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## Dodo

by Melvin L. Clermont

Known for its breathtaking ocean views, white sand beaches, and beautiful tropical landscape, the African island paradise of Mauritius was the only place on Earth to find the famously extinct dodo bird. Humans, and the animals that accompanied them, discovered the island centuries ago and wiped them out. So say the history books. On the east coast of Mauritius is the district of Flacq, popular for its dense, grassy plains and large rock mountains nestled within. At the base of one of these, a couple is preparing to scale to the top.

“Alright,” said Jim, a typical-looking young American male, dressed in climbing gear, wearing a large backpack the size of his body. “Looks like we’re all set. Just gotta be super extra careful since we’re hauling up all this crap on our backs. Especially mine.”

“That so-called crap is paying for this vacation, whiney,” said Becka, Jim’s girlfriend, also typical-looking, young, and American wearing a much smaller backpack. “National Geographic could’ve commissioned anyone to test these new hi-res cams but they chose us. All we gotta do is set it and forget it and our work is done. One looking at the sunset, one at the sunrise, and one on each side looking down at the topography. Couldn’t ask for a better shaped mountain. So let’s book. We’ve only got a few hours of sunlight left to make this happen.”

“Okay, Ronco, no need to get testy. Hey, check it out. A pink pigeon,” he said, pointing and watching it drink from a small puddle of water in the sand near them at the base of the rock mountain. “And he’s got a note wrapped around his leg. I didn’t know

they really did that. C'mere you." He jumps towards it but it doesn't flinch, even when he gets right next to it. "Not scared'a me, huh? How 'bout this?" He kicks some sand onto it but it simply steps away from him and continues drinking. "You little..."

"What, you think that's a little hidden treasure map or something, Jack Sparrow? Leave him alone. It's a freakin' pigeon for crying out loud. You could be an elephant or a bulldozer and he wouldn't move. That's how they are back home, probably no different here. Now quit goofing off. We gotta take care of this. Let's go."

"Alright, alright. Nice comeback by the way." He takes some chalk from his pocket and rubs it into his palms. "I think I'll take the lead."

"Uh, no you're not. You think those silent but deadly's you've been passing off since we left the hotel have really been silent? And there's not an ounce of wind blowing either? I'm leading." She chalks up and they start to climb, leaving the pigeon alone at the puddle. It turns to look at a hole at the very base of the rock mountain that's just big enough for it to squeeze into. Inside, a pair of piercing eyes like an eagle's stares back at it.

"Coo," goes the pigeon and it resumes drinking from the puddle. The eyes from the hole disappear.

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Moving rapidly inside of a narrow tunnel dimly illuminated all around by deep purple crystals, the eyes emerge into a mixture of bright, fluorescent colors to reveal the face of a dodo bird; its plumage slicked back as if conformed to a permanent wind. It has just entered into a large cavern filled with other dodoes big and small. In the middle is a large pond where they play and wade. They leave and enter in several tunnels on

all sides. One dodo in particular is a bit bigger than the rest and is missing his right eye. He's also defecating out in the open.

"KingDodo," said the dodo that just ran in from the tunnel into the cavern.  
 "TheCooiiianmessengerhasarrivedwithnewsintactonitsleg.  
 Shalllgathereveryoneintothemainchamber?"

"Speedster, my son, don't bother me when I'm... *Uuuunnnhh...Ah.* There." A few dodoes nearby look at the king in shock with their beaks wide open. "Now, what was it that you were saying? The Cooiiian messenger is here? I shall gather everyone into the main chamber. But first, I will tell my beakwriter to create a compelling speech for the audience. I suspect good news is on its way."

"Andwhatofyourmess, sir?"

"What mess?" He looks down. "Oh, this? What of it?"

"ItisagainstDodianCodetoreleaseinsidethecavernindaylighthours."

"Preposterous. Who created such a code?"

"Um, youdid, sir."

"Oh. Well, pardon me. I, uh, must've forgotten. Old age and a weak bowel, you know. You have your king and your father's promise that it shall be cleaned in a timely manner. Now go and retrieve the Cooii posthaste. *Dodo, dodo,*" he called out while flapping his wings wildly as Speedster ran back through the tunnel.

