WHEEL OF THE GIANTS

SNARLING FOREST

LADY BIRD PARK

PANDA GONE LAGOON

BENT WOOD FOREST









## 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.

*Crepuscular and nocturnal behavior  
has begun to measurably shift.*

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

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

# CHAPTER ONE















**GET  
BACK!**









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.

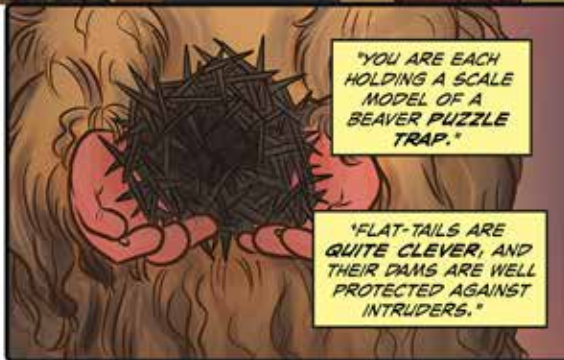
THEY WON'T **TAKE**  
ME BACK. MISTER  
ELTON SAYS I'M TOO  
DISRUPTIVE. BUT I  
WAS JUST FIXING  
THINGS!



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!**









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.



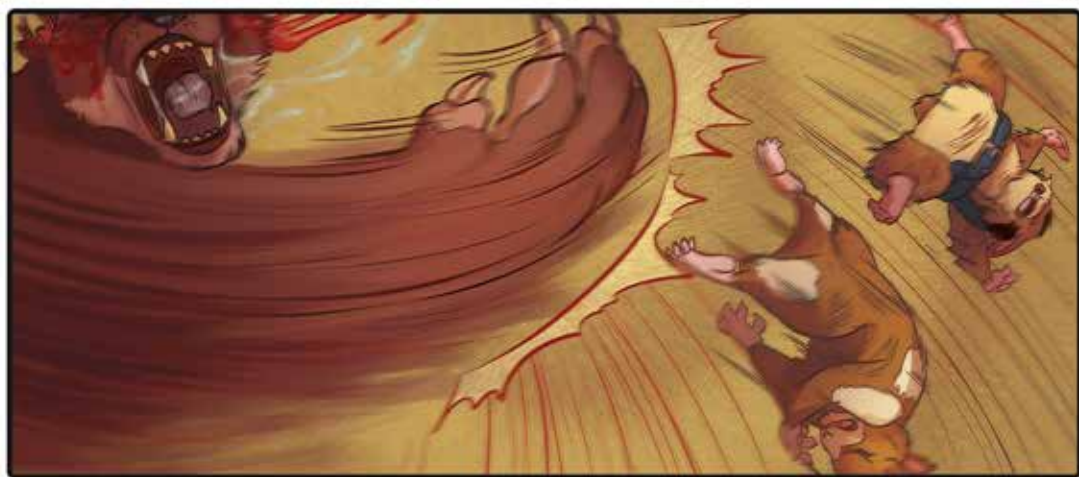
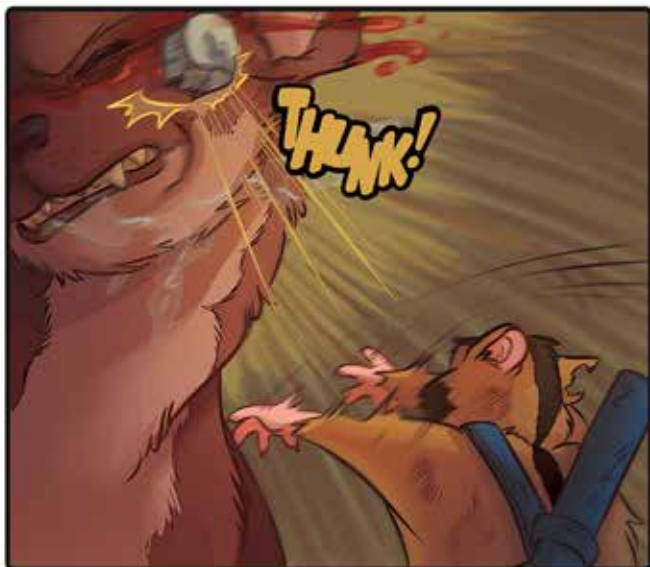
















**SKREEEEEEEE!**

**BLAM!**



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  
WASH 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.

ANYONE  
FINISH THEIR  
**PUZZLE?**

NOT  
YET.

