

Scientific Conundrum

Von UniverseHeart

The Secluded Laboratory

The sound of the helicopter was deafening to her ears, but she resisted the urge to cover her ears from the onslaught of sound. Her loose hair swayed in the strong wind as she made her way down the ramp to the landing deck, where their vehicle had just landed. Her escort followed her out, carrying her suitcase for her.

As the young woman looked up, she saw that she was already expected. At least five people were standing there, having waited for her arrival as well as the arrival of other goods necessary for living on this deserted island in the middle of the ocean.

"Greetings to you, Miss Rogowska", the oldest of the people there said in greeting, just seconds after the engine had died down. A man with greyish hair, a large nose and glasses on his face approached her, dressed in a white lab coat. The woman recognized this person immediately from their last encounter, which had happened not too long ago on the mainland during an arranged job interview. She had participated in this interview in the hopes of gaining a new employment, and the prospects offered here certainly seemed interesting to her. It was not any day that one got the chance to work on a top-secret project on an island and as per regulation, had to stay, work and live there for the entire duration of it. It fit her, the woman thought, as she always had preferred to live in seclusion from others. An island would be the perfect place for her.

"Thank you, Doctor Fuji", she replied, reaching her hand out for him, which he accepted and briefly shook. "New Island certainly looks interesting at first glance." "That it is, Miss Rogowska", said the older man in agreement, "now, since you just arrived here, we will first give you some time to rest. Your journey must have been exhausting." "Yes, but I think I will be back to full capacity with a little rest." "Very good. We will make an in-depth introduction of your co-workers as well as these facilities at a later date." With a clap of his hands, another woman with black hair approached them, carrying a clipboard in her hands. From the first glance, she seemed to be an assistant of some sort - she had a slender figure and dark eyes, giving off a serious air about her. Dr. Fuji introduced her as well.

"This is Dr. Yumiko. She will show you your new living quarters. In the meantime, I must attend other matters, but I am sure that we will see and talk with each other very soon." With a polite bow, Dr. Fuji turned around to go and speak with the operators of the helicopter, probably to discuss the recent shipments. The woman looked up into the blue sky and the helicopter behind her briefly, before grabbing ahold of the suitcase that contained all of her important belongings. Dr. Yumiko

waited for her patiently, before she simply stated "Now, please follow me." Without many words, the young woman followed.

Monika Rogowska had been in this laboratory complex for two days now, located on a secluded natural island out in the open sea. The buildings, containing living quarters for the researchers as well as the various parts of the laboratories, were built right on top of it.

There was a very good reason why they were currently living in such a remote location, as the research that was currently conducted in their laboratories might be deemed by most to be risky and highly controversial; but it was like a dream for any geneticist who has ever seriously considered putting their knowledge to practical use and create a living, completely artificial being. Such a chance was only ever offered here; out in the open sea, in international waters which did not belong to any country, the laws of them didn't exactly apply here. Hence, the ban of creating living clones and keeping them sustained even way past the embryonic stage was not in use. The seclusion and the fact that any and all workers were only allowed to work on New Island if they had a top-secret security clearance only helped the research conducted there to blossom. A handful of workers were permanently stationed, while others were flown in periodically by helicopters with black and covered windows. Their island was also not marked on any existing map, and any workers who were flown in here were thus prevented to know their exact location.

The brunette woman with red glasses had only recently been stationed on this remote island and was supposed to become one of its permanent residents. She came here after having successfully undertaken the strict hiring regiment, and now belonged to the few chosen ones who will be putting their knowledge to use in order to obtain every last secret that life itself holds. Their group leader was Dr. Fuji, an experienced scientist in the field of cloning and genetic engineering, and Monika was scheduled to meet this man soon to get a tour of the facilities and further discuss her participation for the project ahead.

Monika has had the last two days after her initial arrival to herself, in order to rest from her long journey as well as to get accustomed to her new living quarters. She had been busy unpacking her belongings and rearranging her room, when she got a call on her telephone.

"Mrs. Rogowska, I call to remind you of your scheduled meeting at 1 pm. Mrs. Westervelt will be coming to show you the way."

"Thank you."

