

Lemon Extract

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A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Jack Lipton and Thinking Horndog for letting me play in the Sa'arm Cycle!

**WARNING! WARNING! DOES NOT COMPLY! DOES NOT COMPLY!
DOES NOT COMPLY WITH AGREED CANON!**

Rob

Too late for breakfast, and too early for lunch. What a pisser! I moved uneasily in my office chair, taking off my reading glasses and dropping them on the desk. I hurt. Still. Big surprise. "Can't sit here any longer, might as well..." I grumbled to the office, and reached for my cane. I got up and lurched to the door. Didn't hurt as bad as last week, though. Progress?

"Professor Lemon, do you need any help?" Jen, one of our group secretaries called, seeing me (and probably hearing me cursing) in the hall.

"No thanks Jen, I'm headed down to the Packer for an early lunch," I replied.

"You take care of yourself!" she chided once again. Hell, she's a decade older than me, and been at the University forever. "Take it easy, please! If not for yourself, for your students!"

"Yes, dear," I said out loud. She was right; I was probably pushing too hard. She tries to take good care of me. "Damn," I muttered under my breath as I headed to the service elevator.

Almost eight weeks? Yeah, eight weeks on Thursday. Riding home from school on my bicycle, middle of the afternoon, sun shining bright, and bam! Hit by a drunk teenager in a "borrowed" car! Luckily, the University med center had the new Confederation trauma kits -- they tell me that's why I'm still around. But in spite of the miracles in that kit and good old Earth medicine, I was still limping and in pain.

They tell me if my CAP score is good enough, they'll fix me up quick. And when will we find that out? No clue. An ID team swept through six or so months ago, giving everyone ID

cards to carry. But we're still waiting for a CAP team to come through, to give us numbers to go with our pictures.

And if my score was good enough, my medical problems would get fixed.

Until then, though, I lived with pain and reduced mobility. I still taught my physics and history of science sections, but I dropped the yoga classes I taught -- had to. Hell, even with the Confederation miracles, I was out of it for two weeks.

My appetite was still weird. I'd initially lost weight, from the nanogoodies in the emergency med kit burning calories like crazy to repair me. Now my weight was going up and down like a damn yo-yo. Nanos still active, they told me. Yeah, tell 'em to work on bones and joints, not silly things like hair follicles on my head!

I exited the service elevator and looked around. Good. Not a soul to be seen.

I hobbled to a door, "Authorized Personnel Only," the sign proclaimed. I swung the tip of my cane at the reader by the door. It beeped, a light turned green, and more important, the lock gave an audible click. I pushed the door open and quickly went into the service corridor.

That saved me a *lot* of walking. When I came back to school after the accident, I used crutches for a while, and Facilities friends hauled my sorry healing ass around in an electric cart, but I wanted to get past those as soon as I could. I mean, I'd taught yoga for two decades around here, and practiced it for even longer.

I was so pissed when Dieter, one of my old friends in Facilities, gave me the damn cane! Wanted to shove it right up his ass, I was so mad! Then he showed me -- he'd put a Facilities ID chip in the tip. It would open *any* door on campus, *any* time. I damn near cried. That's what friends are for.

I hobbled down the service corridor, aided by airflow howling the same way, and popped out near the Alferd Packer Grill, not the closest place for me to eat, but my favorite. I could use another shortcut and pop in the back, but I was trying to keep things somewhat quiet. Besides, I was supposed to walk, and I knew I needed the exercise to regain range of motion. The more I walked, the less pain I'd go through in physical therapy. Or, the more pain I inflicted on myself, the less others gave me. Some trade-off...

But at least I was around to bitch and moan, right? That's what friends told me, and they were right. I walked around to a "normal" entrance.

Oh my! What do we have here? Glowing tape, queues, and uniformed Confederation Marines! This must be CAP day!

"Come on in, three lines, get your IDs out please, this won't take long," a strong female voice called out.

Others, mostly students, were queued up around me, now behind me. Guess I'm stuck.

Good looking bunch, those Marines -- all female. The one with Captain's bars was tall; they were all tall.

"Professor! Rob!" a familiar voice called out. One of the Marines stepped closer.

"Carol?" I asked, recognizing her. She'd been in my classes, my physics, and my yoga classes for years. And after that, she'd been in my house and my bed for a while too, before she took off for CMU and her doctorate.

She hugged me. "Oh, I was hoping we would see you!" She stepped back quickly. "Oh, are you okay? I heard about your accident..."

She looked good... "You look good -- even in that uniform," I said. I was smiling; she gave me something to smile about.

"Captain!" she called out, laughing, "This is the one I told you about." She turned to me again. "How are you doing? Over here, we have a station just for faculty."

We moved to a much shorter queue. "I'm doing okay; I guess you heard about the accident. They tell me the emergency med kit saved my life, but I'm still recovering. No more yoga for a while, I'm afraid."

"Oh no!" she commiserated. Then with a smirk, "Do you have someone nursing you?"

I smirked back. "Yes, dear -- no end of volunteers." But my screwed up hip and back significantly restricted my functioning in those realms as well. "What happened to you?"

She shrugged. "CAP survey team visited CMU, and all of a sudden, I'm no longer a post doc. Oh, after another few months with this team, I go off-planet for more advanced study. And your classes made the difference."

Hmpf. I'd like to think so.

The testing station was being run by a cute but bored looking young woman. You've seen pictures of them -- the testing stations, I mean... Looked like something from an eye doctor's office, either that or an old fashioned beehive hair dryer. You sit in a seat leaning forward and she swings the thing over your head. Stick your ID card in the slot, beep, next! AI driven, no fooling it (or so they say).

Carol put her hand on my shoulder. They finished with the woman in front of me, who I didn't recognize. She looked at her card and made a grumbling noise.

"Okay, Rob, have a seat. Let me take your ID," Carol said, helping me sit down. "Peg, he's the one, here..."

“All right, sir,” the young woman said, “I’m going to swing the instrument over your head. Relax and look at the light in the distance, that’s all you have to do.”

So I’d heard. Wish I had a gadget like this to test if kids had learned what I was trying to teach them... She swung the hood over my head. I saw a glowing spot in the distance, or did I?

Things went soft and fuzzy.

I felt weird. My vision was blurred. “Here, Rob, let me help you up,” Carol said. She helped me stand, and move. Damn, I felt weak. “I can’t see for shit!” I complained, and not too loudly, as I couldn’t make too much noise. “What’s going on?”

She helped me to a chair a ways away. “Here, sit for a bit and rest. I need to go get someone.”

“What’s wrong with...” I started to ask. Thought I heard noise in another part of the room, a part I couldn’t see for shit.

She rubbed my shoulder. “It’s a side effect some people experience. Wait right here -- I’ll be right back.”

I took a breath. Still had my cane. My vision was blurred, foggy. I rubbed my eyes a bit, cautiously; they felt like they had goo in them. I closed them and moved them around to try and let tears help. Opened my eyes; helped a little, but things were still major blurred and foggy, if anything, a little worse than before. Couldn’t focus on things up close -- didn’t have my reading glasses, dammit!

Feeling for my glasses case which usually lived in my shirt pocket; it was on my desk. I brushed my ID now hanging once more around my neck. I held it up and looked.

Holy shit. I had to squint to make it out, and even then only barely: 1.6.

One point six! Shit! One point six, and it was glowing! So much for medical care! I was cannon fodder for the Sa’arm!

I’d expected at least a five! I mean, I thought genetics was a component -- my parents and *their* parents all lived to their 90’s. I thought that would give me a boost.

Evidently not. I rubbed my right eye. Cleared a little. Maybe I was damaged goods because of the accident; a leftover from that damn kid. Commotion at the other end of the room? Make that LOUD commotion and Marines moving quickly.