\* \* \* \* \*

The pond and the cavern are now crammed with loud dodoes. Standing in front of them are King Dodo and another one with a small lead stick in its beak and a pouch hanging around its neck with more lead sticks in it. It is stooped, writing on a piece of

paper on the ground. When finished, it puts the stick in its pouch and grabs the paper with its beak, holding it up for the king to read.

*The king is about to speak. Everyone quiet down. Dodo.*

*Why don't you quiet down? Dodo. Dodo.*

*Why don't you? Dodo. Dodo. Dodo.*

*Both of you shut up.*

“As you know everyone, the Reintroduction Protocol has been successful. Last year, the Cooiis informed us that our numbers have grown from the 123 here to 59 in Indonesia and 73 in Australia. Also at that time, we sent out the fertile couple Kilayla and Michael to Hawaii. Today is the day that we find out if they have reintroduced into the United States. *Dodo. Dodo. Dodo,*” said King Dodo, flapping and calling wildly along with the crowd.

Just then, Speedster and the pink pigeon enter from a tunnel. Silence engulfs the cavern as they go directly to the king. The beakwriter uses his beak to unravel the note wrapped around the pigeon's leg. He stamps it flat, grabs it in his beak, and holds it up for King Dodo to read.

“My fellow dodians,” said King Dodo somberly. “I am unhappy to announce that...reintroduction into Hawaii has been a failure.”

*My sister is healthy. Michael must be shooting blanks. Dodo.*

*Don't talk about my brother like that. Dodo. Dodo.*

“A torrential thunderstorm claimed the three eggs laid by Kilayla,” said the king.

*I still say Michael was shooting blanks. Dodo.*

*Shut up.*

“This means,” he continued, “that we must wait another year for Kilayla to be in heat. But all is not sad. Every year, good or bad news, two of us must go out to reintroduce. I am proud to say that my son Bosco has been chosen along with...” He scans through the crowd and then turns to Speedster. “Where’s your brother? Dodian Code strictly prohibits being absent during the Announcement of Reintroduction.”

“Myking, Ihavenoideawherehemightbe.

Heknowsthepunishmentofbeingabsentorlate. Wait,” said Speedster. A smaller dodo enters through a tunnel. The crowd goes into a frenzy.

“Bosco!” yelled King Dodo. “You put my elected position in jeopardy. Where were you?”

“Chill out, pops,” said Bosco, walking up to the king. “I was just hangin’ out with some human kid on the beach. Kinda got caught up in the moment ‘cause we were havin’ so much fun.”

*I don't care who he is, he must be punished. Dodo. Dodo.*

“Such atrocious language,” the king whispered to himself. “Dodians, please. Allow us a moment. We will continue afterwards. Disperse!”

\* \* \* \* \*

The dodoes have continued about their usual business except for the pink pigeon, Speedster, Bosco, and King Dodo.

“You are young,” King Dodo said to Bosco. “And for that I give you the benefit of the doubt. But do you have any idea how important today is to our species?”

“I know exactly what today is. Today’s the day you send me away from everyone with some girl I don’t even know. I’m still a virgin for cryin’ out loud. Like I’d know what to do? Why not send Speedster instead? He’s more...experienced.” Speedster blushes.

“Oh, my son. Many of the dodians here are virgins. And Speedster is still needed here. Until we find a replacement for his position, he can’t be sent out. You, on the other hand, are young and ready. Let me explain to you the importance of reintroduction. You know what happened centuries ago with the humans, and we’ll certainly talk about your involvement with them later, but it was a natural disaster on Madagascar that allowed us to still be here.

”Whaddaya mean? What happened there?”

“We were virtually eliminated on the shores of this island but some of us still lived in deep seclusion far, far away from any human eyes. That’s how we continued on back then. Decades ago, one man, who I can’t allow myself to forget as I’m the only one who recalls his face, rediscovered and captured all of us that remained, along with a horde of pink Cooiis, and concealed our existence on a ranch in Madagascar. We lived in horrid conditions as he bred us for meat, medicine, clothing, and clothing accessories. He even experimented on us, giving some of us abilities that mother nature didn’t intend. I was one of them. A cyclone was our savior. It killed many of us, but the strong winds and rain destroyed our pens and the barriers surrounding the property allowing us to escape. A projectile took my eye. Only 53 of us survived. Luckily, we were all young and unrelated so that we could repopulate. The Cooiis helped us escape back to Mauritius undetected and we found this new haven.”