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

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.

THASH 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  
YOURSELF WITH THE  
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.









I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE REALLY LEAVING THE BURROW.



IT'SH NO DIFFERENT THAN DEBRIS DUTY. SHAME SHTUFF ALL AROUND, JUSHT IN A DIFFERENT PLAYSH.

BESHIDESH, IT ONLY LOOKSH BIG BECUSH YOU'RE A PUP-SHQUEAK.



YEAH, I GUESS.



OF COURSE, *LAST* TIME WE HAD DEBRIS DUTY, WE ALMOST *DIED*.

GET A MOVE ON, BOTH OF YOU. THIS PLACE IS *LOUSY* WITH SCALES.

OH, THERE ARE THINGS WORSE THAN *SCALES* IN THESE WOODS.



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

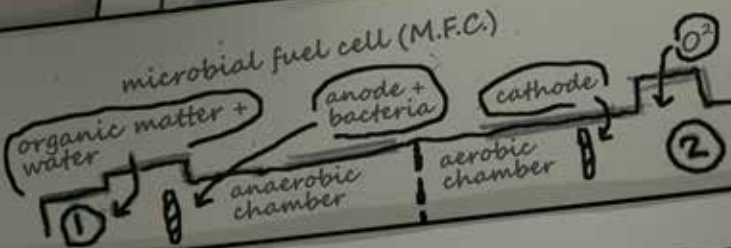
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### NEWS IN BRIEF: Biofuel Cells: Tree Fungus Lets Current Flow

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.

...this could effectively turn



# CHAPTER TWO









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!





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 IS 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."

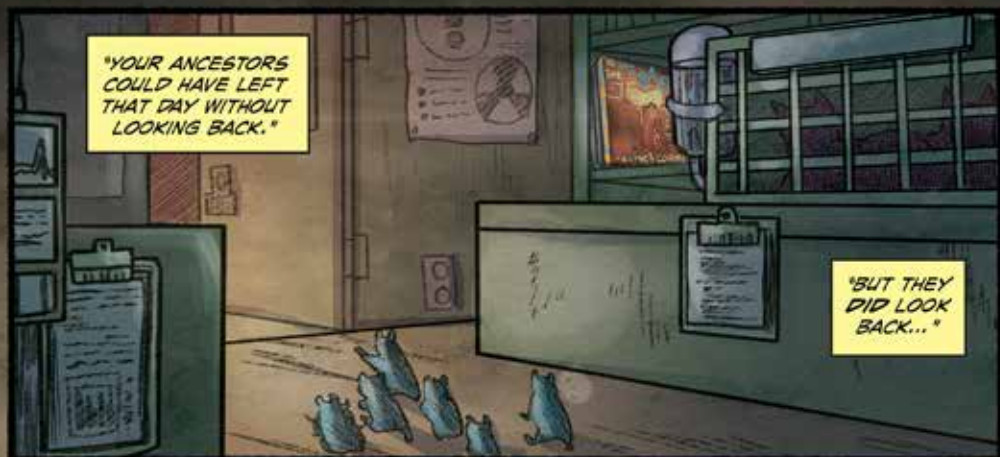


I KNOW  
ALL THOSH  
SHTORIESH,  
MISHTER  
HAP.

*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."



"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*.



I'M  
SHCARED OF  
*THAT*.





SSPEAKIN' A WHICH, WE'VE BEEN HEARIN' A TALE OF FUR ROAMIN' WHERE THEY DON'T BELONG. AND THAT SSSORY, WELL...











SKLISSHHH!



RAAAAAAH!



CHHHHOOPPP!



AAAAAGH!!



SLAAAAASH!

UNNNNNGH!





CHOMP!



CRACK!



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.

















## 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: DOUNGARIAN 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 legal Counsel. If you think you have received this email in error, please do not reply.\*\*\*

