

# MISTY'S JAMBALL

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IT'S JUST A ROCK!

DR.OCCULARI

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## TYPO REPORTING

I am my own proofreader, and I'm not good at it. Proofreading, for me, is like pulling weeds: every time I come back to the manuscript it has grown new errors.

When you, dear reader, inevitably come across typos and grammatical errors (I'm especially bad with homonyms), if you are so inclined, I would appreciate you letting me know.

Send typo and error reports to:

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Please report the error and the correction. Include the title of the work, the release number, the chapter (if there are chapters), and enough text surrounding the error so I can find it with a search.

I am looking for obvious typos and errors, not critiques.

Thanks so much for your sharp eye.

## THE INTERVIEW

An interview with Misty Tadaima about a brawl that broke out at a jamball game, conducted by Jimii June Sanbon, cub reporter for the Chimaera Chronicle newsii.

Jimii and Misty are tucked away in a shady corner of the town commons, straddling a bench face to face in an uneasy standoff.

Jimii– Feezl “Spittle Spray” Matma accuses you of headbutting him<sup>1</sup> in his gonads. What do you—

Misty– He stole my ball!

Jimii– But you have your ball. I see it right there.

The ball is resting in Misty’s left hand with her thumb on top firmly keeping it in her grasp.

Misty– He gave it back.

Jimii– Willingly?

Misty– Yeah, or else.

Jimii– You threatened him?

Misty– No. I headbutted 'im in his boy-bag and grabbed my ball when he dropped it.

Jimii– So, there was no, “or else.”

Misty– There is if he tries it again.

Jimii– That’s a strange-looking jam ball. May I see it?

Misty– You’re already looking at it.

Jimii– I mean, may I have a closer look.

Jimii June Sanbon, cub-reporter, holds out her hand. Misty looks at the hand with crinkled eyebrows, then with squinty eyes looks into Jimii June’s wide open, carefully maintained innocent face. Misty holds the ball above Jimii’s open palm.

Misty– You better not try anything.

Jimii– (with a friendly smile) Or else?

Misty lets the ball drop into Jimii’s hand.

Jimii lifts it close to her face. Holding it gently, she turns it this way and that, rolls it carefully in her hand, looking at all its aspects. She holds it in a dappling spot of Billy<sup>2</sup> light.

Jimii– It doesn’t look special.

Misty lunges for the ball. Jimii pulls it back, raising her other hand in front of Misty's nose.

Jimii– Hold off space ranger. I'll give it back in another tick.

Misty holds off but blows fumes out her nostrils<sup>3</sup>.

Misty– One more look; that's it.

Jimii returns her attention to the ball, hefts it.

Jimii– Looks like any grey rock.

Misty– A round grey rock.

Jimii rolls it in her fingers.

Jimii– (nodding) A very round rock. No scuffs. No scratches. How did you come by it?

Misty is glaring. Jimii reaches out to return the ball. Misty grabs it and stuffs it in her stuff bag.

Misty– I found it.

Jimii– Where?

Misty returns silence.

Jimii– (dragging out the question, sensing this is going to be a fingernail pulling interview) Wheeere?

Misty– (giving a jab with her chin, roughly indicating east) The Gnostic Plateau.

Jimii– Wheeen?

Misty– A rev<sup>4</sup> or so ago.

Jimii– Did it fall off the plateau?

Misty– I found it on the plateau.

Jimii– On top?

Misty gives a sort of shrug-nod.

Jimii– You climbed to the top?

Misty Shrug-nods.

Jimii– Did you see a chimaera<sup>5</sup>?

Nothing. Nixa. Jimii opens her mouth, assesses the stonewalling expression on Misty's face, changes the subject.

Jimii– This ball means a lot to you.

Misty– It means it's mine. How's Feezl's boy bag?

Jimii– It will live; him too. How's your head?

Misty taps the top of her noggin with her knuckles.

Misty– Just fine.



