

ka'Lii, the female Jennan Bureau scientist-investigator, walked into Mold'Arr's cave cube and waved her upper and lower arms at him. All four of them. She said, "We have another mysterious disappearance of a corpse at the Sacred Burial Grounds."

"So they send you because you're a doctor of many degrees and an expert in objective investigation, eh? Someone to keep an eye on wild man Mold'Arr and his crazy extraterrestrial theories, hm?" Mold'Arr remarked. "Just because no one believes my sister got abducted cycles ago. I was just a kid when she got taken in front of my very eyes, by... by... unworldly things!"

"Look, maybe it was one of our higher technology neighbors a couple of canyons over, ok?" Ska'Lii replied in a whiny kind of voice. "They probably flew over with torchlights on some gasbag & your sister willingly went with them. She probably marriage-bonded with one of those guys."

Gasbags (in their language, gasbags were officially called Utots) were lighter than air, organic creatures used by the glider race of Jenna for intercanyon travel due to a lack of good, gliding thermals over long distances.

"No way, Ska'Lii, never believe everything the Bureau says," Mold'Arr responded in his trademark monotone mumble, "You know, we've been partners for a little over a cycle now. Everyone loves how you objectify my paranormal investigations of these Y-files the Bureau can't close or explain. Yes, some of them are probably caused by natural, or undocumented phenomena, but we've run into some wierd stuff, too, you've got to admit. Things that can't be explained except by some force or people or technology beyond our world!"

"I don't want to argue with you anymore, " Ska'Lii sniffed. "Let's go! It's getting dark and people are beginning to spread rumours about us gliding around at night all the time."

"Ah, we're professionals, Ska. People WISH we were having an affair, but that would ruin things, wouldn't it? Especially our friendship." Mold'Arr got down from his perch.

"Yes, it would," sighed Ska'Lii, "Yes, it would. Now, can we get out of here?"

Mold'Arr and Ska'Lii left the cave and began the long climb up the face of the craggy cliff. This was Bitak Puwang, their canyon habitat. Almost half a mile deep, 500 miles long and 77 miles at its widest, the canyon interior consisted of blue and red, forested fertile valleys, multiple river systems, plateaus, uplifts, natural arches and bridges while the cliffsides consisted of outcroppings, ledges, and steppes.

hey lived and worked on the northeastern wall of Bitak Puwang, where the capital, called Deeze, was located on a wide steppe. The nearest canyon system was a hundred miles away from the edge.

The Jennans reached the tabihan, their word for edge, in full darkness. The thermals and updrafts were also kicking up. This would be good for the glide back down. Mold'Arr recalled that he witnessed his sister's abduction at another, distant tabihan, many cycles before. He shook his head at the memory.

"So what's the scoop, Ska'Lii? I've heard reports of dead abductions from these parts before. Why is the Bitak Bureau suddenly interested? The official word is that they're probably a renegade group of Katulong bandits stealing these bodies for any precious goods. Why are they assigning this to us now?" Mold'Arr asked.

Mold'Arr knew that the Bitak Puwang government had been having problems with roving bands of Katulong. Katulong, or helper people in their language, were the 4-limbed versions of Mold'Arr and Ska'Lii's race, an evolutionary offshoot of the gliders. Katulong did not have an extra pair of arms, could not glide, and were ground-bound. They were relegated to menial and farming tasks and acted as butlers, maids, etc. for those that could afford them.

"This is the third grave robbery in a week, that's why", Ska'Lii responded. "There are no gasbag landing marks nor are there any kabayo tracks indicating Katulong within the surrounding 12 mile area, and distant gliders have seen lights of all colours in this region."

Kabayo was their name for the heavily-furred, two-trunked, and eight-legged

beasts of burden used by the Katulongs. Ska'Lii stopped to look around at the Sacred Burial Grounds and waved one of her 3-fingered hands towards an area. "Follow me, Mold. There's an additional twist, by the way, this most recent abduction is of the recently interred Senator Oniuqa."

"The FAMOUS Oniuqa? The woman who helped ratify the Grain Treaty with the Batong Matarik canyon people 10 cycles ago? Gawsh, what a problem that's going to cause us! One of our national hero's - poof gone! That's a good one to explain to all the relatives." Mold'Arr looked at the ruined altar of the legendary senator.

Ska'Lii pointed at it. "The raised platform has collapsed, almost as if something blew it down. No tracks, which could mean gliders. Burn marks on the doors but they're pretty precise. I don't know of any canyon civilization with torch devices that good."

