

October 26th, 2024

Issue 15 | Night

SciFansat

The Monthly E-Zine for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and More!

Micro Fiction & Poetry

Jacek Wilkos

John Love

M. H. Thaug

Nancy E. Dunne

Flash Fiction

Tony Daniel - "Midnight Double Feature"

Alastair Millar - "Night Shift"

That Burnt Writer - "The Cassandra Protocol"

Kayleigh Kitt - "The Final Countdown"

Short Stories & Serials

Alan Vincent Michaels - "Nightfall"

Jan Karlsson - "An Infinity of Silence"

Peter J. Gilbertson - "Derelict Skyrings" (Serial Finale)

Jason H. Abbott - "IRL"



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Editorial

Welcome to our night-themed October issue of SciFanSat, a bastion for science fiction, fantasy, and more! We're happy to provide you with a host of literary treats a few days before Halloween. Please, dig right in and take your pick. Under a dark sky, we have a mix of the eerie and the sad, the farcical and the introspective to choose from. All hand-selected for your speculative reading pleasure!

Jacek Wilkos, John Love, M. H. Thaug, Nancy E. Dunne, and others have gifted us with their microfiction and poetry to share. From there, you can mosey into our flash fiction collection where Tony Daniel's "Midnight Double Feature" is a seasonally appropriate tale for film buffs with a biting sense of humor. Alastair Millar's "Night Shift" hustles to entertain us, while Kayleigh Kitt's "The Final Countdown" is a reminder that we never have as much time as we think. That Burnt Writer rounds out our flash offerings this month with an outta-sight blend of science fiction and horror, "The Cassandra Protocol".

The short story selections this October hosts three pieces: Alan Vincent Michaels threads echoes of tragedy between past and future with the needle of science in "Nightfall". Jan Karlsson then grants us a window into "An Infinity of Silence" and a solitary struggle upon rocks under endless stars. My authoring contribution to this issue is here as well, in "IRL", where weird horror and meeting previously online-only friends in real life collide.

Finally, and more than worthy of special mention and applause, is the ninth chapter of — and the series conclusion to — Peter J. Gilbertson's "Derelict Skyrings" serial! Peter has been gracious and consistent with providing us with a new monthly installment of the futuristic military techno-action exploits of space marine Mohamed Blackbear since issue seven. All chapters summed; he has produced an almost 19,000-word novelette for our entertainment over the past nine months. Thank you, Peter, it has been a fun run and great ride!

There are no magazine changes or updates to announce this month. Our heartfelt thanks go out to all the authors and poets who contributed to this issue! Keep creating and writing, always. You and our supporters in the speculative fiction communities are the magic that makes this periodical happen!

Remain exceptional, take care, and please join us again in November for our sixteenth issue and last chance to publish with us in 2024 before our king-sized, best-of-the-year December issue!

November's theme will be... LIBRARY!

Jason H. Abbott
Editor, SciFanSat Magazine



Poetry

Into the Night

by John Love

*aether mists flow across the seas
mere shadows cast by moonlight
alight upon the beach and breach
the defenses and fall upon defenders
with razor steel and honed axes*

*then when not a soul remained
they slithered out into the night*

~jdeXpressions~

Find the Author

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The Prophecy

by That Burnt Writer

They whisper to me at night,
haunting my dreams,
these spirits of the dead.

Ah, but dragons *never*
existed,
you say?

Continue to believe,
if it makes you feel
superior...

We'll see who

b
u
r
n
s

when they return
bringing with them
an Apocalypse.

Find the Author



[@thatburntwriter](https://twitter.com/thatburntwriter)



Dark 'N Ion Stormy

by Alan Vincent Michaels

seen too many worlds?
hauled too much cargo to count?
give yourself a break!

forget tequila
forget flat "Gargle Blasters"
don't forget *this* drink

your one and only
sip "Dark 'n' Ion Stormy"
you will taste your dreams

now at Orion's
the premier Wormhole Tavern
Night's Span between stars

*Original haiku sequence performed by
Suria-Calesi - Galactic Poet Laureate
for the Orion Wormhole Omni-Grill & Tavern
—GalaxyWeb Advertisement Series #639QW1ø*

*GalaxyWeb Recipes are provided under The Full-Disclosure Laws of 3011
GalStd*

Drink At Your Own Risk

DARK 'N' ION STORMY



The “When The Night Goes On Forever” cocktail for spacefarers of all stripes, arms, and tentacles after and during long-hauls through light-less Wormhole Subspace.

A Dark ‘n’ Ion Stormy is a highball drink made with Orion’s Black Hole Rum™ (made for the darkest nights! — 3126 GalStd vintage or earlier) and Pleiadian Ion Ginger Beer™ poured over local asteroidal ice, and garnished with a slice of a gas giant lime.

► INGREDIENTS

- 2 liters Black Hole Rum
- 1 liter Ion Ginger Beer
- six dashes of the bitterest Orion Red Bitters
- gas giant (or any gaseous environment) lime garnish

► PREPARATION (2 servings)

Procure radiation crystal highball cylinders or any handy, but clean, buckets (can also be used for “after-drinking” activities).

Very slowly (emphasis on “slowly”) pour Black Hole Rum and Ion Ginger Beer over ice in complete darkness to prevent creation of amino acids and possible proto-organisms.

