

We ~~rode~~ride over to the council chamber where Malporin ~~was~~is normally to be found in his daylight hours. He ~~was~~is, as always, pleased to see us, though he ~~seemed~~seems puzzled that Dassa ~~didn't~~doesn't depart. I know he wants to spend more time alone with me. What I don't know, is what I want. Dassa's presence prevents me from having to consider it further.

"Can we see you in private?" I ask. His eyebrows rise. Fortunately, Kemisa is not in the vicinity, as I ~~did~~do not think we would be able to ditch the curious cat.

"Sure. How about my office, upstairs?"

"Is that where you have your gemology equipment?" Dassa asks, more directly than I would have preferred.

"Um... yeah. Why? Did you want to check on a stone's quality?"

I raise a hand. "When we are in private."

An elevator whisks us to the top floor of the council building, which has a view of the mountains and the landing field. Armored shutters ~~that had been~~ installed to ward off snipers, ~~stee~~and open now. I ~~could~~can see a brown haze settling on the mountains. It ~~cuts~~cuts the sun down to a coolness that ~~augured~~augurs poorly for winter. Fortunately, a full Brownie ~~was~~is not in the near term forecast.

We reach a glass doorway that ~~said~~says 'Malporin Assays'. ~~On the other side lay a~~A well-appointed office, ~~with~~contains chairs of heavy leather and wood. The room very much reflects its owner, solid and efficient, down to the modern gemology equipment lining the back wall.

Malporin waves us to chairs by a broad table. He ~~drew~~draws soft drinks from a small cooler and ~~sat~~sits with us. "What can this simple miner do for you?"

"Simple?" Dassa ~~replies~~replies. "I doubt that."

He only smiles.

I place the satchel with the diadem and the stone I ~~had~~ extracted from it on the table. "Perhaps we could have a tray or something," I say, with a glance at Dassa. "Who knows where these items have been?"

Dassa nods vigorously.

"Worried about it being native grave goods?" ~~he replies with a grin.~~He grins. "Captain, you ~~surprise~~ me; I hadn't thought you squeamish." He returns with a large, metal tray into which I empty the satchel.