“Sorry dad. I didn’t know about that part of our history.”

“I was going to share it with you when you were older but now is as good a time as any, I suppose. We lost your mother a couple years ago to a wave caused by that tsunami. What do you think she would want you to do?”

“She’d want me to go to Hawaii and lose my virginity. You know what? I think that’s why she kept on pressurin’ me into havin’ a girlfriend and introducin’ girls to me all the time. She was preppin’ me for this, wasn’t she?”

“Yes she was. Now do you understand? We must get our numbers back up to where they were before the humans came along. We must populate more parts of the planet as insurance. With the help of the Cooiis, who are ubiquitous all over the world, we can accomplish this. Take the messenger, for example. The humans on this island believe the pink Cooiis to be endangered but they thrive, hidden from them just like us. Your mate has already been chosen. Your itinerary already planned. Are you ready to become the man I know you can be, my son?”

“Sure, whatever. Since you broke it down like that, who wouldn’t want a free trip with a hot girl? ”

“I swear, you’re learning that language from the humans, aren’t you? It is a violation of Dodian Code...”

“...to interact with or be seen by adult humans. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. I listen to the adults speak sometimes. Out’a sight, of course. But I only play around with the young, stupid kids who can barely speak. Again, out’a sight. The kid I was just playin’ with even gave me this cool trinket. Look.” Clipped onto Bosco’s wing is a small LED device.

“Techno!” yelled King Dodo. A dodo wearing glasses walks up to them. “Inspect this device. What is it?” Techno begins to freak out. “What? What is it?”

“It...it’s a tracking device!” yelled Techno. “We must activate Protocol One, my king.”

“Egad, Bosco, what have you done?” said the king.

“King Dodo,” said the pigeon messenger, “I will leave now to tell my kit of the situation so that we can make accommodations in our loft. There is plenty of room there for all the dodians until we find a new safe haven for you all. I shall return shortly with assistance.”

“Thank you,” announced the king as the pigeon messenger leaves through a tunnel. “Too bad our code doesn’t allow for us to fraternize with the messengers in any way or even know their names. He seems like a good lad. Dodians! Assemble!” The dodoes reenter the cavern. “Protocol One has been activated. Prepare for evacuation.” The dodoes call out and flap wildly.

*This is the boy’s fault. Punishment! Dodo.*

*Punishment!*

*Punishment! Dodo. Dodo.*

“I shall attend to the matter of punishment for my brother, fellow dodians,” said Speedster. “But right now, Protocol One is in effect.

Further instructions will be given upon the return of the Cooiis.”

“Aw crap. I’m sorry everybody,” Bosco lamented to the crowd. “Sorry dad.”

“This is no time to be sorry,” said the king. “Techno, have you figured out a way to remove the device without harming him?”

“Yes,” said Techno. “Very simple actually. I must bite it off of you, Bosco. It could hurt.”

“Go for it,” said Bosco.

Techno grabs the device within his beak and flails it until it comes off in pieces.

“There. Are you alright?” he said, straightening his glasses with his wing.

“Yeah, I’m cool. Didn’t hurt as much as I thought it would though. I’d say him bitin’ my arm was a fair punishment, wouldn’t you agree dad?”

“No,” said Speedster. “Not fair at all.”

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All the dodoes are amassed silently within the cavern and are looking at the same thing: King Dodo and Bosco with Speedster standing between them.

“You can’t be serious, Speedster. I’m your father. I’m your king!” said King Dodo.

“Yeah, and I’m your brother. This ain’t fair,” said Bosco.

“It’s my job as leader of the Protectorate to enforce the rules. All of them. Against anyone. Including my own family. Including kings. Now...lick,” said Speedster.

“But son,” pleaded the king. “Protocol One. Must this happen now?”

“Lick!”

“This is my fault. A king who can’t even abide by his own rules. Forgive me, son,” he said to Bosco. “I guess this makes us even.”

“Gee, thanks a lot dad,” Bosco replied.

“Lick! Now!” ordered Speedster.

Looking down at the pile of defecation left by King Dodo earlier, they both kneel while Speedster stands above them as everyone watches them lick it up.