Well, I need to pee. And with a one fucking six CAP score, no need hanging around here, that’s for sure! Looked around, and I was about fifteen feet from a service door. Or at least it was a blur that looked like a door. Let’s find out.

I lurched to my feet, using the cane more than I'd expected, but the door clicked open and I made it through quickly. Damn, now I had to walk *against* the gale in the service corridor.

One point fucking glowing six! I'd never heard of a score that low! It was supposed to include genetics, intelligence, ethics, and more... I didn't think Richard Nixon or President George II would get that low a score! Got to be damaged goods from the accident. That and all the dope I smoked in those undergrad years?

Damn, I had to pee, and bad! And I was thirsty, not sure if I was hot or cold. I ducked into a custodial closet and peed in the sink. I had to go, and it stunk worse than asparagus! Ran some water to rinse the sink, and drank quite a bit of water, or I started to, but my hands felt like they were coated with slime. Soap and warm water cut it, then it was a lot of cold water.

Took the service elevator back upstairs. Now I was hot! I went into my office and sat in my faraday cage, a shielded enclosure made of metal mesh that I used for experiments. It had a bunch of fans in it for cooling test gear. The power switches for those I knew by touch. I turned the fans on and pointed them at me. That helped. Good thing I knew where things were, I still couldn't see for shit.

My heart was pounding, flashing hot and cold. Maybe I was hungry after all? I got a bottle of Gatorade from my little office refrigerator and downed that in nothing flat. My vision was still screwed up -- like my eyes were full of mucus, worse than before. Closed my eyes and stuck a fingertip in the corner of my eye near my nose. Ghaa -- pulled a stringy blob of goo away from my eye, but that got tears going, which helped. Did the other eye with similar results.

I sat in front of the fans, eyes closed, panting almost, trying not to think.

One fucking six! All those years teaching! I laughed at myself -- all those years turning away attractive female students, my rule of not going out with students, or some colleagues. I hadn't let Carol get close until she'd been accepted at CMU and was leaving Boulder... All those years of ethical behaviour... All those years of taking care of myself, staying healthy, only to get run down by a drunk kid in a stolen car, and then handed a one six? Hey, I know better -- I teach physics, thermodynamics, and yoga. Second law of thermodynamics and the First Noble Truth are in complete accord -- life's a bitch, and then you die!

Damn, and I need to pee, again! At least I was right across the hall from the men's room -- a small benefit of tenure. My vision was just as messed up as before. Even though I didn't feel stable on my feet, my hip and leg weren't bothering me as much. More stinky pee, though, and when I washed my hands and face, it felt like I was covered with slime. And I couldn't get my vision clear! My hands I could scrub, but I wasn't about to rub my eyes. Flushing them with warm water helped a bit, puling out more stringy slime.

Back to the office, downed another bottle of Gatorade, sitting in front of the fans in the shield box. Eyes closed, moving them a little, hoping for more tears.

“He’s here!” a female voice called.

“Oh thank God!” another voice called out.

“Carol?” I croaked; was that Carol?

I heard the squeak of the shield room door opening, and I turned, opening my eyes. Couldn’t see shit, just big blurs!

“Captain, we found him, in his office,” Carol said. I felt a hand on my shoulder. “Damn, you scared us!”

“I can’t see -- what’s going on?” I asked.

“Here,” another voice said, turning me a bit, flashing something bright in my eyes.

“No, too much gear in here -- out in his office!” Carol insisted,

Hands led me out into my office and into my chair.

“Here, lean forward and I’ll rinse your eyes. The nanos are...”

I leaned forward. Fingers pried one eye open and flushed it with something cool. I could see! She did the other eye, and I could see out of that one too! And I could see better!

I sat back and sighed. “What the hell is going on?”

The one who’d flushed my eyes, the oriental cutie who’d been sitting beside the test station, was passing a gadget in front of me. “The nanos are flushing waste products out the closest path. Sarge, we really need to get him back downstairs to the rest of my kit.”

They helped me stand. I felt wobbly, but stronger and better at the same time.

“Why?” I asked. “Why me?”

Carol looked at me, smiling. “Oh, you wonderful man! I just hope...” She put a hand over one ear, covering an earpiece. She nodded. “Captain, we’re on our way. Be there in five.”

She looked at me and smiled more, almost sighed. She looked to her medic friend. “Captain says pickup in a little over 90 minutes!”

The other one nodded. “Okay, that sounds right -- still want to get to my gear stat!”

“What is going on?” I insisted.

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The medic gal was smiling as well. “The nanos are going wild. I can give you enough to get you to the orbital, where they bring in the big guns.”

I shook my head. “But why? With...” I looked at my ID again. But this time I could see it, and read it.

I’d been looking at it wrong -- I turned it over, and looked at Carol in amazement.

Carol

I finally had a chance to sit down and have some chow. Local pulled pork, not too bad. Almost eight at night, and we'd been up at six and testing since eight in the morning.

"Sarge, Captain wants to see you, right away," Nora said, sticking her head in the little room we were using for breaks.

I sighed and nodded. I took a big bite, and then another one. I was finally getting to understand our old dog, and the way she ate so fast, something about never knowing when you're going to get to eat again... I nodded with bulging cheeks as I got up.

Nora smirked and said, "Follow me."

I nodded again, and followed. We're a good squad; we work well together. I'd slotted in as sergeant a few months back, and would do officer training. Currently we were working our way through Oregon, doing CAP testing. Supposedly we're a "statistical survey team," going into specified areas and testing folks. Except I didn't believe that. Don't think any of us did.

I swallowed more of my dinner. "Someone complaining her score wasn't high enough?" I asked. We'd had another of those today.

Nora shook her head, then shrugged. "No clue. Just told to fetch."

I nodded. Nora handled security for us.

She stopped in front of a door marked "Employee Lounge" and knocked. "Enter!" came the reply.

"Thanks -- hour to go; help run 'em through." I said as I reached for the door.

"Right, sarge," Nora agreed and headed back along the corridor.

I froze in my tracks after closing the door. Captain Greer was there all right, sitting at a table. With her were two other officers. Both looked to be in their early twenties, but their uniforms had enough brass to open a hardware store. The woman had med insignia, med plus something. The guy? Not familiar with his. Both had to be regens, that's for sure.

"Yes, ma'am?" I said, trying to pull myself to some semblance of attention. We weren't high on formalities in our unit. Something to do with the way we "volunteered."

She smiled and waved to the open chair at the table they were using. "At ease, sergeant. Have a seat. Let me introduce Colonel Marsh and Colonel Chambers."

I started to say something, but my stomach decided I needed to belch instead. I tried to cover my mouth but my belch was about 30dB louder than I'd expected.

The woman, Colonel Marsh, said, "That's quite all right, dear -- relax," and smiled.

I looked at her a little more, trying not to stare. We've heard of it, seen pictures, but I'd never seen anyone up close... Well, I was guessing, but I don't know too many twenty year olds that rank. So that's what full regen looks like...

"Carol," Captain started out, surprising me by being so informal in front of brass. "You went to University of Colorado, Boulder, right?"

I nodded. "Yes, transferred to CMU for postdoc work."

"How well did you know Professor Rob Lemon?" she asked.

"Biblically..." Oh shit, had I said that out loud? I felt myself blushing. It was a reflex. "I mean..."

All of them were chuckling. Marsh said, "That's quite all right, dear. We'll take that as knowing him *quite* well, which is what we hoped."

I managed to nod. Back at Boulder, it had been somewhere between a joke and an honor. Lots of people knew Rob Lemon. A few, very few women, knew him, well, biblically.

"Is he still at the top of your selectee list?" Chambers asked.

"Yes," I answered without hesitation. With my CAP score, and the time I was putting in, when I was rotated off-planet, I could choose one to go with me. He was at the top of my list, unless someone got him first.

