

Chapter 13

Two weeks into the season, the Di-Di's enjoyed a three win, one loss record going into their first recess of the year. After defeating Little Angeles on opening day, the team returned home to face the Seattal Rattles two days later. Feeling good from their victory over the Spankers, the score of the second game wasn't remotely close as they defeated the Rattles, ninety-two to seventy-four. In the game, Sheila recorded her fourteenth career triple-double with twenty-seven points, fifteen rebounds and eleven blocks against Seattal. Because of her performance in the first two games of the season, the league eventually named her the Player of the Week.

The team's third game, also a home game, pitted the Di's against the Atlanda Angels and their star point guard, Annie Gonzales. It was a hard fought contest through the first three quarters, but by the fourth, the Di's managed to extend their lead and defeated the Angels, seventy-seven to sixty-eight. Trying to extend their winning streak to four games, Denavah's next game was against the Honeybees of Sacrapimento, in Sacrapimento. Though the Di's put up a valiant effort, the Honeybees and their fans enjoyed a come from behind win against Denavah, eighty-eight to eighty-four.

The team returned home that evening, dejected about their loss, but eager to rest and prepare for their next game against the Minnysola Triplets, which wouldn't be played for at least another week. They had worked hard these past few games and they weren't

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Comment: Is there a better way besides two paragraphs of prose to present these scores? Reading four games worth of scores and stats is cumbersome and slows down your narrative. Consider alternative options (i.e. scoresheet? league standings sheet?)

about to let one loss stop them in their quest for a great season. They just needed a little time to unwind and enjoy each other's company for a while, without the pressures of the basketball world looming over them.

A typical recess for any team was usually seven to eight days, and consisted of three to four days of practice and three to four days of complete isolation from the league. Since the next game against the Triplets wasn't for another nine days, coach Rogers gave his players a full five days off before they needed to be back to the arena for practice. This gave LaKeisha the opportunity to do something she had been putting off for weeks. On the third day of the recess, LaKeisha and Amanda made plans to have lunch at a downtown restaurant and catch up with one another. She had forgotten to call to make plans the week after the combine and wanted to make amends for her forgetfulness. Amanda told her later not to be concerned about not calling, since the news of her sister's engagement took her entire family by complete surprise, and making a luncheon date that week was impossible.

This meant Ryan and Dawnna were in charge of caring for the babies in her absence. She knew they were capable and up to the challenge of spending the entire day with the children, but this was the first time she had ever left them alone with the team. To make matters more interesting, the young pair would be taking the babies on a shopping spree at one of the nearby malls. Everyone's parents had sent their child an allotment of money from each of their allowance accounts, and each player was looking forward to spending some of their hard earned cash.

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Most of the babies were given an amount of three hundred dollars, while LaKeisha gave Ebony and Ivory five hundred dollars to share between the two of them. Jessie had grown a little more than an inch since the first game, and her current clothing no longer fit her. Her parents gave her an allotment of a thousand dollars to get a complete new wardrobe, and possibly a toy or a book for good behavior. Thank goodness that all of the money they were given was in the form of debit cards, and given to the two adults to keep track of. Who knew what kind of trouble could have ensued were they to carry wads of actual cash.

The day started like any other, with a wonderful breakfast cooked by LaKeisha and Dawanna and with Sheila arriving to the table in a fashionable manner and her food getting cold. When they finished, some of the babies went out to play, some went to their rooms and the rest went to watch TV. None of them could concentrate though as they were all too excited about the trip to the mall and were eager to get started. Unfortunately for them, the mall would not be open for another three hours.

Ryan helped Dawanna with the morning dishes, allowing LaKeisha to return to her room and get herself ready for her lunch date with Amanda. What a wonderful feeling she had, to not have to cook lunch for a change and to be able to spend some time with someone who wasn't shorter than four feet. At ten-thirty, LaKeisha came back downstairs and handed all of the debit cards to Dawanna.

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“Now don’t let them get too crazy with their money. Clothes, a toy or two, foods that won’t ruin their training schedule are o.k. No outlandish get-ups. And above all, NO pets! Running around after these ten is enough exercise for three people without having to chase after any four-legged creatures.”

“I understand completely, Keish. No pet stores.”

LaKeisha handed two more cards to her. “These are for you and Ryan. There’s a thousand dollar limit on them, get yourselves something nice as well.”

“Oh, LaKeisha, we can’t take money from you. You need it for more important ...”