*Punishment!*

*Punishment!*

*Punishment! Dodo. Dodo. Dodo. Dodo.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Outside on the side of the rock mountain, Jim and Becka are halfway up.

“We’re making real good time,” said Becka. “Way better than I thought. At this rate, we’ll be done with everything and back at the hotel in less than an hour. Still plenty of sunlight left. Wanna take a little break?”

“Sure,” replied Jim. “Pour some water down into my mouth.”

As they hang and Becka reaches into her backpack for a bottle of water, the pigeon messenger leaves through the hole at the base of the rock mountain.

“Waiting on you, Becka. See? My mouth is wide open. Waiting on you. Aim good. Let’s go. Beeeckaaaa. Waiting on you.”

“Man, I wish I had to go to the bathroom right now,” she whispered to herself.

“Okay, got it.”

“Sock it to me, babe.” Hanging below her with his eyes closed and mouth wide open facing up at her, something falls into his mouth, but it isn’t water. “*Ach! Pweh! Pppp! Ppppp!* What the...” After spitting it out, some water pours all over him. “Hey, what’s goin’ on here? What was that all about? What’d you do that for? What was that?”

She laughs uncontrollably. “I think you can blame him for that. He’s got good aim, I’ll give him that,” she said, pointing towards the pink pigeon.

“And I’m a she, not a he,” it said to itself, flying away towards the sun.

“Oh, now that’s just rich,” said Jim, wiping away the water and still spitting.  
“Drops one in my mouth at the same time that you pour the water. *Pppp!* I think there’s a conspiracy goin’ on here.” She continues laughing. “Ok. Go ahead and yuck it up. Better not tell anybody about this either. Hope that trapper and his kid at the hotel catch that bird and stuff him.”

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later at the rock mountain, Jim and Becka have finished their work and have long since left for their hotel. A dump truck filled to the top with small cages is parked near the base. A man and young boy are standing there looking up at the cameras through binoculars strapped around their necks.

“You think those could be a problem, father?” said the young boy, holding a small monitor in his hand, dressed in appropriately colored camouflage and face paint. On his back is an open pouch filled with nets.

“Not at all, Kris,” replied his dad, an older-looking man holding a small canister, dressed the same. “Only satellite imagery could capture good detail down here with this lighting. Those things are too small and too high. Nothing to worry about. You sure this is the location?”

“Positive,” said Kris, looking at the monitor with a beeping red light on the display. “The tracker stopped here before the signal died. Maybe the dodoes found out about it and destroyed it. I don’t know. I know you told me they were smarter than people give them credit for but the one I was playing with earlier makes me question your claim.”

“That’s only because I told you to play the stupid card so it wouldn’t suspect your true intelligence or intentions.”

“Hmmm. I think they’re actually inside of this rock mountain and still are since there hasn’t been enough time for them to escape if there really are as many as you say there are, father. But I still don’t understand how that’s possible. We drove around the whole thing and there’s only that one little hole. No dodo should be able to fit through that. They must have some other way of getting in and out.”

“I told you, Kris, they’re very intelligent. These are the same dodoes I bred and experimented on in Madagascar. I just know it. Their potential abilities pose a threat to humans and, most importantly, myself if they ever decided to let the world know of their existence which I don’t think they’ve done...just yet. Neither have the pink pigeons I had in my care. I’ve already done more than enough hard time for ethics violations. With them still free, the risk is too high that it could happen again. No doubt they’ve evolved and adapted quickly, and passed on their enhanced DNA to their offspring. I’ve mapped Madagascar and this whole island for a long time and I know they’re here. I can feel it. There’s no place else they could be.”

“Then why not give them a little incentive to come out? Let them know they can’t hide forever from the great Doctor Markus.”

“That’s my boy,” he said. “And to think your mother wanted to keep you in elementary school.” He walks over to the dump truck and removes a gas mask and a small, handheld fan from the driver’s seat. Walking towards the hole, he puts on the mask. He opens the canister and thick green vapors stream out as he holds it up to the hole while the fan blows the vapors into it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Inside the cavern, the dodoes are growing impatient.

*The Cooiis should've been here by now.*

*Where are they?*

*Did you just fart? Dodo.*

"Listen, fellow dodians," said King Dodo. "Even with this awful taste in my mouth, I can still taste the air around us and it doesn't taste good."