A click on the telephone and this short exchange was over. The woman looked to the electronic clock, displaying that she had maybe 15 minutes left before someone would come to fetch her, and bring her to her new colleagues for a formal introduction and a subsequent tour of the facilities. Even Dr. Fuji himself will be introducing himself to her and personally explain what tasks will lie ahead of her. To say she was nervous would be the understatement of the year. In fact, she never had

thought that she would be able to actually get the job here. It has taken her almost a year of applications everywhere before she had been able to land this new job. And while she had a huge fear of potential failure, she also told herself that she will give it her all, no matter what. This is also why she agreed to moving to New Island as a permanent resident. If this is what the job asked of her, then she would do that. Monika just hoped that she would get used quickly to her new environment and to the new people here.

A knock on her door startled her, but with a quick look at the clock, she had realized that her time was already up. She stood up to answer the door, and was met with a fellow researcher - a woman dressed in a white labcoat, with blonde, shoulder-long hair awaited her. She had a wider frame than Dr. Yumiko, but seemed friendly and almost cheerful.

"Hello, I am Natalia Westervelt."

"I am Monika Rogowska, and have just arrived here two days ago."

Monika didn't know what else to say.

"I am aware of that", Natalia said, slightly stepping into the room, "You are one of the newbies who just arrived here."

The blonde woman took a look around the room, and then focused her gaze on Monika.

"I know that life here on the island can be pretty overwhelming at first, but you will get used to it in time."

Monika smiled at that. "I sure hope so. So far, it seems pretty lonely. Well, lonelier than usual, since I don't know anybody here yet, except for our boss. That is, if Dr. Fuji IS your boss as well - I don't know anything about the internal hierarchy of this place yet either." Natalia smiled back.

"I can confirm that Dr. Fuji is my boss as well. He is the one who runs this entire island after all, which of course include all of our projects and side-projects. You do belong to group C, right? So you will be working very closely with him. And lucky you, I belong to this group as well, so you will have at least one face you know around here."

"I am glad about that, thank you, erm.."

"You can call me by my first name, if you want."

"Thank you, Natalia. You can call me by my first name as well"

"There is nothing to thank me for, Monika. Just keep close to me, and I will explain everything to you about this place, if you'd like. I hope we can become friends, you seem to be a very nice person."

With this, Natalia stepped out of the room, indicating for Monika to follow her.

Monika was very impressed by this place. She could hardly believe that she currently was located on an island. The place looked very modern, albeit a little bit cold, as the two women walked along several corridors which seemed to be pretty convoluted and mostly grey in color. The brunette just knew it would be a pain in the ass to remember which way to go back later on. Natalia must have noticed her deep sigh that she had exhaled at that thought.

"Haha, I know this place is very large and that it is easy to get lost in here. Hence why we give THIS to newbies."

She stopped, and searched around for something in her lab coat, giving it to Monika

as soon as she found it. The woman noticed that it seemed to be a pamphlet of some sort, and upon opening it, realized that it was a map of this place.

"The New Island Laboratory is home to many different sections of labs", Natalia explained. "Besides our group, there are several others who have slightly other projects they work on. We, from Team C, are working specifically on cloning. There are other groups who for example focus on researching breathable liquids and stasis possibilities, methods to keep living organisms in suspended animation."

Monika took a look at the map and frowned. Looking up from the map, she noticed a sign nearby, which told her the number of the corridor they were in. Level 7. Huh, now the map made sense to her once she found it on the map.

"Thanks, Natalia. Say, how long did it take until you didn't need the map?"

"Oh, at least a few weeks. Until you get a feeling for this place, you will probably need the map for a while, so don't lose it. But you will get used to it eventually. The routes to the laboratories of our team will be pretty easy for you to remember."

"The other projects sound interesting too!", Monika remarked, "what other things are going on here as well?"

"Hmm, for some reason, one of our groups is studying brain activities, neural connections and memory retrieval", Natalia answered, "It's a bit creepy isn't it? Our group is supposed to create clones, and sometimes the people from this group come in to measure the brain activity of our subjects. One could think that one possible application would be to combine their research with ours! Imagine, clones running around who share your memories! Creepy!"

She said this with an amused tone, and Monika noticed that her new acquaintance seemed to have a taste for the unusual, but she liked that. Hopefully they would become closer friends as they continue to work on their project. In any case, it made her feel way better to know now that there was someone with whom she could talk. All the better that Natalia seemed to be a very nice woman.

As they continued walking, they came across a corridor which contained laboratories that allowed a look inside the labs. Several people seemed to be hard at work inside, standing by machines, checking their readouts, or pipetting something into tubes on their work benches. Other scientists seemed to be in a deep discussion, and she could see several huge glass containers, filled with an amber liquid that caught her interest - especially since something seemed to float inside of them, though she couldn't make out what exactly it was due to the distance. She could only assume it must be some of the experimental subjects here. In other word, clones. A slight shiver went down her spine at the sight.