### 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.

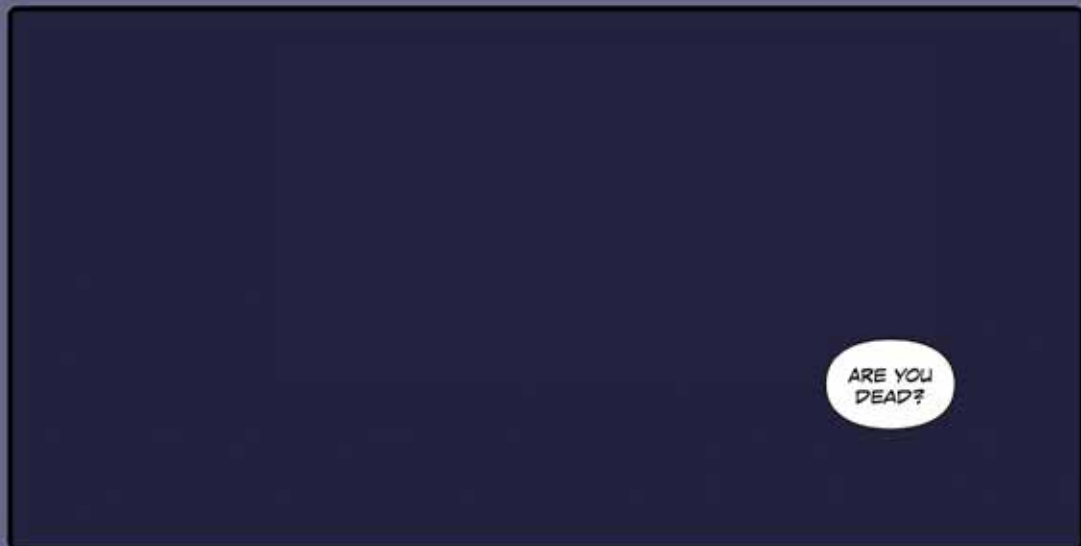
At Mitch's Maglocks...



# CHAPTER THREE



HELLO?



ARE YOU  
DEAD?



IF YOU'RE  
DEAD, I'D VERY  
MUCH LIKE YOUR  
BELT.







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.





















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

Wanted For:  
1000 Dollars  
Flight Case  
Brought to the Court  
at the end of the day





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.









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 SHINGSHE  
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*?

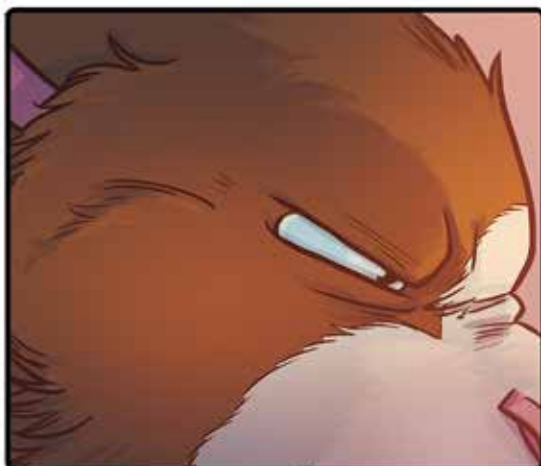


MISTER IVES, IS IT TRUE THIS USED TO BE BURL'S SHIP?

WHAT GAVE YOU THAT IDEA?



THIS.















NICE WORK,  
IVES!

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'!













**CRAACKK!**

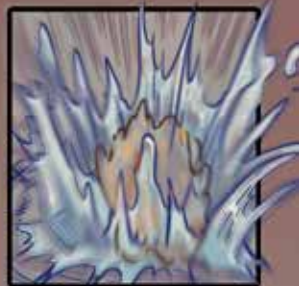
**BUDDA-  
BUDDA-  
BUDDA!**

**SLASSSSH!**

**SHHHRAAK!**

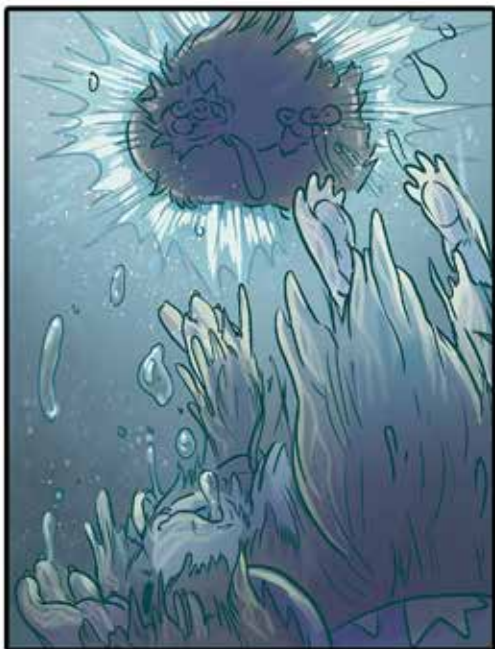
**SKRRRAASSSH!**

















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









IT'S THE  
BURROW'S HEART,  
ISN'T IT?