*I taste it too. Dodo.*

*I can't taste it, but I can smell it.*

*That's what he meant, you idiot. Dodo. Dodo.*

"I don't smell anything," said Bosco.

"You're too young," said Speedster. "Your sense of smell hasn't developed yet. We must flee now, myking. Danger approaches. We can't wait for the Cooiis any longer."

"I agree," said the king. "Dodians, let's go! *Dodo.*"

"Dig Doug," ordered Speedster as a dodo with a large beak approaches.

"Take the lead. Submarine," he said to another approaching dodo. "Follow behind him."

"Yes, sir," they replied. All of the dodoes follow them into a tunnel.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Doesn't look like they're in there," said Kris. "That non-lethal vapor concentration acts and moves fast and can down a rhino. That's how I designed it. No mere dodo can withstand its effects. If they're really that smart, they would've come running out somewhere by now."

"Patience, son. These are not mere dodoes. Give it a little more time."

As they wait, a large beak juts out of the ground underneath the dump truck. The sand falls in as DigDoug has cleared away enough of it to create a hole big enough for the dodoes to fit through.

“Submarine, isthecoastclear?” asked Speedster. Submarine sticks his head out and extends his neck, scanning all around.

“I think we are underneath a vehicle,” whispered Submarine into the hole. “At the base of the mountain are a boy and a man who is responsible for gassing us out. We have a clear path to the plains. If we run fast and silent, we can make it. The Cooiis should be able to see us overhead whenever they arrive. Hopefully soon. Or we can wait here till dark for better cover. The sun will be completely set very soon.”

“Weshallwaitforthecoverofdarknesstobeouradvantage,” said Speedster.

“*Aaachooo!*” went Bosco. Kris turns around.

“Bosco, you little...” said King Dodo, “you’ve just blown our cover.”

“Sorry. The sand got up my nose. I couldn’t hold it in any longer.”

“Tothepains!” yelled Speedster.

“They can talk? But that’s impossible. The one I was with didn’t speak,” said Kris. Dr. Markus throws down his mask and the fan, leaving the canister open as the vapors disperse outside.

“I told you they were smart,” said Dr. Markus. “Use the special nets. Now!” Kris drops the monitor and quickly removes a net, one of many, from the pouch on his back. None are tangled together as he throws one after the other with great accuracy at the running dodoes, capturing some. “After all this time, I’ve finally found you.” Dr. Markus cuts off their path by running in front of them, trying to herd them back towards Kris.

“Him! It’s him,” said King Dodo, running. He comes to a standstill in disbelief. “I know that face anywhere.”

“Protectorate!” yelled Speedster amidst the fleeing dodoes. “FormationZero!” Some of the dodoes suddenly disappear, blending into their surroundings. The nets containing some of the captured dodoes are removed as if by ghosts.

“You think I wasn’t expecting that?” said Dr. Markus. “Kris! Goggles!” They both pull a pair of red-lensed goggles from their pockets and put them on. Now they can see the invisible dodoes. “Keep throwing the nets, boy. Give me some.” Kris tosses him a wad of nets as they run around chasing the dodoes and immobilizing them.

“This is disastrous,” said King Dodo, evading capture. “Just like Madagascar all over again. I will not run any longer.” Unexpectedly, he takes flight.

“Protectorate! FormationTwo! Followsuit!” ordered Speedster. Several dodoes take flight and swarm the humans, keeping their distance as if to confuse rather than attack so that the remaining dodoes can escape.

“Father,” said Kris, “what now?”

“Hit them. But not too hard. I want them all alive,” replied Dr. Markus.

Just then, as the sun is almost set, it is blanketed by an approaching object in the sky. A few dodoes have already been downed while others run for the plains. Some are still caught in the nets as the Protectorate swarm the humans to buy time.

“What is that?” asked Dr. Markus, ducking the flying dodoes and staring at the darkening sky.

“Over the plains. Look. Bats!” said Kris.

“No,” said King Dodo. “Cooiis.”

“Hercule, Ramrod,” ordered Speedster. “The gas. Send them into it.”

Two very large dodos run into the legs of Kris and Dr. Markus, nudging them into the growing green vapor cloud. But after a series of hard kicks, they back off.

