

Shahab Yazdanpanah

Professor Sorte

Science of Cli-Fi

5 June 2017

Survival

“We are running out of time.”

The Elder looked at Scoot with fear in his eyes. The seasons had changed into an eternal summer. The last Expedition hadn't returned yet. Lor, Lina, and Fey, led by the scientist Hans, were supposed to be back from the main lands near the end of the spring season.

“We're running out of drinking water, there's nothing left,” continued The Elder. “The supplies that we seek must be found and soon. I'm afraid we cannot last beyond this upcoming summer.”

Scoot studied his barren palms, coming to terms with this reality. Long before he was born, the tribe had relocated to the far north of the globe, distant from the main lands, to escape the increasingly scorching heat and follow what little food was left, also migrating north. The new territory of the tribe had been slowly running out of clean drinking water due to the heat and the contamination, for years now. River after river, lake after lake, they all began to dry out and acidify. After first leaving the main lands, a few valiant tribe scavengers would go on “Expeditions” back to the main lands in search of supplies for building, eating, shelter, and the synthesis of clean drinking water.

“What do you suggest we do, oh wise Elder? Hans and his crew should’ve been back months ago, what if they’re dead?” Scoot worriedly asked.

“You could be right Scoot, but we cannot risk it. Gather a crew and leave this morning in search of them,” responded The Elder.

“But it’s almost summer,” replied Scoot.

“If you don’t leave now, there will be no chance of the tribe’s survival beyond the summer. This is our final hope, and my last order to you.” fired back the Elder.

“But what about the rest of the tribe? What if we don’t make it back in time, or if we don’t find any more synthesizers? We can’t just leave everyone without water like this!” Scoot responded.

“I know this may be a hard decision for you, but our end here is inevitable. There is no more land for us to move north onto, and the lakes are either too contaminated or dried out. You must listen to me and go! You are the last hope of the tribe.” exclaimed the Elder.

After pausing for a moment, Scoot raised his head.

“I see,” he said.

Scoot left the Elder’s hut with this final acceptance. He set off to the hut of his best friend, Kaleo, whom he would gather for the new Expedition. Kaleo suggested the other two members of the crew be Jidah and Samki, women known within the tribe for their abilities to hunt and forge.

“What if we don’t find them before it gets too hot? Then what, Scoot? Do we just throw our lives away endlessly searching?” said Kaleo, looking down at his feet.

“I’ve been thinking about that too, but I want to give the tribe as much hope as I can, even if I have to put my life on the line for it,” responded Scoot with resolve.

At sunrise, the four crew members, headed by Scoot, left the tribe moving towards the main lands in search of the previous Expedition. On a seasonal clock, it was all-or-nothing for the people of the tribe, who now faced the brink of extinction.

The first week on the road was tiring. Jidah had a difficult time hunting for food due to the limited amount of species left on Earth. All she could scavenge were insects and reptiles, most of which were inedible due to centuries of selection towards brutal environments. Kaleo gathered a series of herbs and nuts that were known to heavily store water. Constantly building and re-building their tents and beds on the move quickly wore down Samki, but no one was as phased as Scoot. Boggled by the crudely drawn map that outlined the path back to the main lands, Scoot spent hours every day trying to analyze the fastest route to avoid the most hostile environments. The dry and barren wasteland that spanned the globe looked endless and identical to the crew members in almost every direction. It was up to Scoot to navigate the crew to their destination before the elements of nature caught up to them.

“Do you ever wonder what the planet looked like before all of this?” asked Kaleo, looking around at the desolate valley the crew was camping in that night.

“Not really. I don’t want to know. All the stories make it sound way too good to be true”, replied Jidah, hungrily consuming the vegetables Kaleo had gathered earlier that evening.