"Gliders from some canyon desperate enough to nab her body? Riding on some gasbags and using some kind of new technology, eh? I don't know how they have the strength to carry her body AND glide for 12 miles out of here." Mold'Arr looked up and around. "No way. The gasbags can only float for an hour before having to be set down and fed."

Ska'Lii also looked up, scanning the dark night sky. It was quite clear and she could see the stars. Something moved but she thought it was probably a falling star. She made a wish on that star and glanced back down. "We'd better glide back down. Tomorrow we can interview some of the witnesses."

They turned around and began the walk back to the tabihan. Suddenly, a red light enveloped them. Both were blown off the cliff by a rush of hot wind. Mold'Arr twisted around and saw bright red and white lights that probed and swirled the sand in the Burial Grounds. Another rush of air blasted him further backwards and he saw whatever it was rapidly ascend into the skies and dwindle to a dot in the stars.

Ska'Lii had landed on a ledge and Mold'Arr glided down and set himself upon it. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"I don't know... what... what happened, Mold?" Ska'Lii responded groggily.

"You mean you didn't see? K R U D L I K !!!"



Alone aboard the picket monitor station "Rizal", Emor Emod breathed a sigh of relief. That was a close call for him and ended any desire to snare more specimens. Emor hoped the creatures, which the Earth scientists

affectionately called “batadillo’s”, did not see the probe that had scanned and blown them off the cliff. Hopefully, the large biomass samples of dead aliens the robot probe had retrieved this past week from the Chasma Bonifacio canyon would be enough for the Earth-designed tests he had to run. He’d run the programs to examine the specimens taken and patch an enhancer over the infrared scan of the Jennan natives. Then he’d rocketcanister the data to the orbital observatory “Dahil Mahalkita”, just outside the Barnard Star System for a clear transmit (via bounce stations of course) to Director Kezon Siti at moonbase Theta.

Emor promised himself that he’d personally strangle the scientist who thought up the idea of getting biosamples easily by retrieving native corpses. It was bad enough the Earth authorities still didn’t know what to do with the live batadillo’s caught and experimented on years ago, now they had to creep around and nab dead ones! Sheesh!

#### riter’s Notes & Glossary

I consider the planet Jenna to be very prolific in its various plant, “insect”, and animal life, just like Earth, where we discover new types of wildlife all the time. This story hints at just a very few of them and allows other authors to create their own.

I also consider Bitak Puwang to be one of several “batadillo” canyon city-states or habitats on the planet. Just like Earth, Jenna has a multitude of cultures, colors, languages, religions, beliefs, fashions, technologies, etc. For this very reason, I believe anyone can “create” their own Jennan habitat, while at the same time, following the conventions set forth in WB101.

Batadillo - the Earth name given for the hexapodal dominant race on Jenna. This story does not provide a Jennan planet-wide name for themselves, except referring to themselves as “gliders” or the name of their originating city-state.

Batong Matarik - the nearest canyon city-state and trade-based ally to Bitak Puwang. Their language is similar to the Bitak Puwang, but of a different dialect.

Bitak Puwang - the particular city-state biome of Mold’Arr & Ska’Lii. Batadillo’s born and/or living there consider themselves Bitak Puwangs or Bitaks for short. The Earth designated name is Chasma Bonifacio.

DeeZee - the capital of Bitak Puwang.

Jarna - the Earth name given for the evolutionary quadrapod “cousin” of the batadillo’s, except they only have 2 arms and are incapable of gliding. Batadillo’s utilize their services for ground-based menial tasks, whereas some canyon systems use them as outright slaves. Katulong is the Bitak Puwang name for jarna.

Kabayo - the Bitak Puwang name for the mammalian-like “mule” used by the jarna. It is a heavy octaped that can move with swift agility in brief surges, with an elephantine trunk that splits into two down the middle, and is heavily furred. Always preyed on by the batadillos and jarna, kabayo have only been domesticated successfully by the jarna over the last several hundred years.

Tabihan - the Bitak Puwang name for edge, denoting cliffside or canyon's edge.

Utot - a lighter than air, floating Jennan beast nicknamed "gasbags", discovered by the batadillos in a remote continent. Balloon-like in appearance with insectivorid features, they can carry no more than two batadillo's & descend to the ground on an hourly basis to be fed. Feeding replenishes its capabilities to inflate itself. The utot is not quite tame, so one batadillo has to glide down to tie the creature to the ground, while the other batadillo remains to prevent the Utot from bolting. The logistics required in employing utots for long-distance travel is quite complex, their use slowly becoming popular & widespread only within the last few decades.

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