

Erik Lynch

Dr. Stanlaw

ANT 185

February 6, 2019

*It is Stardate 2075 and we have just sent a spaceship to one of Jupiter's moons, Europa. You are on it. It turns out that Europa has life under its ice ... not the little fish-like thingies we expected to find, but large humanoid newts, with hands and mouths and speech and all that. And homes and complex social structures and ... well, you get the picture. Apologize for landing in the chief's pond and try and get enough water to get back to earth.*

As a handful of pencil-necked geeks extricate themselves from the smoldering wreck of their spaceship, they are immediately confronted with a plethora of problems. Their ship- a research vessel jointly funded by Raytheon, Coca-Cola, and the Chinese government- has exhausted their supplies of potable water. If they are to have any hope of returning to Earth, they are going to have to replenish their supplies. The good news was that they were on a distant moon with H<sub>2</sub>O as far as the eye can see. The bad news was that they had crashed into a pond in the middle of what resembled a village.

It was only a matter of minutes before a dense throng of humanoid creatures had congregated around the downed ship. Looking out from the portholes, the crew beheld a startling sight. The creatures that timidly poked their heads out of doorways or tensely circled the ship may have the rough shape of humans, but they appeared to look quite a bit like newts! These creatures, who the crew dubbed 'Newtmen', stood nearly four feet tall when standing, though they preferred to slink along low to the ground when moving. A crewmember gave a yelp when one moseyed up to the ship and pressed its face into the glass, causing the Newtman to shriek much like an alley cat and slither out of sight. With their supplies of water dwindling by the hour and their ship surrounded on all sides by strange creatures, the crew knew they couldn't just wait this one out. They would have to make contact with the Newtmen.

The expedition counted among its number six anthropologists and a photographer. In addition, their corporate sponsors had sent along some eighteen corporate lawyers to investigate the possibility of franchising into outer space. The expedition brought along one member of each major anthropological school of thought for the sake of being fair and balanced. Each one would venture out of the ship from time to time in an effort to better understand the people they were dwelling among.

The first to wander out into Newt-land were Hans von Racism and Johnathan Grifton, proponents of the Evolutionary and Sociobiological model, respectively. Johnathan realized quickly that he was out of his depth, as he had no idea what made these Newtmen tick. He could get a better sense of their physiology with an autopsy or two, but he waved the notion off as quickly as it had come. If he couldn't even get a glass of water, how could he ask for a fresh cadaver?

Hans von Racism didn't give up quite so quickly. Busting out his handy pair of calipers, he went among the Newts' homes and measured their skull shapes, carefully taking detailed notes. He posited that the principles of Social Darwinism would hold true and, by determining which phenotypical group held power, they could deduce who to ask for water. This experiment went well enough as von Racism made his way through the first few huts, but when he attempted to enter a particularly large hut, the passive curiosity of the Newtmen evaporated, and they rapidly mobbed him. Hans von Racism narrowly managed to escape with his life, limping back to the ship in disgrace, bruised and bloody, with his monocle shattered.

The rest of the expedition, having heard von Racism's tale of woe regarding the ignoble savages, judged that the particularly large hut must hold some sort of significance to the Newtmen. Mecha Stanlaw, a cyborg with the brain of an anthropology professor, suggested applying the cognitive-symbolic method to this conundrum. He stepped out of the ship, his metallic foot-claws clanking and digging into the soft earth. Regarding the sacred hut from a distance, Mecha Stanlaw peered at the outer wall of the compound. What had at first appeared to be meaningless scribbles were in reality a series of symbols!

Mecha Stanlaw noticed a number of recurring patterns in the symbols. He saw a shape that looked roughly humanoid, albeit somewhat slimier. This, he figured, must be the Newtmen's representation of themselves. His electric eye was drawn to a series of symbols that seemed to tell the Newtmen's foundational myth. It was told that some sort of female sorceress had, through supernatural means, turned the original inhabitants of Europa into Newts. Later, some of these Newtmen "got better" and fled the moon to a warmer clime, an unknown temperate planet much closer to the Sun. Fascinated, but not finding what he sought, Mecha Stanlaw made his way to the far side of the hut. Still inspecting from a respectful distance, he noticed what may just be the key to solving his quest for water. A carving depicted a ring of Newtmen standing around a body of water, their number interspersed with a variety of other creatures the expedition had not encountered. Mecha Stanlaw deduced from this image that the Newtmen did not consider the water to be the private property of anyone in particular, if they even had a conception of private property at all.

Informing the crew of this discovery, they warily made their way to the waterfront, keeping an eye on the noticeably less friendly Newtmen. Keenly aware that they were being observed, the crew slowly produced a number of buckets and, being sure not to make any sudden movements, filled them to the brim with water. When the Newtmen did not react to this, they hauled the buckets back to the ship and made round trips for the rest of the day until the ship had reached its capacity for water. The anthropologists were disappointed, having learned little more than the Newtmen's foundational myth and stance on water as a public utility. Nonetheless, they were heartened by the discovery of an advanced civilization on Europa and were already writing grant applications to return to study and live among these most fascinating of creatures.