The woman nodded. "You've been doing CAP testing in the field for, over six months now... What would you guess his CAP score would be?"

I started the canned response, "CAP is an AI-mediated process, and while the score is a scalar value, it is composed of a multitude of..."

She waved a hand. "Thank you, dear, but you can call them within a half point most of the time, right?"

Even though it was a log scale with a unit difference representing a factor of ten, most of us felt we could peg a person to within half a point or better after talking to them for a few minutes. "He has to be high eight or higher," I told her.

The man raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

I nodded, holding up fingers. "Intelligence -- he's brilliant, in many areas. Genetics -- his parents, and *their* parents lived into their 90s. He's in his mid 50's teaching yoga classes. Ethically, morally -- again, first class."

Marsh nodded. "Would it surprise you to know he has a seventeen year old daughter who tested nine plus?"

"No -- a daughter? That's not possible," I told them. Not the Rob I knew.

Chambers smiled. "Her mother is a professor of Mathematics at Cornell; she met Professor Lemon when they were both grad students at Boulder."

Marsh picked up the tale. "She told us she fell in love with him, but realized as much as she loved him, he would be impossible to live with, so when she got her doctorate, she moved to Cornell, but took something extra with her when she left."

I smiled. "Damn, I could have done that," I realized.

"What?" my Captain asked.

I shook my head, blushing more.

"Explain, please dear," Marsh asked.

"After hearing that, I wouldn't be surprised if more haven't done it." I had to laugh. "Brilliant. But how do you know all this, and why tell me?" Oops. Should I have said that?

But the Colonels just smiled and looked at each other.

Chambers told me, "A team in Cornell yesterday tested the girl, verified 9.1. They immediately tested her mother -- she's 8.5. We interviewed them on the orbital."

My mind was spinning... If the kid tested 9.1, mom was only 8.5, the math said dad was almost certainly higher than the kid. "Holy shit," I muttered.

"Indeed," agreed my Captain.

"So you and your squad are going to be in Boulder tomorrow morning, testing," Chambers said.

I nodded. "Another statistical survey," I suggested with a smirk I didn't try and hide.

"Is it that transparent?" Marsh asked.

But Campbell cut her off. "You know him. He's at the top of your selectee list. You need to be sure you test him tomorrow."

I smiled. "That's easy -- we set up in the Alferd Packer Grill at the University and wait. He'll show up between eleven fifteen and eleven thirty for lunch."

"That easy?" Marsh asked.

I shrugged. "Tuesday morning, if he runs his usual schedule, that's where he'll be. If not, we drag him out of his office. If he's not in his office, we'll drag him out of the yoga studio, or his house. We'll test him. Then what?"

Marsh smiled, nodding to her colleague. "Follow standard procedure."

Captain spoke up. "Which is to say, if he tests at nine or greater, we've got an immediate extraction -- is that correct?"

"That is correct, Captain. Resources will be standing by."

"How do we get to Boulder?" I asked.

Chambers looked at his watch. "A shuttle will be here in ... approximately fifty minutes. You'll want to review his records; sergeant, you now have complete access. We expect an update at 0700 Boulder time tomorrow and regular updates through the day. Clear, Captain?"

"Very clear," my Captain replied.

Marsh looked at my Captain, then to me. "Thank you, dear, that will be all."

I knew when I was dismissed. "Captain with your permission, I'll start getting the squad packed up? Oh, I'm treating this as confidential and need-to-know unless you say otherwise."

She smiled at me. They all did. "Correct. Get moving."

I got. Managed to finish my dinner, only a little cold. The shuttle was on time, and the pilot enjoyed breaking as many rules as he could getting us to Boulder.

But damn, reviewing Rob's records on the flight... He'd been in a *really* nasty accident. He would have died if it hadn't been for Confederation emergency medical supplies.

"Peg!" I called to our med tech, an experienced emergency room nurse before a CAP team "volunteered" her, and had her look over his records and tell me if my guesses were right on how close he'd been, and what kind of condition he'd most likely be in. He was back teaching *some* classes, which was pretty amazing considering his injuries. Peg agreed -- he'd been flying with angels. She took my tablet, and when she started poking around, we found we had *significantly* enhanced access! Yeah, he was recovering, but it would take a long time on his own, or with just nominal Earth medical care.

I had the drill figured out. If he tested out as expected, the deal turned into a snatch, right there on the spot. We looked it up, and standard procedure for someone his age was to start full regenerative treatment immediately. But if he was only (only!) eight and a half or so, in the top 0.1% of the planet's population, we'd leave him as is. Which wasn't right. Not for Rob, not for all he'd done.

I looked at Peg. She's smart.

"What's going on, Carol? Is this another 'statistical' job?" she asked.

I smiled; like I said, she's smart.

"Explain SOP for him if he, strictly hypothetically, tests out nine plus?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I program two med packs for field initiated regen and hit him with both packs, monitor and support until we hand him off to a full regen team, which needs to happen within eight hours once I hit him with the second pack. They prep him and put him in the tank."

I nodded. "And if he's only eight five or so?"

She shrugged. "Wish him a good day."

"Hypothetically now, what could we do for him that wouldn't require the full regen support, tanks and the whole thing? Is there something less you could do that would help him, that would run out on its own without further support?"

She smiled. "If I hit him with the regen 'A' pack, yeah, that would be the trick. If he was a bad trauma case, the pack he'd get in the field is pretty close to regen 'A' -- let me look, yeah, look here, that's what they did. The big difference is the trauma pack allocates nanos to manage pain and shock; don't need those in regen, at least not to start. Yeah -- look at this -- he still has some nanos active, but not enough to really make a difference. According to SOP, if he checks out nine plus, we hit him with the regen 'A' pack, then with regen 'B' ten minutes later -- the "B" pack starts the hard core rework that requires tank support."

Thinking, thinking. The higher you test out, the longer the test takes. I'm eight five, and getting to that level takes about seven minutes. A nine would go ten or eleven. I'd never seen a nine before. Our gear only tested out to nine one, I thought. Higher than that took specialized equipment.

Peg suggested conspiratorially, "I'll guess he tests out to at least eight?"

I nodded. "Oh yeah."

She continued. "About fifteen seconds into the test, when the initial induction is complete, I hit him with regen 'A.' If we get the bell for rerun, I hit him with 'B' at ten minutes and we..."

"Rerun?" I asked.

She nodded, smiling. "Ever see a nine?"

I shook my head.

"We had one, before you joined us. Down at UCSB. When the AIs that run the tests think they've got a nine, they signal a rerun, audible as well as visual, and rerun part of the test -- total time is about sixteen minutes, and they wake up groggy. Oh, the AI sends out a standby to orbital command when they start the rerun, and if they check out, they signal that as well, so by the time we see the confirmation, an extraction team has already been notified. The extraction team drops down and takes over, and I do mean *take over*. If he checks out, he and his harem will be on an orbital within a few hours of the extraction team's arrival. You know this guy?"

I nodded. "And I don't want to just walk away if he's only an eight."

Peg nodded. "Only... You're eight plus, right?"

I nodded again.

She smiled. "I'll give him the 'A' pack early."

I nodded. "Okay. That's the way we'll run it -- I'll let you know when we get him. And this is ..."

She smiled. "I know -- if he only tests out to eight, I must have misunderstood, or thought I could give him the 'A' pack because of his injuries."

"Thanks," I told her. I sighed and shook my head. "Gonna be a long day..."

She looked at me, and at her watch. "When we get bunked, I'm giving you a sleep cap. And if you don't take it, I'll nail one in your sweet ass."

I hugged her. "Thanks."