As the stars settled in that night, the four crew members slept on their branch-crafted beds, atop piles of burnt yellow grass. A light breeze seemed like a gift from the gods to them, since the temperature was only a couple degrees cooler than during the day. The night was silent,

except for the subtle sounds of insects and sand particles drifting in the wind. The cracks in the barren earth were sometimes filled with the moving sands, and this created a soothing swishing sound. The red hills that surrounded them created an incave where the temperature could settle and remain constant.

Everyone slept worriedly that night, wondering about the situation of the lost crew members from the previous Expedition. If The Elder's predictions were correct, and the tribe lands were getting too hot and dry, then the crew members of the previous Expedition should've already been dead on their journey back towards the main lands, thought Scoot. He rolled around in his bed, wide awake, wondering why The Elder would send him on this seemingly hopeless Expedition and risk the lives of his crew members. Scoot knew deep down that The Elder's judgement always held its integrity, no matter the situation, but he couldn't tell if this time it was for the benefit of the tribe. With this thought looming in his mind, Scoot finally fell asleep.

Six weeks passed into the Expedition, and due to Scoot's navigational skills and strategic movements, the crew was arriving earlier than expected to the main lands. The heat had increased to the point where all the members were beginning to suffer from heavy skin burns, dehydration, and light-headedness, but there was no time to worry about cancer or the ensuing psychological issues. By this time, everyone in the crew was suspecting that they were the last living people left in the area.

Scoot and the crew members arrived at the remaining rubble of the buried main lands at sunset on the third day of the sixth week. Excellently planned by Scoot, this gave the crew the entire cool of the night to search wherever they could for as long as they could before the heat of the day rolled in. Upon reaching the outskirts of the main lands, one could barely make out the edges of a sign that read, "NOV," but the rest of the characters on the sign were undecipherable.

They searched what was left of the central downtown area of the main lands. Wandering through sand and over-turning rubble in the dark of the night, no one expected to find anything but further exhaustion. They split up into groups of two: Scoot and Kaleo took to the east side of the main lands while Jidah and Samki explored the west. They planned to regroup right before sunrise to find shelter and rest for the day. The hours of the night quickly passed as everyone was backed into the mental corners of despair; none of them had discovered anything relating to the lost Expedition. An old underground metro entrance was where the crew met up in the final hours of the night. Scoot and Kaleo busted the lock on the rusted gate of the metro, and the crew hurriedly moved deep underground as the first sunrays of the morning struck the earth.

“I cannot believe it has come this,” exclaimed Samki as they all walked further down into the metro.

“We’re doomed,” replied Jidah with the same tone as her friend.

“What do we do, Scoot?” asked Kaleo, speaking for the entire crew.

“I don’t know, my friend. I don’t know,” responded Scoot with complete solemnity.

As the crew members traveled further and further underground to the depths of the metro, they noticed that it wasn’t getting hotter. This was surprising to them at first, but it then became understandable due to the depth of the building and the incredible discovery of several up-gushing underground water sources that seemed drinkable. Entering the metro was turning out to be the most promising thing to happen to them on the entire Expedition. Upon arrival at the base platform of the metro, or what seemed to be left of it, the crew amazingly discovered a series of tents.

“This is it!” shouted Samki as she ran over to the tent nearest to them. “This is Fey’s tent, I’m positive! I remember building it for her before she left. It was the only tent I ever made using this rusted iron she brought with her from her first trip to the main lands.”

“We have to find them, or at least their bodies. They can’t be far since it’s daytime on the surface. Kaleo comes with me, Jidah and Samki you two will search the other end of the metro,” responded Scoot with a tinge of hope in his tone.

As the crew members began to separate off and make their way toward opposite ends of the vast metro system, they could hear footsteps emerging from the darkness.

“Scoot!” shouted Hans upon recognizing the faces before him. “My friend it’s been ages.”

“What are you guys doing here? What’s going on!” fired back Scoot, filled with anger from Hans’ nonchalant tone.