ANY  
IDEA WHY IT'S  
SURROUNDED  
BY *SKULLS*?



YOUR  
RESPONSIBILITY IS  
TO PREPARE THE  
PUPS FOR WHEN THE  
*LONG RAIN* FALLS  
AGAIN.

*MY* RESPONSIBILITY  
IS TO ENSURE THE  
WELL-BEING OF THE  
COLONY. YOU KEEP TO  
*YOUR* MATTERS, I'LL  
KEEP TO *MINE*.

OF COURSE.  
I MEANT NO  
OFFENSE.





"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 STOKES HER COMPETITIVE SPIRIT.



## **MAC**

**SPECIES:** SYRIAN - TEDDY BEAR  
(MESOCRICETUS AURATUS)

**POSITION:** H.A.M. - JANNIE

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, Wendt 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  
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

### 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 containment of water supplies and a reduction in breathing.

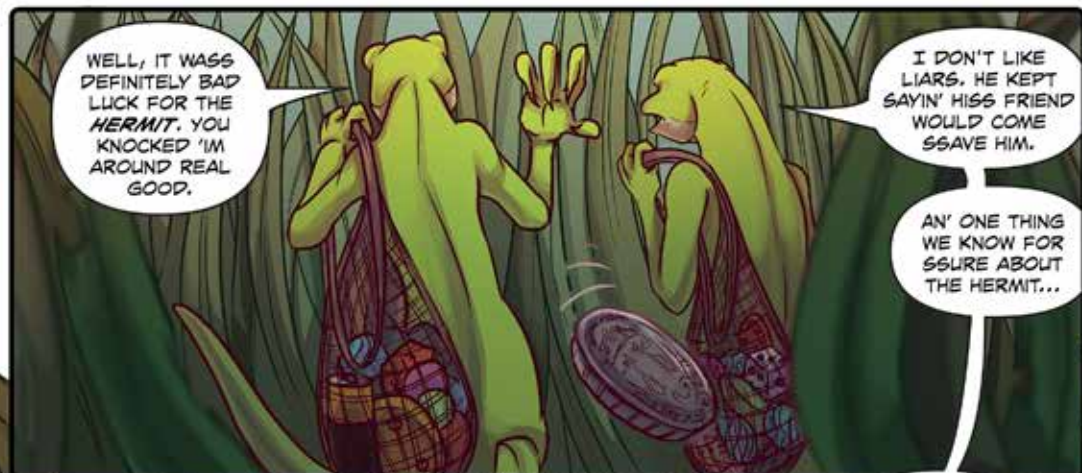


# CHAPTER FOUR



















I'D HEARD A  
REPORT THAT SOMEONE  
FROM OUR COLONY WAS  
WANDERING ALONE  
OUT HERE.



BUT YOU  
AREN'T ONE OF  
OURS.



WHO--?





ARE YOU??

AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?









LET'S  
GET THIS  
HAMSTER A  
RIFLE.

I LIKE  
HER.



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?







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  
FUR, 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  
from 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.*



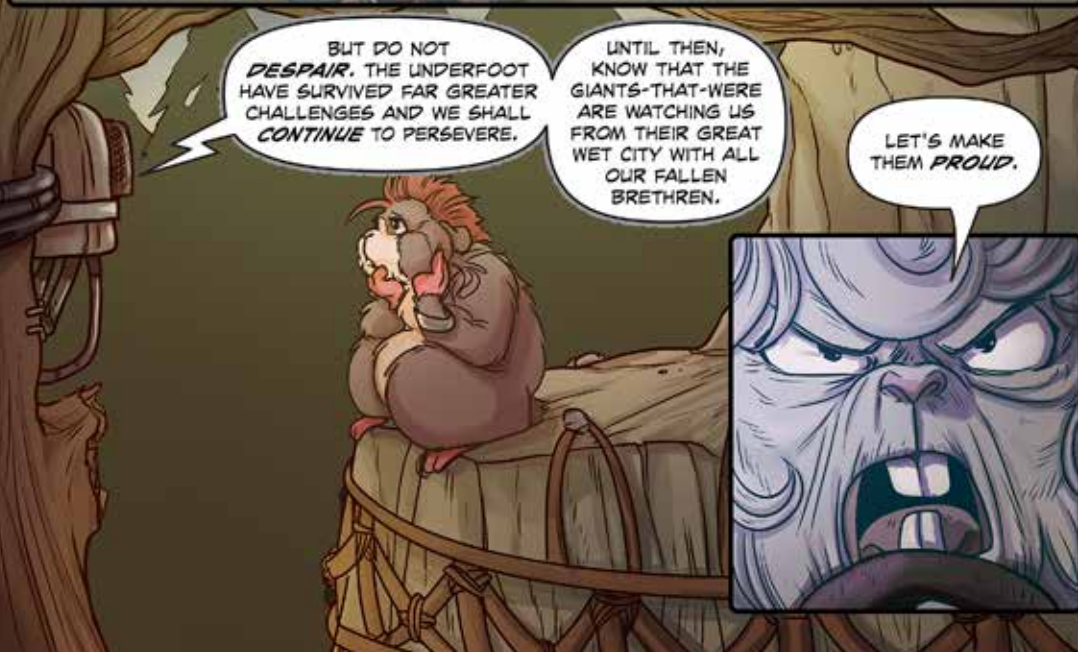
THE RISING WATERS  
AROUND YOUR PAWS  
WILL SOON BECOME  
A FLOOD.