We landed. Captain got us good bunking. Whaddya mean, you don't have our orders? This was planned weeks ago! I don't care, we're here, and we're going to set up right here tomorrow morning, so are you going to pick a place, or am I picking a place, RIGHT NOW?

I took Peg's sleep cap (as did a few of the others) and slept like a log. She gave me something else in the morning, and I was ready to go.

We checked in with the brass. I suggested to Greer it might be nice if someone could ride the University's security system and tell us when he showed up on campus, and where he went... Two minutes later, a new status window popped up on my tablet. I think he's expected to test out high...

It was good to be back on campus. I'd spent over seven years of my life at this place, undergrad through Ph.D... Only left and went to CMU so I could go to bed with him. No, not really.

Yes, really! I laughed at myself. And he truly put me where I was today! If I hadn't slept with him, made the deal to go to CMU, I wouldn't have been tagged by that CAP team sweeping CMU. But now I get to return the favor. I hope. And I was so envious -- whoever she was, she left with his child. Why hadn't I thought of that? Had others?

Damn, I hope he showed... Normally he'd be teaching yoga classes, and coming over after those and office hours. Kids practically fought to get into his classes... Must be hard on him, not teaching yoga.

Bingo! Nine thirty, the U's systems flagged him opening his office door. I walked over to the Captain, but she was looking at her tablet and smiling. She gave me thumbs-up from a few meters away.

So it was keep testing people and wait for him to show, and if he didn't show by lunch, hunt him down. We had the usual six stations set up, one "reserved" for faculty. Peg was standing by, helping direct, and watching for problems. I went by and told her, "He's in his office." She nodded as she directed people, telling them this would only take a few minutes, we were a "statistical survey team," not a full canvassing team, so we appreciated their cooperation, but if they couldn't spare the time, it wasn't mandatory, thank you, yes, do it now and you won't have to do it again later on and doing it early like this makes you eligible for some extras.

Yeah, like getting "volunteered" like the rest of us!

Statistical, my ass! We were cherry picking! If we were doing a statistical survey, we'd expect to see a more-or-less normal distribution, right? Mostly threes through sixes, the occasional two or seven. That would be the result of a valid sampling of a normal distribution.

All the "survey" sites I'd seen, we seldom saw less than a six. Some places, we didn't see anyone less than a six. Just like the "survey" that caught me at CMU, we sweep through, and a few days later, people get "invitations."

Or this one, and Rob gets the up-and-out. I smiled and shook my head. Had to hand it to her, whoever she was -- getting knocked up before leaving him. I'd do it, if I had the time, the chance, the premeditation... I'd be going off planet in a few months. Where, I don't know. Maybe...

And then again, if he's doing the up-and-out, if this is an extraction, he gets to pick his harem, right here, right now! I've got a chance! Damn, I've got a chance!

I fell into the rhythm of the job, helping move people (herd sheeple) through the queues. Sixes and sevens, and two eights -- statistical survey, right?

Another thought...

A cute guy queued up, in a longer line... "Sir, would you follow me, please?" I suggested. Height and uniform help. The nano treatment they give us, the Marines, puts us in optimal physical condition, which means not an ugly one in the bunch! I led him to the faculty line, which had two people in it, and turned on the charm. "I went to school here -- could I borrow your phone for a local call, please?" I asked conspiratorially and with a smile, a close smile.

He looked a little confused, but said, "Sure!" and unclipped it from his belt, handing it to me.

"Thanks -- I'll be right back. They'll take good care of you."

I stepped off to the side; I remembered Trisha's number, and thank God she was home. "Trish, this is Carol. Yes, *that* Carol! Listen -- shut up and listen! Get Donna, Robin, and Sam, and get your asses over to the Packer by eleven. Just do it! I'll explain when you get here! DO IT! Be at the Packer, by eleven!" I hung up and walked back, returning the phone.

Captain gave me curious looks, but she was busy directing traffic.

That's what I did, looking around periodically, looking at the clock.

Three minutes to eleven, he shows up! And oh, he was in pain, I could tell! Captain moved him right along. I cut through the crowd.

"Professor! Rob Lemon!" I called, moving closer, hoping Captain heard me.

"Carol?" he called tentatively.

I couldn't help it; I hugged him. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you!" I let go quickly and stepped back. "Oh, are you okay? I heard about your accident..."

He smiled and looked me over. "You look good -- even in that uniform."

I waved. "Captain!" I called out. She saw me, looked startled, then gave me the thumbs-up. "Peg!" I called out, turning. My medic looked equally startled, nodded, and grabbed one of her bags. I turned back to Rob. "How are you doing? Over here, we have a station just for faculty."

He smiled, but wasn't moving with his usual grace, carrying a cane, but not really putting weight on it. "I'm doing okay, I guess. They tell me the emergency med kit saved my life, but I'm still recovering. No yoga for a while, I'm afraid."

"Oh no!" I cried. Then with a smirk, "Do you have someone nursing you?"

He smirked back. "Yes, dear -- no end of volunteers. What happened to you?"

I shrugged. "CAP team visited CMU, and all of a sudden, I'm no longer a post doc. Oh, after another few months of helping with these teams, I'm being sent off-planet for training. And you made the difference."

I led him to the station. Peg was there with Dina.

"Okay, Rob, have a seat. Let me take your ID," I said, seating him and getting his ID. Peg pulled a med pack from her programmer, giving me a nod that she was ready.

"All right, sir," Dina told him, "I'm going to swing the instrument over your head. Relax and look at the light in the distance, that's all you have to do."

He sighed, nodded, and went with it. I started counting. Peg was watching a status panel on the tester. She nodded and slapped the pack on his neck. The pack beeped, and after about thirty seconds beeped again and fell off. I remembered to breathe again.

No matter what happens, Rob, I love you...

And sure enough, at about nine minutes, the screen flashed and breeped like I've never heard before, and told us it was rerunning part of the tests! Rob, you are going for a ride!

"Sarge!"

I looked up; one of the other stations was calling me. Peg told me, "We've got it covered."

Why do kids think they can use someone else's ID? At least this case wasn't one of bad intent; she thought her ID was back in her dorm room, and just wanted to get tested. Okay, go give this one back to Jenny, and have Jenny come over to get tested and go look for yours, too? If you've lost it, it isn't the end of the world, just come back and let us know, okay honey? It's okay; it happens. No, nobody's going to get into trouble, especially if both of you come back today. We'll be here -- get going!

I finished up that one in time to hear a loud "Chirp!" and looked over to the station Rob was at. Yup, saw Peg taking another pack off his neck as Dina swung the hood out of the way.

I hurried over, cutting through the crowd and getting to his side.

“He’s still out of it,” Dina told me with a smile. She showed me his ID card -- with a glowing 9.1 on it. That’s the highest score our machines will give. He’d be retested later, undoubtedly to a higher score.

“Here, Rob,” I told him, helping him, “Let me help you over here...” Peg and I led him to a chair a little ways away, closer to the wall, and out of the traffic pattern.

“I can’t see for shit!” he complained weakly. “What’s going on?”

We put him in a chair. “Sit and rest. I...” I saw my Captain waving. I nodded.

“What’s wrong with me?” he asked.

I rubbed one of his shoulders. Peg nodded with a smile. “It’s a side effect some people experience,” I told him, “Wait right here -- I’ll be right back, okay?”

Peg gave me a nod. I cut through the gathering throngs.

“Confirmation, Captain,” I told her when I got to her side.

She was grinning, looking at her tablet. “I know, Lieutenant...”

“When will...” I started to ask, then it hit me. “What did you say?”