## THE REVIEW

The Chronicle office is a small clay-brick building—one story, two rooms—west of the town common, not far from the Chimaera Corral Saloon, a short walk to the nearest wash closet. An outside stairway gives access to the roof. The roof is shaded by a once bright, now faded and often mended, red and blue striped awning, and is surrounded by a low parapet.

On the roof, in the shade, Qizii Veroop, an alt-bio cephalopod form, has settled into a canvas sling chair sitting sideways to a rickety desk made of locally produced cellulose composites. Ae<sup>1</sup> is reading a handwritten pap while Jimii June Sanbon, cub reporter, sits on the opposite side of the desk in a rickety chair made of locally produced cellulose composites. Jimii leans forward, elbows on thighs, nervous hands clasped.

Qizii— Well written; needs some revision.

Relief! But Jimii is a reporter (okay, cub-reporter); she forces herself to maintain a proper casual-serious demeanor.

Jimii– Sure. Any suggestions?

Qizii– Cut it down to something like, “Feezl ‘Spittle Spray’ Matma was roughed up during yesterday’s mid high side jamball match between the Hungry Genes and Newton’s Nemeses. Doc Gill reports he will be fine, and ready for the Genes’ next game.”

Jimii– (loosing all her cool) What? That’s it? What about the ball?

Qizii– What about it?

Jimii– (spluttering) That’s what the fight was about. It’s important to her—obsessively important. It came from the plateau!

Jimii points east, where the tableland top of the Gnostic Plateau shimmers in the hazy distance. Qizzi glances with aer third eye<sup>2</sup>.

Qizii– You might care; I might care, but to everyone else, kids will be kids.

– (Ae holds up the pap) There’s good reporting here. Keep your notes. You never know when they might be relevant. (handing the pap back to Jimii) Billy day is coming up. Give me a story on preparations for the five-legged race.

## WHAT JIMII WROTE

Headline: Jamball Game Collapses in Feud Over Mystery Ball

Time stamp: Five-a-did, 12th of Thirdmonth, Rev. 174

Yesterday's jamball match promised to be a tough contest between the Hungry Genes and Newton's Nemeses, but it turned into a brawl between the Hungries' Feezl "Spittle Spray" Matma and the Newtons' Misty "Who You Lookin At" Tadaima.

Based on a careful parsing by this reporter of biased and unreliable witness accounts, the altercation seems to have begun when Feezl claimed Misty's jamball as his own prize, a practice rarely invoked, but within the unwritten rules of the game. It is rarely invoked because inevitably it leads to what followed.

Misty rejoined with a withering swarm of execratory cusses that froze Feezl in a pose holding Misty's ball high overhead. Misty finished by thrusting her hand out, and issuing the air-shattering command, "That's my ball!"

Feezl unfroze enough to offer an ill-fated retort, "Oh yeah?" Whereupon Misty, taking advantage of her short, but stout stature charged and rammed Feezl in the groin with a gonad squishing headbutt arriving with such force that, when Doc Gill attended the writhing Feezl, he insisted Misty be examined for a possible concussion.

Before Doc Gill arrived, and before the thrill of watching the altercation had sunk in for the other players and spectators, the prone, squirming Feezl dropped Misty's ball in favor of attempting to cradle and belatedly protect his own Darwin cursed orbs. Misty walked past Feezl, picked up her jamball, rubbed it, and polished it against her jersey. She walked back, totally ignoring Feezl, casually tossing the ball in the air and catching it.

The match hadn't ended properly, but a handful of unbiased spectators agreed Misty and the Newton's Nemeses were the winners, of both the altercation, and the game.

Those are the facts as determined by the Chronicle's crack investigation team. Sheriff "One-Eye" Esmerelda was not called to the scene, so there is no official report. When asked about the incident,

Sheriff “One-Eye” said, “Mark my words, That Tadaima girl is going to be trouble.” Apparently, headbutting Feezl hadn’t yet counted as trouble.