“Keep on netting them, son,” said Dr. Markus. “We can do this.”

“Father. *Cough. Cough.* The vapors...I...can't...” Kris said before he passes out.

“Blast it!” Dr. Markus said in anger. He runs into the dump truck dodging the flying dodos and pulls out a shotgun. “Dead or alive will have to do.”

“Then I choose alive,” said King Dodo, flying directly into Dr. Markus’s face, shattering the goggle lenses. Screaming in pain, he drops the gun which Speedster kicks away from reach. The pigeons arrive in large numbers and swarm Dr. Markus, leading him into the vapors.

“The pink pigeons...I know it’s you...I won’t let you beat me like this...” Dr. Markus said in his final breath before passing out. The pigeons then create a vortex that sends the remaining vapors high into the sky where its green color disperses.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun is set as all of the dodos are now hidden in the plains as a mass of pigeons fly away into the darkness. Only a few remain behind to aid in the relocation of the dodos.

“Medic, is everyone accounted for? Any casualties or injuries?” asked King Dodo to another dodo wearing a stethoscope.

“Only Hercule and Ramrod,” replied Medic. “Their plumage and underbellies were damaged from the kicks, but they’ll be fine. And a few Coois passed out from the vapors. They’ll recover shortly as inhalation was minimal.”

“Good. Everyone made it through that debacle. Now to the real business at hand,” said the king, turning his attention to the pigeon messenger. “Cooiiian messenger, may I ask what took you so long?”

“Forgive me, King Dodo,” she replied, “but I did return in a timely manner at first. But I saw the boy and the man with their truck full of cages and immediately knew their intentions. I needed more backup so we went back. To make it up to you, I have passed on my messenger duties to another in order to stay behind and help in your relocation.”

“Really? Then may I finally ask what your name is, young man?”

“Divebomb. And I’m a she.”

“Of course you are. My apologies.” Bosco approaches.

“Hey,” said Bosco, looking back at the bodies of Kris and Dr. Markus. “What are we gonna do with those guys? They’re not dead are they?”

“No,” said the king. “They live. But Medic told me they’ll be back on their feet in less than 12 hours. Plenty of time for us to be long gone and safe.”

“But that means they’ll be back.”

“And we’ll be...”

“Don’t say it.” Speedster and Techno, with Kris’ goggles around his neck, approach.

“Is the cavern and immediate area cleansed of any evidence?” asked Divebomb.

“They are now,” replied Speedster.

“Good. We also noticed some cameras on top of the mountain. Know anything about those? They are facing down here, you know.”

“I caught a glimpse of them with these very sophisticated goggles if I do say so myself,” said Techno. “I wouldn’t worry about them. Only satellite imagery can produce a high enough resolution to make us out down here in these lighting conditions, but I doubt anyone ever pays attention. Little cameras like those don’t have a powerful enough lens.”

“Then I’m satisfied that we can move on now,” said King Dodo, “I suspect no one will show up to assist those humans anytime soon because they would have appeared by now.”

“Right,” said Divebomb. “Off to your new home then. The darkness and high grass will assist us. Follow me.” She takes flight and is accompanied by the other pigeons.

“NightWatchmen,” said Speedster. “Take the lead.” Several dodos with very large eyes start walking and the others follow.

“Sorry again, dad...” said Bosco.

“My word, boy,” interrupted the king. “Do you apologize for everything? The damage is done. Let’s just go.”

“Okay. Well, I was just gonna ask if, you know, if I can have my own room this time? Speedster snores.”

“Sorry, kid,” said the king, “but that ain’t happenin’.”

“What?”

“You’re not the only one who has listened to the adult humans speak.”

\* \* \* \* \*

At noon the next day, Jim and Becka arrive at the rock mountain in their Land Rover. Kris and Dr. Markus, whose right eye is bandaged, are driving away as they pull up.

“Man,” said Jim. “What happened to them? They both look like zombies.”

“They probably found your little pigeon friend and got their butts handed to them,” said Becka, getting out of the Land Rover. “But that’s their problem. Ours is up there. I can’t wait to check out the first set of images.”

“I know, right? If those cameras can produce the same detail as satellite imagery like we were told, then these pics should be awesome.”

The End

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