She grinned even more. “I said I know, Lieutenant -- that’s your rank, effective a while ago. Your new assignment is head of the team responsible for Professor Lemon. You’ve got Peg for medical, and ...” A ruckus started up at one of the middle stations. “Oh hell, what is it now? You need ... What the...” She stuck fingers in her mouth and let out an ear-shattering whistle, followed by yelling, “Cut it out! Now!” She shook her head and turned to me again, “Congratulations, don’t let him out of your sight -- the extraction team left early and should be landing...” “Security! Now!” came a call from behind us, and the sounds of a scuffle. Make that more than a scuffle!

We dove into the mess and helped sort things out. Someone trying to use another person’s card is one thing, but *counterfeit* cards are another. When it was more or less under control, I cut around the back to my station. None of *our* people injured. As I approached my crew, I saw Peg kneeling over a downed and bleeding civilian, holding a gloved hand to a bleeding civilian head, and ...

Oh shit, where’s Rob? He’s gone! “Nora, Donna! Where’s the guy who was sitting here?” I yelled out. No cane, no Rob!

Dina

Ghaa, I don't know if I love my job, or I hate my job! We no sooner get back to our quarters on Orbital 2, I strip down to relax in low gee, and breep! Another one! But when I looked at it, it was only a warning. Okay, a follow-up on the Cornell snatch; we'd been expecting that. The Northern European team, Petra's team, took that one, while we were busy on her turf, a Portuguese man.

We had between nine and fifteen hours on this one. I passed the alert to my team with a ready call in eight hours.

I run a Nine Extraction Team. Whenever screeners find someone with a CAP score of nine or better, we're called in for an immediate extraction. Standard operating procedure says they're to be off-planet in four hours max. We shoot for two.

Oh, even though we're a Nine Extraction Team, we don't refer to ourselves as NETs or anything like that. We're hookers. Got a problem with that?

But... Why is it always... Three weeks with damn nothing to do except wait, and then a cluster all at once? I *know* the answer: Murphy deals from the bottom of the deck.

As to why...

No easy way to do it, you just have to dive into the numbers to see what we're up against. Everyone in our Service, all Confederation officers, get more or less the same presentation. If you want to play along, get out your tablet, spreadsheet, or good scientific calculator -- I use an old HP one.

Figure the current population of Earth at 6.6 billion, 6,600,000,000. United States alone is 300 million, 300,000,000.

First off, the Sa'arm are on their way. Low probability of arrival within three years, but virtually certain within eight years. Don't like that? Don't believe it? Tell *them* when they get here. And when they arrive, it's going to be ugly and short. Some Confederation members are hoping that we (us ill-tempered, ill-mannered, monkey types) will come up with something new to stop them or at least slow them down, but not much has come up in the last century and a half of Sa'arm expansion into what was Confederation space that slows down Sa'arm. Other than detonating the planet or the star, and that's been done, but that's not a "long term" strategy.

So while some folks work on ways to convince the Sa'arm this planet isn't for them, most others are working on how many we can get off the planet, and who the lucky ones will be.

Lucky? That's a different debate. But this is where CAP testing comes in.

We are very, very lucky, having extraction criteria imposed on us from outside. It's based on CAP scores, not by how big a pathological liar you are (oh, sorry Senator), who you know, or how much of what you have access to, whether it's money, drugs, sex, guns, muscle, or whatever. Your chance for extraction is based on your CAP score. That's it.

Your CAP score is established by an AI-based machine. The machine looks into your brain, into your mind, into your body. It doesn't care about your name, your income, who you voted for or who voted for you. Can't be bribed, tricked, threatened, misled, sweet-talked, lied to, or otherwise rigged. Not that we know of, anyway.

We want to screen the planet for people with CAP scores of 6.5 and above.

First cut at the math: figure it takes 3 minutes to test one person. There are 525,600 minutes in a year. So, one test station working nonstop could do 175,200 people in a year. Call that one test-year. Yeah, that's too efficient, so better estimates on larger populations are that it would take about 3000 test-years to do the United States, and around 80,000 test-years to do the entire planet. Yeah, I know the party line, that CAP tests don't really work well under about 8 years of age, and individual scores don't stabilize until 20 at least. But the genetic components are set at birth, and genes plus gene expression are solid by mid-puberty. I know it's nature *plus* nurture, but score variability post-puberty rapidly dwindles to statistical noise.

Back to the testing problem. Even if we could field ever-increasing numbers of test teams, we don't have the time. Oh, with 1000 test stations, you could do the entire United States in three years; that almost seems doable. Except that things don't quite scale that way.

And if you did it that way, you'd be wasting most of your time.

Shift gears from simple math to probability and statistics. If you're a real pessimist, assume a more-or-less normal distribution. Yeah, I know, you weren't paying attention in that class, you were spending your time trying to look down the front of the good looking chick with the big tits sitting in front of you. Well, I *was* that chick, and I paid attention. Look what it got me -- from a cushy teaching and research position to running a hooker team. But it got me fully regen'd, so I don't look like or feel like a 56 year old woman anymore, and as soon as we meet our quota, we get shipped off -- I'm out there past five sigma, a CAP score of 8.2.

But back to testing, probability, and statistics. We want to skim the cream off the top. The folks from minus infinity (statistically speaking) to plus three sigma we're not interested in - - out of those 6.6 billion people, a normal distribution has a little over 97%, 6.45 billion in that cohort less than three sigma -- *that we're not interested in*. We're interested in the ones *above* the three sigma limit, and worldwide that amounts to a tad over 150 million estimated for CAP scores 6.5 and higher. The ones our hooker teams deal with, the nines? Statistically, that's six sigma, with an estimated two thousand on the whole planet (1892 if you do the math starting with 6.6 billion), and around 90 in the three hundred million population of the United States.

Makes finding needles in haystacks seem far easier, yes?

Sounds like a cushy job, right, like waiting for raindrops in the Sahara... Which is a better analogy than you'd think, because when they come, they come in bunches.

This latest North American bunch, for example. North America is nominally our turf, except with a finite number of hooker teams for the planet, a lot of the time we're bored, hanging around the orbital screwing each other, or we're all batshit busy working far out of our nominal areas. For this bunch, we were in Portugal, and the Northern European team took Cornell!

If you haven't figured it out, the strategy of testing everybody is *stupid*. You want to put your resources where they're going to produce results. Yes, I know, getting those last few requires that pretty much everyone be tested, but lose the egalitarian pipedreams -- *we don't have the time or the resources*. So in North America, as in most parts of the world, while canvassing teams move slowly through populations, testing everyone, we also have what are euphemistically called "statistical survey" teams. Yeah, right. University towns, areas that support populations of bright/creative/weird people. Test where you've got a built-in bias towards higher CAP scores. And follow through with canvassing, mainly to keep the politicians appeased, and catch the very occasional diamond in the rough.

But remember, please -- this isn't about equal opportunity. 97% of the planet is destined to be Sa'arm fodder. That's the way it works. Unless someone comes up with a really, really, good idea, and we won't know how good that idea is until it's tested, and when *that* time comes, it's too damn late. While you're at it, it would help if you could figure out a better way of hauling people away from this star system to another. Hint: there are a very limited number of vehicles, each with a very constrained capacity, available for use. Also good to remember that ours is not the only inhabited stellar system looking at Sa'arm encroachment. There is competition for those vehicles, and the logistics of the transport part of the puzzle make CAP testing look easy by comparison.

I'll go back to the testing part, and stop ranting. Let's say you're going to make a lemon meringue pie. You go to the grocery store to get lemons. Do you look through the *entire* store, one end to the other? Do you examine each and every item, asking, "Is this a lemon?" Dog food, cleaning products, "Is this a lemon?" I hope the hell not! No, you go to the fruit aisle. You only look through the whole fucking store if: (1) you don't know where things are, (2) the store is completely disorganized, (3) you've got a lot of time to waste, or (4) you're really dumb. Otherwise, you cheat and take the short cut -- you look in the part of the store where you expect to find lemons.