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  
BRETHREN.

LET'S MAKE  
THEM *PROUD.*





YOU REALLY  
THINK YOUR  
TEAM CAN  
DESTROY THE  
DAM?

IT'S WHAT  
WE DO. YOU REALLY  
THINK *YOUR* TEAM  
CAN GET US  
THERE?

IT'S WHAT  
*WE* DO.

THERE'S A LOT TO  
PROCESS. ALL THIS TIME,  
WE THOUGHT *WE* WERE THE  
ONLY DESCENDANTS OF  
CHRRK.

WHO?













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.

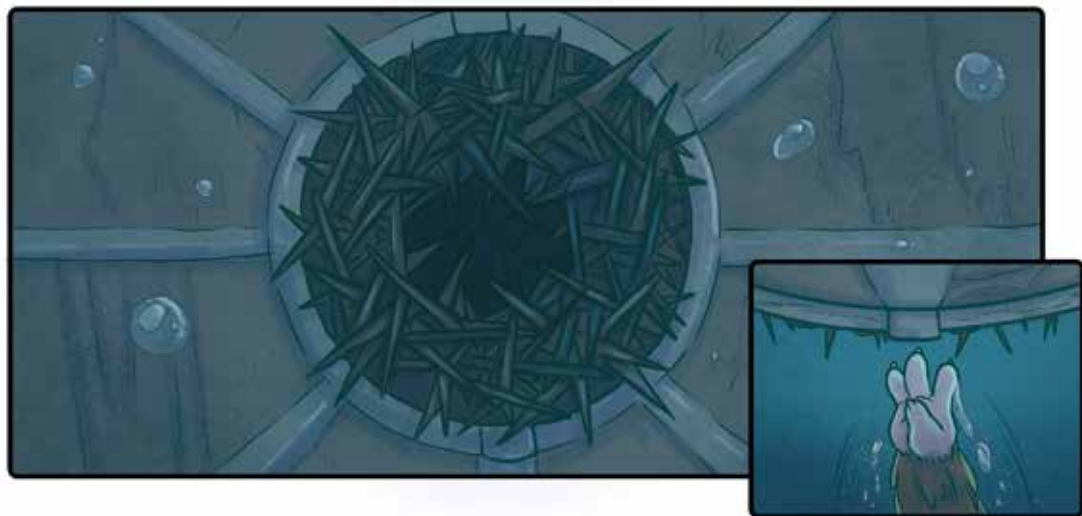
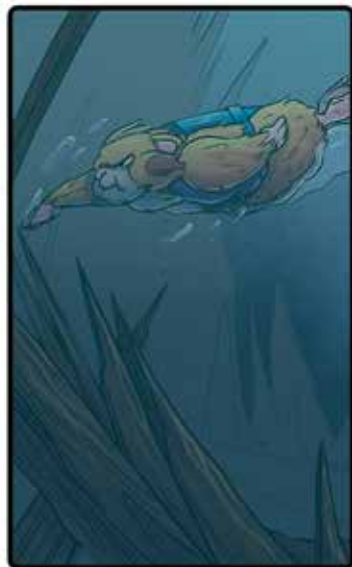


















NONE OF THESE ARTIFACTS WOULD HELP DIVERT WATER. THEY'RE SCANNERS... IT'S LIKE THEY'RE **LOOKING** FOR SOMETHING.

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.