She was woken from her fascination with a slight startle as Natalia came to an abrupt halt before her. She hadn't noticed the big doors they both were standing in front of now.

"Here it is. This is one of the smaller room by far. I was instructed to bring you to Dr. Fuji, as he would now like to discuss the project with you in further details. I was also told by him that after he introduced you to it, we will be having a meeting with the

entire Team C, to get to know each other. Several other newbies will also attend the meeting. I'll be back soon to fetch you for that, okay?"

Natalia smiled at her, giving her a pat on the back.

"And don't worry, Dr. Fuji is actually a nice man, even if he sometimes seems to be very strict. I am sure he will also give you a small, more detailed tour of our facilities as well. Anyway, I have to head back to my experiments for now, see you soon!"

Natalia opened the door for Monika and gestured for her to come in. As soon as Monika had stepped inside, Natalia turned around and closed the door behind her.

The brunette woman had stepped into one of the smaller laboratories. Dr. Fuji had seemed to be talking with another man, but then noticed that she had arrived to meet him, so he excused himself and went to talk to Monika.

"Oh, Hello. It is nice to see you again. As you know, my name is Dr. Fuji and I am the lead scientist of New Island", the older man said as he extended his hand towards the woman, who gladly took the handshake.

"I am Dr. Rogowska, and I want to thank you for inviting me to join your research group", Monika replied. Dr. Fuji nodded and offered her a warm smile in return.

"I hope that you were able to get used to island life during the last two days. I know it can get pretty lonely out here, as the usual pleasantries of our civilization aren't available."

"Yes, I noticed. There aren't any supermarkets around", the woman replied jokingly, earning a slight laugh from Dr. Fuji.

"I can assure you though that even if supermarkets are missing, everything that is needed is shipped to us on a regular basis. As for the other needs, we have several recreation rooms in this facility as well. A good rest is of a high importance in our field, especially if we use our brains so extensively."

Monika followed dutifully behind Dr. Fuji, who has been leading her through several corridors, pointing out all the different rooms to her as well as explaining in short words what kind of equipment was to be found inside. One of the rooms contained everything needed for DNA analysis: an automatic DNA extraction machine, and a sequencer that was able to analyze the exact composition of the DNA. The woman tried her hardest to memorize where each room was found and what they contained, but found that it was almost impossible to do for the first time. With a glance at her, Dr. Fuji could tell of her small problem.

"I know that all of this might be a bit much at first and that you might get lost inside of our facilities for the first few days. Then again, so far everyone of our group did during their acclimation time. If you ever have any questions or get lost, you are welcome to ask any of your colleagues."

The Doctor came to an abrupt halt in front of a heavy set of doors.

"Now I think is the time where I explain to you what your task is and what we have hired you for. The thing is that we needed additional staff for our next big undertaking."

He reached out for a panel right next to the door, putting his thumb on a thumb print scanner. With a quiet whizz, the heavy doors opened and revealed a large room, containing several incubation tanks filled with amber-colored liquid. A little bit to the left side of the room was a huge machine, five times as large as a human and shaped like an ammonite, grey in color. Three different screens were mounted on the machine, and Monika noticed several researchers intently discussing something right in front of them. Out of this machine, a connection to several incubation tanks was protruding. The tanks were currently un-occupied, but the woman had a feeling that this will not be the status quo forever.

"One huge step in the advancements of genetic engineering was the discovery of a manufactured form of amniotic fluid which allows us to grow artificial organisms in the incubation tanks you see here."

The Doctor took a few steps forward, until he reached one of the large incubation tanks. With one hand, he reached out, touching the glass and turning to Monika.

"These are our incubation units. As you can see, they are currently filled with a special formula of synthetic amniotic fluid. I think that you are well aware that genetically altered embryos are normally to be destroyed after a time of 6 weeks has passed. During this time, the embryos are usually too small to be put into such large tanks. However...", Fuji paused, "Our facility doesn't destroy these young embryos. Instead, once they reach a certain age, they are transferred into the incubation units you see here for further gestation. The see-through glass allows us to directly study the gestation process and has so far provided us with invaluable knowledge of embryogenesis."

