

Short Story Contest

November 2021

 LIBRARIES



PROMPT: You've been recruited into a shadowy organization that handles paranormal and extraterrestrial encounters across the world. You're not a Field Agent—you're the new Head Archivist.

The Archivist

by **Maria Kauffman**

Chosen Prompt: 1

The Archivist

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The doors slid open before her and Galeia walked forward with measured steps, one every second, her pristine white boots clicking faintly on the seamless pale green metal. She glanced at the screen in her hands, the blue glow of the flexigraph amplified by the greyish tint of the lights that ran in a line along the walls. She scrolled through the list of subjects in careful swipes, trying to select the ideal first case.

She had been dangerously close to experiencing joy when she had learned that she had been chosen by The Council to join the Alien Study Organization, ASO, her skin beginning to take on a hint of yellow before regulated breathing and internal numerical recitation returned her to her natural state and her flesh to an even green similar to the glassy metal floors she was walking upon. Now, her first day as the Head Archivist, she was determined to be the perfect worker. She would remain calm and clinical while ensuring that the documentation of the species was correct. Regulation, after all, was her aptitude, and nothing had more regulations to ensure were followed than research on live alien species.

“Remember,” the many training sessions she had gotten to attend had coached her. “The most important thing in research on living creatures is to minimize pain and discomfort. Research should not cause them undue distress.”

She kept that in mind now as she reached the first set of enclosures. She scanned her palm on the door, resisting the urge to tap her trimmed nails against it, and it slid open smoothly, a reassuring swish. The two walls on either side of the room were

clear sectioned doors that offered an unrestricted view of the species. She checked the chart on her flexigraph, pulling up the profiles for the room.

“*Species: Aleiozar.*” She read from the screen, mouth pressed into a firm line against any instincts to say the words out loud. “*Home Planet: Tevron.*”

Underneath the identification was a picture that exactly matched the creatures she saw, long bright red reptiles designed to blend into the red sands of Tevron, with six legs, bright yellow eyes, and a mouth that only opened to sink its razor sharp fangs into its prey. Each of the twenty enclosures, ten on each wall, had a floor coated in red sand and screen-walls that displayed a bright pink sky, replicating their home planet as much as possible. She checked that their pool of water in the corner had clear liquid and that there was meat in their food dish, noting on the chart the satisfactory state of the area. She would normally be handling paperwork, a task she was far more comfortable with, but her first few days were meant to familiarize her with the facility and its contained species so she would know what she was documenting.

She finished her inspection of that room, allowing herself a slight nod and then immediately tamping down any hints of satisfaction before her skin could take on the slightest of orange glows. She had a lot more rooms to get through before her midday meal and she could not afford to get behind schedule. She had to visit all of the containment rooms today to view the model species held for preservation. Tomorrow, she needed to be done with the containment rooms so she could start inspecting the experimental rooms for species being studied instead.

She turned to leave the room, her hair coiling more tightly into its bun as she scanned herself out and went down to the next room, resolved to work her way down

one side of the hallway in the morning and the other side in the evening, neatly dividing her day along with the hall.

The next room held Qualiis, a type of avian species known for its turquoise feathered bodies. They looked like spheres with their feathers all fluffed out, their large bright pink beaks standing out garishly. The turquoise feathers made sense, being designed to blend in with the leaves of their forests, but the pink beaks were an outrageous allowance. She knew from their profile that scientists had discovered the size was necessary for their eating habit, but the bright color seemed like an unnecessary indulgence to Galeia, despite the fact that it was natural for the material from which the beaks were formed. She observed their wide perches of varying levels and their water and food dishes, berries and nuts filling the food bowls. The screen-walls were programmed to appear like a mass of turquoise leaves and she recognized that great effort had been made to give all of the preservation species a habitat as similar to their natural one as possible in a simulated environment.

She moved to the next room, her progress steady. This pace would fit into her schedule perfectly, but there would be no room allotted for delays. It was fortunate that she made a habit out of never being delayed. She stepped in, reading the profile from her flexigraph as she went through the door.

“Species: Human, Home Planet: Ertra.”

Within, she surveyed the humans critically. The creatures had flesh in varying arrays of ground-toned colors, with the Collectors always trying to collect every regional variant of a species being preserved. Despite the fact that humans were said to be widespread on Ertra, their nests throughout the planet were similar, so their enclosures

here were all the same format. They had fur-textured fabric lining the floor, with a seat-like tube in the corner for them to let their waste out into. She did have to admire the abilities of humans to be properly trained in that regard. They had a block in the corner which their food and water dishes were placed on, the food from a large assortment of nutritional groups due to their extreme dietary needs. They were considered rather inefficient species despite their hints of intelligence. Testing had proven them clever and they had dominated their planet before it was discovered, but they also lacked self-preservation and foresight abilities, having wrecked their planet to the point where it had taken years for restoration technology to repair its atmosphere and often failing to plan ahead in experimental trials designed to test their reactions. The majority of them would doom themselves for temporary ease, ridiculously shortsighted despite rudimentary strategic knowledge.

She put her thoughts on humans aside, ruthless in preventing herself from becoming distracted. Her notes on the room were completed, so she exited, moving down to the next species. She had gotten through three species in fifteen minutes, an ideal ratio. She was going to be the best Head Archivist the ASO had ever worked with.

And she would always be on schedule.