And that's the way it is, looking for CAP 6.5 and above -- you only test the entire population if you expect your target group to be uniformly distributed within that population. In the so-called civilized part of the world, we've got clues alerting us to the distribution of our target group. Cities. Universities. Artist's colonies. You look where you have a good chance of finding what you're looking for. In some countries, that's political prisons and mental hospitals, even though the local (repressive) governments don't like us looking there. But they don't run the testing program -- *we* go where we want. And when need be, we go armed. We're playing for keeps and don't give a rat's ass about local issues.

But a lot of bleeding heart politicians don't understand statistics or distributions. I remember one tweet bleating that we weren't giving people a chance. Hah -- neither are the Sa'arm. Of course that idiot was also convinced the education system was failing kids in his district *because half of them scored below the mean*. Yes, really! You can guess his CAP score, and you only need the fingers on one hand, and if you ask me if the thumb counts, I'll just smile.

That's the end of my rant. Most likely.

The current firedrill started with a "survey" team hitting Cornell University and surrounds. Lots of sixes and above, which is good news and bad news. Good news in that those are the ones we want, but bad in that the higher the score, the longer the tests take. Three minutes for CAP 5 and below, up to six minutes to CAP 7, and around twelve for a nine, except that when the AI thinks it's got a nine, it alerts Command of a possible, and then reruns parts, so it takes sixteen minutes to confirm a nine. We keep recommending to ditch the rerun, since we've never had *anyone* fail the rerun, and they're run through a more complete screening on the orbital anyway, but to some, sanctity of process is more important than progress... We get a standby alert at the rerun point, and supposedly a team is ready to be dispatched and should arrive on site within twenty minutes of confirmation. If we're warned beforehand, like with this one, we launch on the rerun notification. When we arrive, we seal the area, help the lucky person pick their entourage (quickly -- the clock is running), and stuff them through the portal we carry that takes them directly to an orbital. Usually the nine and entourage are out of the planetary system within six hours -- they're too valuable to risk.

So the team doing Cornell pops up with a teen girl who's a solid 9. Because of the significant genetic component in CAP, when a 9 pops up, we run the family tree, pronto! In this case, mom tested to 8.6, no other kids, mom's siblings were already tested low eights, which is good for them, parents deceased. Oh, as we expand these family searches, that helps schedule "statistical" surveys... The AIs use scores over 7 for "hints" in assigning survey teams.

Daughter is a solid 9, confirmed on the orbital. Mom is 8.6 confirmed. That means dad is *at least* as good as daughter, and *almost certainly* a whopper *higher* than the daughter. Even though CAP is a log scale, and it's not necessarily a simple arithmetic process, a useful first cut is that the CAP score of the child is the average of the parent's CAP scores. Mom is 8.6, daughter is 9.1 -- find and test dad, yesterday!

When I looked at his records, I understood why we extract these people as soon as we can, if not sooner. I understand even better why some of our people scream to have even *tentative* nines like him pulled off-planet as soon as they're identified -- forget the survey team, get his ass off planet, and test him when he's safe!

If you haven't figured it out, people in the upper two plus percent of the population, CAP 6.5 and above, 3 sigma and greater out from the mean, represent the future of mankind, if we're to have any. Especially the nines, out at six sigma -- according to the combined intelligences of the Confederation, those individuals *are* the future of our race.

And this poor elite bastard was riding a bicycle around town, and got hit by a drunk kid in a stolen car! If not for Confederation trauma packs, we would have lost one percent of the expected population of North American nines! He almost died! That's why we want them off planet in two hours or less! A nine plus, riding a *bicycle*! A bunch of us (and our superiors) continue to argue that when we identify a *tentative 9*, we should snatch them as soon as possible. In most circumstances we can put very good lower bounds on their expected scores, based on genetic relationship alone. Like in this case, when daughter is a solid 9 and mom is 8.6, dad has a 96% expectation that he's 9.4 *or higher*. What the hell are we waiting for? For him to take another damn bike ride? Or to spend the night with friends?

No, we don't make *that* mistake anymore. We've got the current procedure because a family in the U.K., a little over a year ago, mom and dad *both* tested 9 plus, with a two year old daughter and mom pregnant with a son. Their flat was being painted, so they spent the night with friends, to be picked up the following afternoon after they had a chance to get some things from their flat. Unfortunately for them, and for the rest of the human race, the wall heater at the friend's flat was defective and flooded the flat with carbon monoxide. None of them woke the next morning. The full story never made the press, but it changed the way we do things, I hope the hell to tell you.

I dug into more records, into connections, and bingo! I sent my command a strongly worded recommendation to assign a particular survey team to Boulder the next day, and as backup, included that a particular member of that survey team (ID supplied) had *intimate* knowledge of both target and location, attaching supporting documentation which they probably wouldn't read. I made some additional very strongly worded recommendations for his handling if he tested out.

To my surprise, less than half an hour later I got a reply from my boss's boss, Colonel Marsh, "Good catch! Orders cut as suggested. Remain on standby to handle this one!"

Had to smile at that. I warned the rest of the team. When I brought up a screen to check on shuttles, I found one already assigned to us, and it would be hot and ready to drop!

I checked to see if Brian, head of the other North American extraction team, was aboard. He was, and was marked idle. I gave him a voice call, asking if he could drop by to discuss an upcoming mission.

He arrived six minutes later. I dimmed the lights as the hatch closed behind him...

We made love again in the morning, got cleaned up, and had something to eat before the alert came in; my team completed checkout on our shuttle just as the AI started its test. We launched when we got the rerun alert. So far, we've had exactly *zero* cases where rerun has downgraded an individual to less than CAP 9.

ETA University of Colorado, Boulder, 12 minutes!

Lemon Extract

We received confirmation from the AI as we were on final. I smiled when I looked at the details; evidently the med tech down there was pretty sure he'd test out as well; she'd started him on the first regen pack early in the test, and hit him with the second one on confirmation.

I got confirmation from the captain of the team that she'd received the new orders, and was passing them along. I'd worked with their captain, and many of the team before -- a pickup at UCSB on the West Coast, about six months ago. Good, solid team.

I looked at his pictures again. This one was going to be fun. I started rechecking my exo-suit for ground ops. We go into these things loaded for bear. More fun that way.

Only to be interrupted by a priority message -- oh my -- they were holding up the departure of a *starship* for him and his harem! I looked at new assignments and nodded -- someone else had noticed his background, and his new Lieutenant's.

We put down in a nearby quad on campus. Two of my security team led the way with me on the first sled with my med lead; the rest were on the second sled with the transport portal, which would be hot and ready to go in half an hour.

Good ground team, good leadership, I'd worked with them before, should be a piece of cake, right?

Free For All

We moved into chaos! The local team had a rumble; I detailed two of my forward security to help them clean up. They wanted additional medical; okayed. I found Captain Greer and our new Lieutenant standing in the back by an empty chair. They saw me, and looked shocked. An empty chair? Not good...

I did what I always do; took command. "Status?" I asked, expecting the worst.

That's what I got. Damn. How could you... Never mind!

"Okay, how long has he been gone?" I asked. This was a new one on me, a 9 bolting...

"Five minutes max," Greer told me. "We got distracted with ..."

I nodded. "Yeah, I guessed." One of my medics was helping. Greer's security team got enthusiastic with the troublemakers, which as usual was hard on the troublemakers.

"Your medic gave him both nano packs?" I asked, pulling up my tablet to review status.

"Yes," the Lieutenant told me. She was pretty. With my exosuit, when I look at someone, I can see their ID, CAP, and more. This young woman was very bright. I glanced at an image of her before she "volunteered" for this duty -- she'd been a beauty *before* the Marines nano treatment -- volleyball player, physicist, yoga student. She was a superb match for her assignment, even though she'd managed to momentarily lose him.