“It’s not from me. It’s actually from coach Rogers. It’s his way of showing you his appreciation for the things you’ve shown him during practices and improving the team’s overall outlook. Especially the new workout routines the babies seem engaged with. I never did ask, are those routines commonly used by the women basketball players back on Earth?”

“Yeah, they’re some of the things the Denver Rollers do before games. I even used some of them back in my playing days. Nothing fancy, pretty simplistic. It all seems like a lifetime ago.”

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“Well, the girls love them. They’ve even tried mixing them into their daily playtime.”

“I know, I’ve been watching them from my bedroom window while I’m upstairs reading. They’re really an innovating group of young ladies. If they continue to be that savvy when they grow up, they ought to be very successful in whatever careers they wind up choosing.”

“You’re right about that,” replied LaKeisha. “And I’ll be proud of each and every one of them. Now then, Thomas will be here by noon to pick all of you up and take you to the mall. Since he has time off like the rest of us and won’t need to drive the team bus for a few days, he was happy to help out since you and Ryan can’t drive, and public transportation wouldn’t be possible with all of you in one big group. Of course, he’ll need to return the borrowed franchise vehicle back to the arena before five, so he’ll drop you off wherever you want to go and then, when most of you get tired, just give me a call on your cell and I’ll be by shortly to pick you up and bring you all home. Just don’t forget to take your cell with you.”

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Comment: "borrowed franchise vehicle" seems too formal for this conversation. The word "borrowed" is unneeded here.

“It’ll be with me at all times, Keish. We’ll call when we’re ready to come home.”

“Good. The babies are in excellent hands.” Picking up her purse, LaKeisha headed for the door and, paused, briefly to issue one more word of advice. “And don’t hesitate to call in case of an emergency!” With that, she opened the door and left for her

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luncheon with Amanda. Dawnna listened as she could hear LaKeisha get into the team van and drive it off into the distance. Now that she was gone, it was time for her and Ryan to get the babies ready to go themselves. If only she could get them all to be in the same place at the same time ...

Somewhere in the nation's capital, Jemma had a headache, the third in as many days as he could count. The pain usually went away after an aspirin or two, but it always came back, especially after having spent hours with the Trogonian delegation, mostly QaTil Smee's brother-in-law and his associates. Fortunately, QaTil's husky aide stayed pretty much in the background and to himself, which Jemma appreciated. He was glad he didn't have to deal with anymore of the nonsense the others had been giving him.

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The entire delegation was currently in Washington, D.C. so they could witness first-hand human democracy and the entire political process. It was part of the group's cultural itinerary before heading back to New Yorkee and the investigation. The return to the city was delayed by several days, because Otto Smee had become fascinated with the political machine in the Amerikus capital and refused to leave, waiting and wanting to see if fights would break out during the deliberations of the politicians, just as they did back home in the Trogonian assemblies. To his dismay, the only thing human politicians did most was stare into television cameras and tell the rest of the population how swell things were in their country. How nauseating.

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Comment: Consider breaking off some of these clauses into different sentences?
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Comment: "only" and "most" describe two different ideas. If it's the **only** thing, it can't simultaneously be the thing done **most**. Vice versa, if something is done **most**, it can't be the only thing (the word **most** implies comparison of two things.) I get what you're attempting to convey, but use one or the other in this instance.

In the evening hours, it was more of the same since they'd arrived, throngs of humans lining up to attend the various social functions with the Trogonians, who were becoming more of a freak show than an actual gathering to exchange thoughts and ideas of individual personalities.

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At each event, QaTil fumed quietly as she watched small groups of humans gather against walls and into corners, whispering and laughing among themselves about her and her companions. How they talked, how they dressed, how they acted. Humans, she thought ... they call us vile, they call us hideous, yet, were they to look deep within a mirror, how much Trog could each one of them see within themselves? And they dare

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claim to be humanitarian? No matter. Once the second stage of her plan was set in motion, she would continue to exact the revenge she desperately craved against the human race. If only that idiot brother-in-law of hers would leave her alone when she needed to do more research.

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Comment: Consider using bold, italics, or quotes when you switch to first-person view, such as when she's speaking her thoughts. As written, it's not clear which part QaTil is in her brain, and which part is the narrator.

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Jedda made his way to the bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet where he stored his aspirin and other necessities. It would be another few days before returning home and he was looking forward to sleeping in his own bed for a change. It wasn't that

he minded the assignment he was on, and he didn't even mind the company he was keeping. The only thing that bothered him was that he didn't have the time to watch one

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minute of Ebony or Ivory play basketball. They were four games into the season and he couldn't get anywhere near a television set when one of their games was televised.