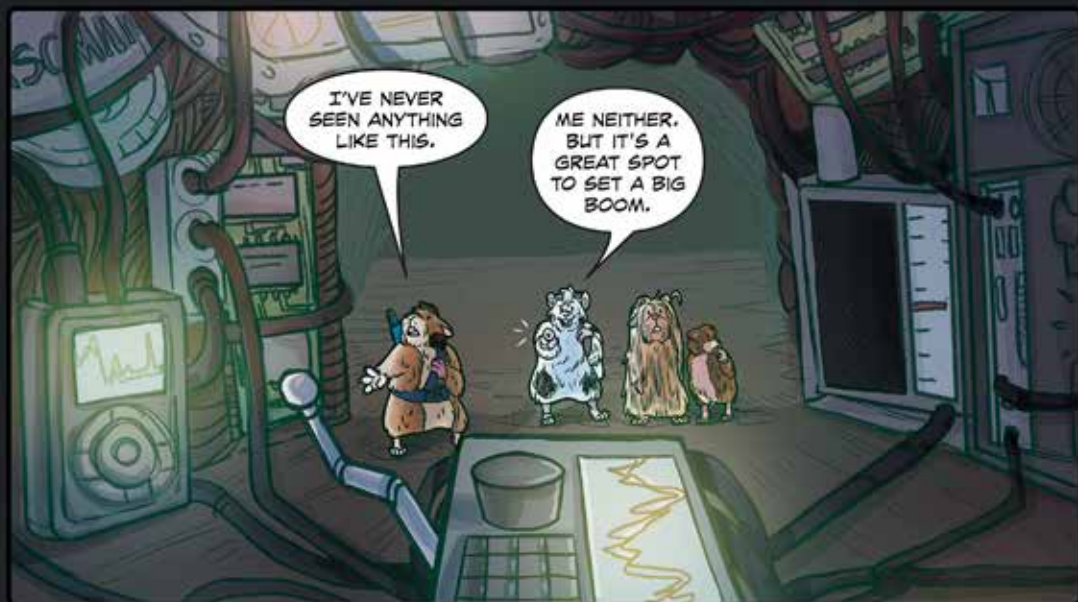
DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY. HAP HAS BEEN TEAM COMMANDER FOR A LONG TIME.

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?









THERE'S SO  
*MANY.*

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



...WE'RE...



...RUNNING...



**WHRRRRRR!**

...OUT...



...OF...



...TIME!

















WHOOOOOOOOOSH!













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.**





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 REALIZE 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  
NESSTSS HIGH ABOVE THE FRAY.  
FORGET THEM BOTH.



AND THE DAM  
SSERVED ITS PURPOSE:  
TO FIND THE MOST  
PRECIOUS FOSSEL 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  
*INSSSTRUMENT* 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.**

## ANI/TORI

SPECIES: DJUNGARIAN WINTER WHITE  
(PHODOPUS SUNGORUS)

POSITION: H.A.M. TRAINEES

ASSESSMENT: AVERAGE AQUATIC AND  
PHYSICAL SKILL SETS. TEND TO SOCIALIZE  
PRIMARILY WITH EACH OTHER.

OCCASIONAL INTIMIDATION OF OTHER  
TRAINEES REMAINS A CONCERN.

NOTE: ~~PSI-LINK MANIFESTATION UNKNOWN~~  
FAR-SEERS. CONSULT THE ARCHIVE  
IMMEDIATELY.



## BASIE

SPECIES: SUNFIRE DJUNGARIAN  
(PHODOPUS SUNGORUS)

POSITION: CHIEF EMEFFCEE ENGINEER

ASSESSMENT: STOIC AND PRECISE. EXCELS  
AT INTERPRETING ARCHIVE SCHEMATICS.  
CONTROL ISSUES NOTED, BUT PATIENT  
WITH STAFF.

ONE OF THE BEDROCKS ON WHICH OUR  
BURROW STANDS. HIS SERVICE IS INVALUABLE.

NOTE: PROBABLY NEEDS A VACATION.



## BURL

SPECIES: CHINESE DWARF  
(CRICETULUS GRISEUS)

POSITION: ~~REDACTED~~

ASSESSMENT: ~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~



AFTER INCIDENT, THE BURROW

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

~~REDACTED~~

...ON, WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE  
TO REESTABLISH COMMUNICATIONS.



# 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, Ysabella 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 — Flatting/Coloring Assistance

ERIC ORCHARD — Maps



ISBN: 978-1-5493-0289-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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