"Baker, Fritz!" I hollered, live and into my comm. Two of my security team in ranger suits hopped over. I dug into my pack and got an earcomm piece. "Lieutenant, you're mine now! Stuff this in your ear." I handed the Lieutenant the earcomm and watched her seat it.

Captain Greer said, "We're scanning Uni systems, and haven't seen his ID. He drove a personal vehicle to campus today. We don't think he can operate it, but one of my team is with the vehicle anyway. I was just about to send the Lieutenant to his office."

"Good thinking, Captain. Lieutenant -- take your medic and one of your security to his office. Call when you get there. Baker, Fritz -- heat up your scanners -- he's dripping nanos; start tracking him from here. Poole, Dietz -- when's my portal going to be live? Move, Lieutenant! Now!"

She moved, shaking her head and gathering her team.

"We're really..." Captain Greer started out.

I held up a hand. "That's okay. You've recovered. He'll turn up." He'd better, and quick!

“Got him! Hot trail!” Baker reported, looking at the screen on her handheld scanner. I turned to see them track up to a closed door. Fritz opened it. Exosuits are good for those kinds of things. Besides, the door looked like it would be easy to repair.

“What was the party?” I asked, indicating the mess. “Let’s stage them for the locals, on the other side, please. I want to be able to cordon this area off,” I broadcast to my combined team. They started moving the troublemakers to the other side of the lounge area, where they could be picked up by local police and medical personnel.

Greer frowned and shook her head. “Counterfeit IDs -- we were following current procedure, tagging them with locators for later pickup when one of them still queued up for testing figured out what we were doing, I guess.”

I nodded. I thought that procedure only encouraged mischief. When I was on the kibbutz, we dealt with forged IDs in a much more immediate manner.

We cleaned up and put out our anchors to set up confinement. My team helped get testing restarted; that was the nominal purpose for this deal, right? And they helped cull candidate females into our area. I thought some might know something was up -- a group of three arrived, all high sevens, looking for our Lieutenant. When I looked them over, all were superb matches for our nine, and were his students. Hope you packed toothbrushes, ladies!

One of the locals explained to me who Alferd Packer was, and why they named a cafeteria after him... I like these people! I was just about to duck out and get something to eat when things started popping again.

Our portal went live and locked, and the crew on the other side was ready to grab and gas ’em as we pushed them through. Maury, my security lead, figured out that our wandering 9 was using an ID tag that was programmed to open any door on campus. Just like our exosuits, except cleaner, quieter, and repeatable...

And they found him -- sitting in his office! Good, now get him down here!

Carol

It was just starting to dawn on him; he didn't have it figured out, not yet.

"We need to get back to the Packer," I told him.

He shook his head. "Okay..." He stuck a finger in the corner of one eye and pulled out a string of goo. "Yak! I feel like I'm sweating slime!"

"You are," Peg told him, "That's the nanos getting rid of waste. I can help with that when we get to my gear."

He grabbed his cane and started to the door.

"Rob, wait," I told him, grabbing the bag with his favorite yoga mat on top of it. "Rob," I asked, standing close, "is there anything else you want from this office, anything you could put in this bag? There's a good chance you'll never see this place again."

His eyes opened wide. I know, I'm not supposed to mention things like that.

He moved to his desk and slapped the computer, pulling out storage modules. He quickly rifled a drawer and pulled out a few more, putting those in the bag. He looked around with a sigh. Then he looked to me and smiled. "I did this a few weeks ago, when I first came back. Didn't think I'd be the one to take this stuff." He took a deep breath, straightening. "Let's go!"

We turned to the main elevator, but he said, "No, the quick way -- follow me."

He used his cane to open doors, heading to a service elevator, and then down a service corridor -- to a broken door into the Packer.

The presence of fully armored Confederation Marines had changed the whole vibe of the place -- the murmurs, the energy had an edge to it now.

The extraction team was cordoning off areas. A large gadget -- must be the portal -- set up in back, up against a wall. We got Rob settled with medical; they rinsed his eyes, washed off his hands, pushed fluids into him, and gave him something to drink.

They let me know he was under control -- he wasn't getting away again! I detailed one of my security to stay with him anyway. Oh! Trish, Dona, and Sam were here! And they were already separated off with the other ladies!

I headed over, the head of the extraction team nodding to me as she walked over as well.

Dina

Our new Lieutenant was rolling with the punches pretty well. Our nine was with med, enough muscle around him so he wouldn't get far. And we'd gathered a good selection...

"Lieutenant!" I called to her.

"Yes, Ma'm?" she said, pulling up short.

"Good job. Those three," I nodded to the three ladies she'd been exchanging glances with. "They look like they'd make good candidates..."

"Ah, yes -- I think they're interested..."

Had to smile at that. "You know them?"

"Y... Yes, we were in some of his classes. Ah, I called and told them to come here."

Good for her! Solve a bunch of problems at once! "Why don't you bring them over." I turned back to the med area as I keyed comm. "Portal team, get ready -- I want clear and confirmed from reception, prep for three close together."

The response came back quick, "Hot and ready to go! Reception team ready to rock and roll!"

I smiled; I had a good crew. "Good job."

"How's he doing?" I asked their med, who'd been an emergency room nurse. A 7.4; nothing spectacular for us, but she'd earned a ride."

She looked at me and smiled. "Fine, Major. Nominal for this stage of regen."

I brought up more of her records. She was a good fit. Sent the query and received an immediate confirmation. "Would you like to go with him?"

She gasped. "I... I can?"

I nodded. More detailed response -- they wanted her. "If you want. It will mean advanced medical training."

She shivered! "When?"

"You'll be part of the last group. Hope your old boss won't be too pissed."

She was all smiles. "I don't think so..."

“We need him up and talking in one minute -- flush his eyes, face, and hands again, please,” I told her.

That snapped her back. “Right, Major.” She turned to her gear, then looked up at me with a terrific smile and added, “Thank you!”

She worked quickly, efficiently, cleaning him up, explaining to him what she was doing as she did it.

“Ready, Major,” she told me.

I looked him over. Damn, he was going to look so good when he got out of the tank! Aside from his injuries, he was in superb condition now!

“Professor Lemon,” I spoke, extending a hand, and pulling him to standing.

“Yes?” he replied, sounding unsure, which was to be expected.

“Professor, do you know what’s going on?”

He shook his head. “Only vaguely. Can you fill me in?”

I smiled. Don’t think he could see me smile through the faceplate. “Professor Lemon, you’re going for a ride. A long ride, as a matter of fact -- there is a starship waiting to transport you and your entourage.”

He looked around and picked up a bag. He turned to the Lieutenant and took her hand. “Thank you.” Then he asked me, “Can Carol go with me?” his voice full of emotion.

I almost cried -- there may be hope for us as a race yet. “Yes, she is.” The three young lovelies she’d called were now standing with Baker and Fritz. “The three young ladies over there -- are you interested in them?”

He looked at me, puzzled, and at them. They waved. “I’m not sure I understand.”

“Professor, you get to pick your entourage. Here and now. Do you want them?” As one of my instructors told me, sugar coating is for candy.

“Yes,” he said clearly.

I keyed my comm. “We’ve got our guinea pigs -- push them through.” Fritz led them to the portal.

I turned back to the reason for us being here. “Professor Lemon, as a nine, you need to collect an entourage of ...” I rechecked with command; sometimes the numbers change. With the

Lieutenant, medical, and those three, that made five. He needed to select two more. “You need to select two more women to accompany you.”

“Accompany?” he asked, a funny look on his face.

“Your harem, Professor. You’re going to be busy, in more ways than one.”

My comm popped, “Major, orbital reports first candidate aboard all nominal, second aboard all nominal.” “Roger,” I replied, “send three and wait for the rest.” Always good to test your systems; we’d send him in the last batch.

