

E-MAIL*

Characters:

Uri Plotkin	Assistant Professor, Eastern Coastal Institute (ECI)
Lorenzo Adams	Professor and Director of the Laboratory for Oceanographic Research, ECI
Kate Ramo	Postdoc in Uri Plotkin's Lab,
Josh Smith	Assistant Professor, Western Coastal Institute
Melissa Hacker	Associate Professor, ECI

(Uri Plotkin has begun to re-evaluate data acquired by Lorenzo Adams and his colleague, Josh Smith, a former postdoc of Lorenzo's who is now an Assistant Professor at another institution. Josh published an analysis of the data a year before and is now making a splash with a different data set from another experiment. Uri has had his postdoc, Kate Ramo, start by reproducing Josh's results from the earlier work. The first scene takes place in Lorenzo's office.)

Uri: Lorenzo, Kate's redoing the PFLUX I data that you and Josh collected in 2003 and she can't get the profiles to agree with those Josh published in L & O. Could you help her with the blank removal process? Josh's instructions are vague.

Lorenzo: I'd be happy to but I don't have the data. Josh and I worked out the original procedure together, but I gave the data files to him at the end of the cruise for unpacking. Josh is very approachable. Just have Kate give him a call. He can E-Mail his M files to her for blank removal and curve fitting.

(Two days later in Lorenzo's office...)

Kate: Lorenzo, do you have a few minutes? Uri said you suggested that I ask Josh for his M files. I have them now but it's still unclear to me what he's done. Can you help?

Lorenzo: Sure. Is it blank removal that you're having trouble with? I've just been working on some of the PFLUX II data; it is right here on my computer screen.

Kate: That and the depth Josh uses for his fits. I was looking at the "Research Protocols and Procedures" notebook in the lab and it isn't very clear. How do you choose what blanks to use? There is one set of blanks from before the deployment and one after, and another that seems to be made up.

Lorenzo: Sometimes a sampler has a contaminant in it and that invalidates the calibration. So we require that the profile makes sense and we reject calibrations that don't. Here are three sets of blanks on PFLUX II. The third set, the one I use, is mostly between the pre- and post- deployment calibrations. Two of the samplers leaked during the experiment and more creative solutions were required for them.

Kate: Can I have those blanks and try them myself? I think I understand the processing Josh has done after the blank removal.

Lorenzo: Be my guest. FTP the whole set of files to your machine. I'm off to a meeting. Just turn my computer off when you're through.

(A week later, Kate and Uri are finishing coffee in the lab....)

Kate: Can I come to your office, Uri? I need a private discussion about Josh's PFLUX I results.

(They go to Uri's office and close the door.)

Uri: What's up? Did Josh send you his M files?

Kate: Yes, and Lorenzo explained how the blanks are removed. But I don't get Josh's results when I run his M files on the data. I asked Chris Turner at Woods Hole to try them. I e-mailed Josh's M files to Chris since he already has a copy of the PFLUX I data. Chris tried, but he can't duplicate Josh's results either. I called Josh on Tuesday and he said I shouldn't be surprised if it doesn't work right away because there are some tricky parts; one sampler was out of order in the string and another leaked. But I've already accounted for those problems. Josh said he had a meeting and would call me later. When I didn't hear from him by Thursday, I called again but he was away for the new Accelerated Research Initiative planning workshop.

Uri: Yes, Josh is probably going to be a leader in that ARI. But do you think he fudged the results with the PFLUX I data to make the curves fit his theory?

Kate: I only know that I can't fit the data to the published curves. And I've tried extreme corrections in both directions. This is a little out of my league, but I'm afraid Josh's results are bogus. What do you want me to do now?

Uri: For now, work on the PFLUX II data. Thanks for keeping me informed.

(Later that afternoon in Melissa Hacker's office...)

Uri: Melissa, you've worked with Josh. We're having a hard time duplicating his PFLUX I data; do you think he could have faked the results?

Melissa: I wouldn't have thought so. But that paper was the only result he got from PFLUX I and he needed the publication for his appointment to Assistant Professor. I was asked to write a recommendation letter for him and his file would have been thin without that contribution. It's a shame if it's wrong because it's a nice theory. Lorenzo will be very upset, if there's a problem; you know what close collaborators they've been.

Uri: If the results were faked, this will discredit Josh. His role in the new ARI will be finished and he could fail to get tenure; even be discharged. I'll have to think about what to do.

* Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute Ethics Program Committee adaptation of "Interviews" by Eve Nichols.