But what about the story behind the story? The ball that started and finished the incident? Jamball players get attached to their balls; we all know that; we’ve all been there in our carefree kidhood, but Misty has a reputation for aggressively wielding her ball in a game, and she defends it with a vehemence that goes far beyond the usual possessiveness kids have for their chosen jamball.

Most jamballs come from the discard piles behind Sit-Com Du’s, or Bib Cov’rall’s composite workshops. With all the knocking about jamballs take, they rarely last more than a season. As you might remember from your own kidhood, finding the right jamball is part of each new season’s ritual. When this reporter was an active jamballer a load of ceramic ballbearings showed up at the spaceport. Soon all the jamballs were ceramic, and to this day a few of those bearings are still tossed about, including mine, but not in matches—they were good balls, at the time.

But Misty’s ball is a grey rock. Ball-shaped, yes, but a rock. I personally inspected it. Seemed like a perfectly fine sphere; it’s smooth, polished, not a scuff, not a scratch, not even a nick, and we are coming up on the end of the second season Misty has been using it. This may be because of Misty’s attentive

care, but two seasons? Not a blemish? That's remarkable.

When asked how she came by this rock, Misty claims she found it on the Gnostic Plateau—up on the plateau—not on the rocky rubble skirt at its base. When asked how she managed the climb, she shrugged and said, “There's a way.”

Why not simply fly to the top, or drop down from space? For the benefit of off-world readers: A handful of locations throughout the knoöverse, known as entangled resistance zones<sup>1</sup> prevent any and all intrusions other than by the ambulatory approach of a biological entity, i.e., one has to walk or climb on foot, or feet, or by whatever unassisted means your gened-up self uses to negotiate natural terrain. Entangled resistance zones are rare—metaphysically rare, some would say. Chimaera has one: The Gnostic Plateau. This leads to a slow, steady trickle of visiting scholars, who mostly scratch their heads and leave, except the ones temporarily locked up in Sheriff “One-Eyes” debtor's prison<sup>2</sup>.

Misty's answer, “There's a way,” implies she made at least one, perhaps several, excursions to the top of the plateau. When her pars, owners and operators of the Tadaima Diner, were asked about this, Marie Tadaima, Misty's ma-par, shrugged, much like Misty herself, and said, “What are you going to do?” Carlos Trigo, the da-par grinned, “She's headstrong.”

The tableland atop the Gnostic Plateau is home to the elusive, little-understood chimaeras, and namesakes of this planet. They are the only surface animates known to predate the AP/PLE Seeder swarm that terraformed the system, and yet, genetically, they are not entirely of Chimaera. Another scholar attracting mystery.

About the rock ball? Marie: "She found it somewhere." Carlos: "We play catch with it."

We are left with unanswered questions: Did Misty find her rock ball after climbing one of the plateau's precipitous walls? If she did, did she see and interact with a chimaera while she was up there? She won't say.





# NOTES

## The Interview

1. Descendants of the original Darwinist colonists refer to themselves using a gendered version of bridge Lineage.
2. Chimaera's primary star is named after the Rev. Billy Wing, leader of the Darwinist cult that established the Chimaera Ranch settlement.
3. She can't actually blow fumes out her nostrils. (You would expect this is obvious, but in the vast Lineage anything is possible.)
4. One revolution around Chimaera's primary, Billy; i.e., one local year.
5. Mysterious surface animate species, and namesake of the planet, living atop the Gnostic Plateau. The chimaera pre-date the arrival of the terraforming AP/PLE Seeder swarm.

## The Review

1. Standard bridge Lineage genderless pronoun. (ae/aer)
2. Qizzi has five eyes. Ae numbers them starting with 'one' for the eye above aer siphon orifice and continues counting prograde around aer head.

## What Jimii Wrote

1. See BBD-Buba, et al. [insert matrix id], Entangled Resistance Zones, AP/PLE Seeder Leftovers, or Pre-Lineage Artifacts?
2. See the pamphlet, *How and How NOT to Spend Money on Chimaera*, available at the spaceport customs office.