He had a smirk to go with the bewildered look; he was adapting. Nines usually adapt pretty damn fast.

“Do they have to be young?” he asked.

I liked this guy even more. “No -- anyone over a certain age gets full regen. Do you ...?”

“Jen Miller,” he interrupted. “Two offices down from mine. Is there a phone I can use?”

“Local phone,” I called into my comm. One of my folks quickly showed up with one, telling me, “They won’t be needing it.” Either one of the ones we’d shoved through the portal to test it, or someone who’d been roughed up. I handed it to our nine.

Rob

I was shaky, but feeling better. Carol, the others -- so young, so much of life in front of them. But the others... I took the phone and dialed Jen's extension.

"Jen, this is Professor Lemon -- I need you to come down to the Packer, as soon as possible."

"Of course! Are you all right? I'll be right down!" her voice was full of concern.

"I need you, please Jen," I said with more emotion in my voice than I'd expected.

"I'm on my way! Damn you if you've pushed yourself too hard!" Click.

That's why I owe it to her...

I dialed the next one. Rang, answered, disconnected. Dialed again -- same thing. I remembered -- she had a class, the reason she couldn't meet me for my usual lunch schedule this semester..

"Could your people pick someone up for me, from a campus classroom?" I asked the leader of the group.

"We'd be happy to," her voice responded from under her armor.

I imagined they would... I called another of our admins. "Polly, this is Rob Lemon. No, I'm okay -- but I need a favor, right now. Where is Professor Graham teaching? Yes, I need it now. Okay..." Two armored soldiers came up. "B 230 until Noon? Thanks, dear. Thank you for all the help you've been, to me, and to our students. No, that's okay."

I disconnected the call. "You're looking for Professor Charlene Graham. She should be teaching in B-230, a large lecture hall in the three-story building just on the other side of..."

Their commander barked out, "Go!" and the two soldiers headed off.

I felt woozy. "Carol," I called out.

Carol appeared on one side of me, and the medic gal on the other side.

"Sit down," the medic told me.

I ended up in a chair again.

"Where is Professor Lemon? What have you done to him?" I heard Jen call out.

Carol stepped away, bringing Jen back.

“What have you done this time?” Jen accused me, breathing hard from rushing down.

My eyes were cloudy again, but I don’t think it was the nanos. But I could still see the fire in her eyes, the determination and energy in the way she stood. She’d take them all on, armored or not... “Jen, Miss Miller. I have been offered the opportunity to leave this place, this planet. Would you like to go with me? I’d like you to.”

“W... What? Yes, but I need to tell...” she started to say.

The team leader must have given an order, as one of the armored people led her away.

“We’ve located Professor Graham,” she added, amusement in her voice. “She will be here momentarily.”

“Uninjured, I hope,” I looked up at her.

She laughed. “Startled and a little upset, but uninjured.”

Charlene was released by her two “escorts” and left standing in front of me a short while later. She was hopping mad; she was beautiful. We’d practiced yoga together for decades. I don’t think either of us had forgotten a brief interlude from those decades past.

“Professor Graham,” I tried to say loudly and with gravitas. “This is the Question. You will only be asked once. Will you go with me, or will you stay?”

She looked around. She looked at me. “Oh my God! Yes!” and she fainted, caught by one of her escorts.

“That was easy! Put her through,” the commander said, gesturing with her arm. “Let’s go!”

Dina

I liked this guy -- there might be a future for our race after all! He actually asked them if they wanted to go! Not that he explained what was going on. And not that I explained that if he chose someone who wasn't willing, by the time he got out of the tanks, they'd be devoted to his every whim!

The admin gal, older, no CAP score on her but I'd guess high six at the least. I also guessed she'd regen into a very pretty young woman.

The second -- a sociologist, and I'd guess paramour from the past, in his yoga classes for years, his age and in superb health -- and 8.8, so no slouch. Both of them, all of them, showing such spirit.

She also made the portal process a bit easier by passing out on us, with Fritz catching her and putting her through.

"Let's go!" I motioned to our crowd. The Lieutenant helped our nine stand up. "Cordon and secure!" I called to my team. They snapped to.

"Portal status?" I called to my team. They knew what was up -- we were sending the important one.

"Last one through nominal; med starting regen; portal rechecked and all green," they reported.

"Thank you. Medical, nine, lead, in that order," I said in my comm, and out loud, pointing to them in order.

"What's happening?" our nine asked.

One of my portal crew told the medical specialist, "Please step through, miss," taking her bags and aiming her at the shimmering portal. She turned and took a look around, and with a big smile, stepped through.

"Professor Lemon," I told him, "You step through the portal,"

"Medical arrived nominal and in process," my comm interrupted.

"And into the low-gravity environment of an Orbital. A medical team will assist you through the remainder of the regeneration process. When you come out of it, you will be many light-years from here. I wish you well, and hope you can do something to save our planet."

He turned and gave his Lieutenant a hug.

Damn, no way to wipe my eyes in this damn suit!

“Professor, please,” one of my portal crew said, urging him forward.

He held his bag, threw away the cane with vigor, and stepped through.

His lieutenant tried to follow him through, held back by my crew.

“Nine arrived nominal and with medical. Medical reports nominal,” my comm announced.

“Lieutenant, your turn,” I told her.

She practically jumped through the portal!

“All aboard nominal,” comm announced.

“Good work,” I told my team. I looked around and motioned to their lead, Captain Greer.

“Orbital command reports operations complete.”

Good. “Portal team, take your portal to standby and secure for transport, another good extraction,” I told them.

“Portal to standby and securing for transport,” their lead echoed back.

I turned. “Captain Greer -- I’m sorry to have deprived you of some of your team. You already have replacements assigned, to meet you tomorrow in ... Colorado Springs.”

“Sorry for the initial excitement,” she apologized again.

I laughed. “Keeps life interesting. We can assist with screening through the rest of the day if you’d like.”

She nodded, with a smirk. “Yes, thank you -- it would be nice if we could offer others the same opportunities we’ve been given...”

I laughed and gently put an arm around her. “Captain, I’m losing one of my people to rotation in a month. Could I interest you in another job? The hours aren’t as regular, but the travel is more interesting.”

She smiled. “I believe you could, even though you took away my prime candidate for heading up this mob -- but first I suggest combining teams, splitting into two squads, and giving one squad a break for lunch.”

Lemon Extract

She was a good choice, thinking of her mission and her team first. “Make it so, Captain. Portal team, you’re cleared to take a break when the portal is secured for transit. Security and medical teams, you’re with Captain Greer! Since we’ve relieved her of some of her crew, we’re going to help out for a while, starting with lunch!”

As our teams reconfigured, I sent a quick summary to my command; extraction complete, remaining on-site to assist with cleanup and testing.

Data coming down for us, and Greer -- oh my! The first thing the orbital team did with our nine was shake him down for a list of all his liasons over the years! And the Prof we pulled from that class was on it! We had two more probable children to test, one local -- a nine year old, so his family would go too. Permission to remain on-site approved!

“Keep that portal warm -- we might need it again before the day is out!” I told my crew. “Anders -- keep the pen for a while -- offer them lunch on the Confederation.” We might need more “volunteers” if this kid tested out high, or others in his family did.

“Commander, permission to use two of your people for pickup?” Greer asked.

“Use Baker and Fritz,” I told her, “the nine year old?”

“Yes, ma’am, him first, then run the family.”

As I glanced at preliminaries on the nine year old, a note popped up from a medical AI suggesting that basic serological analysis pointed to our nine being his father, different serotypes from his younger siblings. The fun was just beginning!

“Good job, Captain -- I suggest we break for lunch now, while we can!”

End
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Lemon Extract

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