The brunette woman was in awe as her brown eyes focused on the tanks. Her mind was already flooded with all the possibilities that such incubation tanks might hold for research. Having the ability to grow beings independent of a uterus would make it possible to provide thousands of infertile couples with the children they had always wanted, should this technology ever be in use for human beings. But even if not, this would revolutionize Pokemon breeding, if the manufacturing technique is advanced enough for serial use. It even provided a tool to directly study the phenotypical aberrations of genetic diseases and can be utilized for new methods of genetic therapy. Her heart pounded when she just thought of all the possibilities. But one certain question also popped up in her mind that she blurted out almost immediately:

"Do you grow the engineered beings to completion?"

"Ahhh", Dr. Fuji said, "Now you have come to the crux of the matter."
He let out a deep sigh and shook his head.

"Unfortunately, this is the main problem we have so far encountered. We have been focusing on cloning specimens from different Pokémon species, but throughout the years, none of them have made it to completion. Every single one of them perished, due to unknown reasons. We can't even begin to understand why."

"And it's not because some major component is missing? Maybe something that only a mother Pokémon can supply? Like, some maternal proteins or hormones?"

"We have considered this possibility also and have made several upgrades to our formula of amniotic fluid in the past to account for this", the older man replied, "Yet our clones still perish if kept in a tank for too long. This issue is the most pressing however, given the next project we are supposed to take care of."

Monika carefully looked at Dr. Fuji, who seemed to be distant and lost in thoughts. It seemed that something else entirely seemed to occupy him as well, and for a split-second, she could have sworn that she saw a dark and sad expression on her superior's face before it quickly faded. The project that was mentioned made her feel even more curious now, but she could tell what it might be. Obviously, a clone would have to be made and had to survive the entire process of its creation. But which Pokémon would they use? They had so many to choose from.

"Sir, I assume you want to bring a clone to full maturation, so that it can leave the tank, right? But which Pokémon do you want to use as the base?"

Dr. Fuji nodded, with a gleam in his eyes when he noticed that Monika could follow his hints so well.

"That is a very good question, Dr. Rogowska. The base itself is also a problematic case, as it will most likely be incomplete."

Monika took a breath to ask a further question, but Fuji interrupted her with a raised hand.

"To answer your question, the base is a fossil. However, it is not just any fossil. It's what we think to be the fossilized eyebrow of the Legendary Pokémon Mew. The truth is, we have been commissioned by someone to create a replica based on this fossil. However, not an exact replica, but a modified one."

"So, has the DNA of this fossil already been sequenced?"

"Yes, that is correct. The gene structure of the sample is very interesting. While there are certain gaps, we can assume that Mew might be the ancestor of all Pokémon. While this is not exactly a proven fact, a first look at it has led to this hypothesis."

The young woman frowned. She has never heard of this elusive Pokémon named Mew before, however, if they already have a fossil to use as a base for cloning attempts, that meant that this Pokémon was indeed real. It was a bit ironic though that the base contained gaps, as this might well play into the plan to alter the clone according to the specifications given by whoever the commissioner was.

"And I guess you need me to help you with designing the genetic structure of the modified clone?"

"Indeed. I want you to help my team to think about what we want to use to fill the gaps and how we want to alter the given sequence of Mew according to our

commissioner's wishes. Once we have the initial design, I want us to focus on solving the problem of maturation."

Monika was intrigued by this project. They would be going on to create not only a clone, but one that will most definitely be a hybrid containing genes of various beings within him.

"Now, I have only one condition here that I want my research team to incorporate: I want to also use human genes to fill the gaps."

That took the woman aback.

"Human genes as filler? Why?", she blurted out in surprise.

"One of the conditions of the commission. This is something I must insist on." She could tell from the look on Dr. Fuji's face that he meant that seriously. And somehow she had the feeling that there was some darker, other reason behind this insistence.

He raised both his hands and patted Monika's shoulders lightly. He smiled at her, as he said: "Now, we need to discuss this matter in more depth with your group. Please follow me."

The older man has seen the utter surprise on the face of this young woman, but he knew that she would follow along. It was something he needed to do, and he had a reason for it that he could not tell anyone else on this island. It was a bold-faced lie that human genes needed to be implemented, but he had a deep-seated personal reason for this.

They both stepped out of the huge room, their steps thudding on the metal floor beneath them as they went on their way.

Unknown to almost everyone, deep inside the facility a young human girl was sleeping in an incubation tank, eagerly waiting for the return of her father.