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Maybe when they returned to New Yorkee, he could actually get back to the secret complex of the Bored Monkeys and catch a few plays. However, duty always came first.

Taking the aspirin, Jedda returned to his bedroom, changed clothes and headed out the door to check on QaTil. There were no formal functions this evening and he wanted to know ... no, to make sure she and the others wouldn't be restless this evening.

To keep in shape during this long adventure, he used the stairs of the hotel quite frequently. It was the only exercise he got, other than keeping up with the Trogonians.

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Hmmn ... what an interesting television show that would make. Making it to the penthouse suites she was becoming accustomed to, he knocked on the door, fully expecting her to answer and allow him entrance. There was no answer. He knocked again. This time he could hear some rustling behind the door, but there was something unfamiliar about it. It didn't sound like QaTil at all. Before he could knock again, the

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door opened quickly and there stood Otto Smee, grotesquely nude, except for the white towel hanging around his greenish waist.

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“Oh! It's you, human. I was expecting your hotel's room service! They're a half hour late with our dinner!”

Now that he had a pain in his stomach to match the one in his head, a stunned Jedda asked, “What are you doing here? Where is QaTil, is she here?”

“QaTil let us in,” Smee replied. “We had matters to discuss with her about next week’s schedule, and when we came to a disagreement about a certain point in our discussions, she stormed out in a huff, leaving her room keys behind. Since she wouldn’t be able to get back in without them, we decided to stay here and wait for her to return, sort of guard the place for her while she’s gone. We also thought we’d take in some of the amenities of her ‘penthouse’ since *our* rooms aren’t as accommodating.”

“What do you mean, she stormed out?”

“You’re not a rock, human! You heard what I said! She went *OUT!*”

Jedda put his palm to his head, trying to ease the ache which was growing steadily. “That’s just terrific! Just what I need, a rogue Trogonian running about the building, or worse, the city. Did she say anything to where she was going?”

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“No, human, she didn’t. And I wouldn’t tell you, even if she had. I could care less where QaTil goes as long as it’s out of my sight. She’s always been a headstrong ... what is the word you humans use? Bit ...”

Jedda cut him off. “I get the picture! She’s not here. I’ll try downstairs and see if the desk clerk has seen her. Someone’s got to know where she went.”

“You do that! Wherever she’s gone, good riddance to her! Too bad she’ll eventually come back and nag us even further. If you do find her, do us a favor and put her in one of your better establishments. Like your jails! Haw, haw!” He slammed the door in Jedda’s face and continued laughing behind the door, muffled laughs joining in from his associates. “Now *where*’s that lousy room service!”

Jedda moaned. The aches weren’t going to go away despite the medicine he took.

The only way to get rid of them was to find QaTil and get her back safely. This time, using the stairs wasn’t an option. Reaching the ground floor, Jedda walked out of the elevator and moved briskly to the front desk where a well-dressed, well-groomed, pimply faced clerk greeted him.

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“Good day, Mr. James. Are you having a pleasant afternoon?” asked the clerk in a squeaky toned voice.

“I’m afraid not, Derrick. I seem to have lost one of my traveling companions. I came to ask if you’ve seen her?”

“I’m afraid I did, Mr. James. I didn’t say anything to her, but from the way she looked as she went past, she wasn’t in a conversational mood. She seemed to be a bit

angry and in quite a hurry to get somewhere if you ask me.”

“Did you happen to see which direction she was headed?”

“Yes, sir. She hobbled out the doors and turned to the left. That was the last I saw of her. It was about two hours ago when I saw her leave.”

Jedda closed his eyes in frustration. Not only was QaTil gone, she had a good head start on him. She could be anywhere in the city by now, doing something totally unthinkable. If only he had tightened security around the hotel, her leaving might have been prevented. ~~However, doing so, would have made the entire delegation more visible~~ to curious onlookers. Damn this lousy headache!

“If it would ease your mind, sir,” said Derrick, “She *was* reasonably dressed for her species to go wandering about.”

“She’s NOT a species!” yelled Jedda. “She’s a living, breathing being, just like you or I. She may have been raised differently and developed in a world totally foreign to us, but she still deserves to be respected and not called names. If you’ll excuse me, I have to go and search the area for her and find out where she went.” Jedda turned and headed for the hotel’s revolving door, still chewing over Derrick’s remark. Though he knew QaTil wasn’t completely honest with him and was up to something he couldn’t put his finger on, he still felt an obligation to look out for her and the rest of her companions.

