

The Kaminsky Retrieval

Well, it's like this. There's a pseudo-saurian race in the next Galactic Sector called the sirothnok. They kind of dominate their Sector, in fact. The sirothnok are not exactly *awful*, per se: but they are somewhat touchy, fairly over-proud of their dignity, and have a certain reputation for pushing a quarrel farther than might be wise. They're not an existential threat to humanity and our friends, but nobody wants a war with the sirothnok.

Fortunately, they get along well with humans, for the oddest of reasons: twins. Sirothnok tend to have twin births at about the same rate as humans have singleton ones, and that of course has affected their entire culture. It turns out that most Galactic species don't really have twins at all; and while many species *do* have reliable cloning techniques, the sirothnok typically find clone-twins from other species to be a bit grating. Human twins don't provoke that reaction, though. In fact, human twins find it much easier than other humans do to navigate sirothnok society; they can just get the 'feel' for the cultures more easily than singletons can.

The people running Earth's diplomatic corps aren't idiots: the Terran embassy to the sirothnok is made up entirely of twins. Which is admittedly a chore for the HR department, but a species with a population of billions can usually find enough reliable sets of twins to staff the place. And the expense and bother is worth it; human-sirothnok relations are excellent, to the point where other species will now use the Terran embassy as an intermediary with the sirothnok. The long-term advantage that this gives to Terran diplomatic efforts need hardly be spelled out.

All of this is necessary to understand the problem, which is this: Artur, Igor, and Josef Kaminsky are triplets with the right skill set to get assigned to the embassy as technical staff. The sirothnok don't typically have triplets, and they find the concept a little weird; but they understand that *humans* can have triplets, so that's not an issue. Besides, while Artur and Josef were interested in a sirothnok posting, Igor was not; he had a new wife and a kid on the way, so it just seemed easiest all around for him to stay on Earth and assist the embassy that way. And for the first six months, everything was working fine.

However, two days ago Igor disappeared, via what was clearly a half-botched kidnapping. The Terran government has been doing some frantic investigating, and is now

reasonably confident that the kidnapping was done by agents of a somewhat xenophobic faction of a **third** star nation. Presumably the plan is to use Igor's biometrics to hack into the Terran embassy's networks on the sirothnok homeworld, thus getting useful information, and possibly critical diplomatic (or even military) intelligence.

Which would be bad enough; but experts on sirothnok culture all agree that the sirothnok will react with absolute fury at the thought of somebody forcing a **twin** to betray his **siblings**. Humanity will not get blamed for any leaks that occur from such an abomination, but the sirothnok could easily decide to start an actual *war* with the star nation from which the kidnappers have sprung. They'd also expect humanity to join them in said war, which would be... problematic.

So. Yes. Find the kidnappers and rescue Oleg before the sirothnok discover what happened. If the sirothnok find out anyway, try to keep the blast radius as small as possible. Also note: we don't want a war with anybody, but nobody in Earth government is going to object if bad things happen to the faction that started this mess. Current Terran diplomatic theory, alas, has a place for the concept of 'negative reinforcement.' It's that kind of era.

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