“Let me explain,” answered Hans as he attempted to calm Scoot down. “Before my crew and I left for our Expedition, The Elder instructed me not to return. He knew this metro system existed and that it was the tribe’s last chance at survival. He knew we would never be able to restore enough water for the growing tribe. I was instructed to take a crew here and start a new tribe living underground. It was getting too hot on the surface.”

“But why wouldn’t he send the entire tribe? Why would he lie about all of this and leave us to die? Why would he send me and my crew searching for you guys if he knew you weren’t dead or coming back?” asked Scoot in full bewilderment of the presumed actions of The Elder.

“I was instructed by The Elder to send one of my members back to the tribe if I found this metro, to prove to The Elder that we had succeeded. He wanted to be sure. I decided against sending any of us back. The surface was just too hot: I didn’t think another Expedition would make it here, and I’m thankful that you all survived the trip. I couldn’t risk the safety of my crew, or of the new tribe,” replied Hans.

“But why did The Elder do this to the tribe already existing back home? They’re all going to die!” argued Jidah standing up by Scoot.

“The Elder understood what was at stake. He knew that moving the entire tribe was too difficult. He needed us to take a leap for humanity and so we did. Having you guys here with us will only strengthen our community underground in this metro. Our tribe will be much more successful. We have an abundance of shelter, cool air, plenty of water, and the vegetation down here is healthy. We can grow crops with our artificial light generators. We can all survive here!” replied Hans.

“We can’t stay. We have to go and get everyone back home and at least try to bring them here,” answered Kaleo.

“And what if you don’t make it back?” responded Hans.

“That doesn’t matter. We have to go back for the rest of the tribe,” said Kaleo, looking at Scoot for his approval.

Pausing to think for a second, Hans replied, “The entrance that you came from was one of many in this underground metro, and I believe it was the farthest one from the direction of the main lands. I can direct you to the north most entrance, the one we first found, if you are so intent on leaving.”

“At sunset we will leave,” answered Scoot, reassuring Kaleo’s resolve.

The eight of them quickly began dividing their roles to ensure a successful day spent in the metro. They scavenged, built, cooked, and allocated their resources to the best of their abilities and helped the leaving members pack and plan their trip back to the tribe. Scoot and Kaleo spent most of the day calculating the trip back. Their prediction was a stretch, as they were relying on moving the entire tribe to the main lands within a 12-week period during the summer season. The fall would be too unbearable, and so no time could be wasted. As noon approached and everyone was preparing to sleep and leave fully rested during the night time, Scoot left his tent for Hans’ tent.

“We won’t make it back,” whispered Scoot as he slumped down on the straw and grass bed next to Hans. “I lied to Kaleo. I forged my calculations to give him a prediction of us being able to make it back with the tribe.”

“I know,” answered Hans, sharpening a dull knife. “I ran the calculations myself months before you. Those were my exact thoughts at first. The tribe members are too attached to their ways of life and are unwilling to give that up for the survival of our race. Not even your crew can see the greater scope of things. They will not be able to look beyond their family and friends back at the tribe and understand what is at stake here, like you and I can. If Kaleo leaves, Jidah and Samki will follow him, and they will all die long before reaching the tribe.

“I don’t think I can convince them to stay,” said Scoot. “They have too much back home at the tribe to lose. They can’t give up on this last bit of false hope I’ve given them.”

“Then you’re in the most intriguing situation, my friend,” replied Hans. “You can either leave with your crew and die attempting to navigate them home, or you can betray your crew, sending them to their deaths, and continue living here with us.”

Scout realized Hans was right. He felt buried. Kaleo, Jidah, and Samki needed his map and navigational skills to even have a chance of making it home, but there was no way they would make it back at all. Scout undeniably knew that Kaleo, Jidah, and Samki were not giving up on the tribe, even if it meant their deaths. That was the condition that they all left the tribe on in the first place. This new hope was too great to surmount. Scout stared at his feet as he left Hans’ tent that night.