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About forty minutes later, Jedda found himself on a seedier block of the capital, somewhat in disbelief that streets like these still existed in Amerikus. He was surrounded by shops, restaurants and saloons, the shops sealed up by thin sheets of corrugated steel and chicken wire. Since she obviously wasn't here in a shop, he couldn't fathom her in one of the restaurants, trying out some new cuisine or some other foods foreign to her, so he avoided searching any of those establishments. A bar on the other hand might pique her interest. A bar she might consider, could be one of the best sources of human culture on the planet.

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Comment: This is a run-on sentence. Break it up into a two sentences for more clarity.

He cautiously stepped into a few of the nearer bars, but had no such luck in locating her. Most of the patrons inside them were aptly subdued, and had they seen a Trogonian enter, they certainly would be showing a different expression than what he witnessed. He was about to continue down the block, when he heard a faint but familiar voice, cackling from a dingy, dank saloon across the street from him. He shook his head in realization that he should have known she'd seek out and find the most grungiest of establishments she could. It was exactly her kind of place, something that would remind her of home.

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He crossed to the other side and peered into the bar through the upright, but broken glass door that was halfway ajar when he got there. As the cackling of her voice got louder, it was joined by the guffaws of men who were apparently laughing along with her. He slowly stepped inside, fully unprepared for what he was about to see.

The saloon was dimly lit, brightened only by the candescent fixtures adhered to the walls, and the flat-screen televisions surrounding the entire room. He smirked, so it wasn't a totally backwater dump after all.

On the screens, a familiar sight greeted his eyes as every set in the place was tuned to the Washington Missys at Chicaco Storks game. It was early in the third period and the Missys were leading the game by seven points. A Stork player was currently at the free-throw line, shooting the second of a penalty shot. It was the first game he'd seen in weeks, and had it not been for his current predicament, he would have sat down, even in a place like this, and enjoyed watching it. Instead, he found his missing Trogonian seated in the back of the place, surrounded by four large, disheveled men in overalls and work boots. Empty pitchers of beers cluttered the table, with empty peanut shells covering the disgusting wooden floor. Seeing Jedda come near, QaTil greeted him in a manner unbecoming of a diplomat.

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“Jedda! Look, everyone, it's my human friend Jedda! Jedda! Come and join us for a drink! Innkeeper! Another round for all!”

Meanwhile, the four workmen turned to look at Jedda, then began to laugh out loud, just as they had before his arrival.

“You were right, Qaddy!” yelled the one nearest him. “He is a doof! C'mon, doof, pull up a chair and have a snort! Couple of beers will do you good! Sal! More whisky

with those pitchers!”

“Yeah,” said a second, “Join us and watch the game! The Missys are kicking some Stork behind!” It was amazing, Jedda thought, that these five even knew there was a game being played, let alone who was playing it. Regardless, he tugged at the cleanest and safest looking chair he could find and took a seat.

“I’ve been scouring the city for you QaTil. You shouldn’t go about the city without an escort. The city isn’t completely safe, you know.”

“You sound like my grandma!” said the third man. “I think Qaddy’s a big girl who can take care o’herself.”

“Yeah,” said the last, putting his hand around QaTil’s shoulder, his hand massaging her slimy, green skin. “You need to relax and let the rest of the world enjoy this lovely and delightful charming creature. Where do you keep such a beautiful vision like her?”

Jedda gave the last man a quizzical look. Obviously, these weren’t the first of the empty pitchers of beer sitting on the table. Nevertheless, he tried diplomatically to reason with QaTil. “Madam Smee, I ask you to listen to reason. This is no place for an international diplomat such as yourself.”

“Nonsense.” she replied. “This is the first place I’ve come across that feels natural to both humans and Trogonians. I haven’t felt this comfortable since my arrival, and I’d like to enjoy my surroundings and the company of these upstanding gentlemen. All your pomp and ceremonies tends to sickens one’s stomach after awhile. The best thing for me was to purge that feeling with a good dose of this city’s reality. This is one of the best places to observe real humanity, not just witness it, but become part of it. So either relax and have a drink with the rest of us, or else you can ...”

“I thought you told me you weren’t a drinker?”

“Well ... as the saying goes, when you’re in Amerikus ...” “Come on, Qaddy, give the guy some props.” said the man sitting next to her. “After all, he did come looking for you. He must have a little concern in him to make sure you were safe.”

“Still, if he and his fellow compatriots want to forge a better and stronger alliance between our countries, they need to fight past their prejudices and their arrogance. Humans need to learn they aren’t as privileged as they think they are. Besides, where does his concern actually lie? For me? Or for himself?”

Jedda looked her straight in the eye and unraveled in his answer. “Neither. My concern is for the future of our children, human and Trogonian. What we do here today, or fail to do, our children can either benefit or suffer because of our actions.”

“That, Jeddariah James, is the first honest answer you’ve given me since my arrival to your shores. Perhaps now, the real work can begin.”

“Aargh!” yelled one of the men sitting further from the table. Apparently, a Stork and a Missy player had collided on the court and no foul was called on either player. “Come on, ref, that was a deliberate foul on Rachell!” Slamming his glass on the table in frustration, everyone turned to look at the action on the television. The Missys now held a five point lead, with Chicaco in-bounding the ball to resume play. The crowd exploded with cheers and applause, all trying to will the Storks to a victory.

“I must say, Jedda,” said QaTil, “I’ve never seen a spectacle such as this before. Is this a special event or is this quite common?”

“It’s very common.” replied Jedda. “It’s the most popular sport on Earthea and it’s played in virtually every country on the face of the planet. It may not be as exciting to you as your Trogonian cliff jumping, but we enjoy it, and it gives our children an outlet to express their skills and abilities without too much risk of harm or injury.”

“Jedda, my friend! From what I’ve witnessed, it looks interesting and appealing. I wonder if it’s something that our children would enjoy playing. Maybe I should look into this sport further. In fact, I wouldn’t mind spending some time meeting and getting to know one of your many ‘basketbrawl’ teams.”

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“Um ...” corrected Jemma, “It’s basketball, not brawl. I’m sure we could set up a meeting with one of the teams during your stay in Washington. Would you like to meet the Missys?”

“No, I’m afraid the colors of their costumes don’t appeal to me. Do you have any of these teams who dress in Orange? I can’t wear it well myself, but it is one of my favorite colors ...”

By six o’clock, tempers were wearing thin as everyone made their way to the food court for an evening meal. Bags of clothing, toys, games and costume jewelry lined the tables as Ryan brought each of them their food from several of the various restaurants surrounding them. LaKeisha would arrive within the hour to return them home, but it didn’t mean they had to wolf down their meals.

“Maria!” yelled Dawnna, “Don’t eat so fast, honey! Tamala! Go easy on the burger. Ivory! Don’t act like you’ve never seen mac and cheese before.”

“Sorry, Dawnna.”

“Sorry, Dawnna.”

“Swurry, Drawna.”

“And don’t talk with you mouths full! It’s very unladylike.”

Over the next half hour, everyone finished their dinners and wandered over to the outside of the nearby bookstore after throwing away their napkins and paper cups. Ryan and Dawnna watched as the little girls curiously looked at some of books on the various displays, some of the titles making no sense to any of them. The two adults were about to join them when they heard Ebony, Ivory and a few of the others yell out their names in unison.

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“Dawnna! Ryan! Look!”

The girls had spotted a magazine rack standing next to the shelves full of books. Alongside the magazines, copies of ‘The Collarton Post’ newspapers were in full view of everyone, where the front of the page drew the attention of the siblings.

It wasn’t so much the main article that Ebony and Ivory had noticed, it was the picture that accompanied the article that they noticed a familiar face somewhere in the back of the photograph. Among a group of Trogonians and their human hosts, the girls spotted their Uncle Jedda with a somber and stern look on his face. Below the photo was the caption: “Trogonian delegation visits White House.”

“Well,” said Ryan, picking up the top copy and holding it closer so that he and Dawnna could get a better look at it. “He looks so happy to be there, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah,” she replied, “From that expression, I think you could probably hit him in the head with a two-by-four and he wouldn’t even feel it. He looks totally numb in this picture.”

“Diplomacy’s a kick to the right people,” replied Ryan. “He wouldn’t be there if he wasn’t somehow enjoying the moment. He’s trained all his life for events like these and they usually only come around once in a lifetime. It’ll take all his skills in democracy to bolster some sort of peace between the two countries. If there’s any man on the face of this planet who has any chance of success, it’ll be Jeddariah.”

“Well,” said Dawnna, “It looks like the meeting got off to a good start. The article says they’ve been to New Yorkee, Minamy and Washington. I wonder where he’ll take them next?”

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