If desired, and it didn’t cause loss of life to obtain, garnish with a fresh Sol System Jupiter lime wedge.

► ENJOY...BUT BE WARNED!

Significant hangovers can last up to a week from only one serving, but just how long is a week—or a night—at relativistic speeds?

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Find the Author

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Micro Fiction

One Last Look

by Nancy E. Dunne

We search the night sky for a sign, for the radiant evidence of the great conjunction. Through lost faith in humanity, we look skyward for reason and logic and are rewarded with our own star of wonder. The great god embraces the sower as our darkness recedes.

Never a more stalwart ally than fear for those that struck out on the high seas, not knowing what lay beyond the horizon. We join them as we look up into the night sky, then step off and up into the stars.

Find the Author

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 [Nancy E. Dunne](#)



Testament

by Tony Daniel

I live for the night.

Before, the daylight was garish; it sucked mystery out of life. Everything shockingly stark, unhidden. Now, light brings pain and death. But the night, it is my life. The shadows, the dark, they hold sway.

I move freely. Shadows embrace me, and I see secrets hidden in alleys and doorways: people who exist in hiding. They are my people, these night people.

They feed me, and I give them peace, if they desire it. I take from them, just a bit, and move on.

I am the night, and it is me.

Find the Author

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Extract from Dr J's Logbook

by M. H. Thaug

October 28: The patients seem restive. Several have drawn strange symbols. Yet I heard no shouts. How do they coordinate?

October 29: On my daily rounds, I found no writing tools. The ink is good quality. Like mine.

October 30: Those drawings appeared in the library. I ordered better locks on the cell doors. Thankfully, the culprit scribbled on ordinary notepaper. My precious collection was not defaced. It includes the scroll I'm researching—but I digress.

October 31: Outrageous! Whoever wanders the building at night had the GALL to enter MY BeDRooM! WhILe I ReMAINed ASleEP! aNd He DreW—

Find the Author

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In the Middle of the Night

by Jacek Wilkos

He woke up in the middle of the night feeling a strong need to get out of bed which led him to the kitchen. He stopped at the fridge, hungry.

Opening the door, he heard a creak. He turned around and noticed a silhouette. A pale phantom, illuminated by the dim light from the refrigerator, smiled, revealing unnaturally long fangs.

Looking around in panic, he noticed a garlic sauce. Grabbed a bottle and, with trembling hands, aimed at the intruder. The sauce fired from the bottle splashed onto the vampire's face.

Nothing happened.

The phantom grinned and grunted. "Artificial flavor."

Find the Author

 [Jacek Wilkos](#)



Flash Fiction

The Cassandra Protocol by That Burnt Writer

[Archeron discovery shuttle/personal crew logs]

[Crew number 3812/15/5]

[DateStamp: autogenerated]

It's day thirteen and the silence is, perhaps, the most terrifying thing of all.

We know they're out there, like the whispers of hungry ghosts patrolling the outside of the barriers; probing, searching for weaknesses. They only shift into the visible light spectrum when they think they've found something to exploit.

The search and rescue party we sent out hasn't checked in for eleven days.
I don't know how much longer we can last.



We'd been down on the surface less than three hours when everything changed.

The first thing to go was the comms to the *Archeron*. We'd scanned local weather systems around the LZ, which was a large clearing on the vast, forested continent that seemed to cover most of the northern hemisphere. There was nothing major, and certainly not an electromagnetic storm, which was usually the first culprit of something like this.

Still, we figured we'd be able to talk to command soon enough, so got on with implementing the usual security and scientific processes as per protocol. Two hours later, we were ready to start the experiments when one of the xenobiologists happened to glance up and saw a meteor in the upper atmosphere. He'd notified the shuttle AI, who'd determined that it would land around twenty clicks north-east of us. We'd tracked its progress as it passed over, a glowing fireball beautifully rendered in the early evening sky.

Then we'd heard the comms crackle to life, and wished we still had interference.

The meteor was, in fact, the *Archeron*. From what we could make out from the screaming, panic, and the interrupted log synchronization, it had been forcibly hauled out of orbit, and even with all propulsion systems engaged, there was no

escaping. A few of the crew had made it to the life pods and ejected, but they just fell vertically like rocks.

As the cruiser finally impacted, a pillar of flame erupted into the air, and even at that distance, we could feel the heat wash over us.

The local treelike vegetation, which had looked so beautiful a few minutes before, with light dappling through the leaves and patterns dancing and rippling sinuously in what we assumed was a gentle breeze, now seemed more ominous, claustrophobic.

Security got us back onboard quickly and locked us down. So, we'd sat, shocked and not speaking, watching the monitors from the ship's hull cameras. It was better than replaying what they'd recorded of our former colleagues' last moments.

"We need to go check for survivors," someone had said. Thirty minutes later, five of our Marines had set out, fully suited in their weaponised exoskeletal power armor. They should've been able to get to the crash site, search, and be back within three hours.

We watched them bound out of the perimeter, just as a shadow passed across one of the cameras.

"What was that?" I said. "Computer, replay camera five, last thirty seconds only, half-speed."

The room collectively held its breath as the AI replayed for what I'd seen. Something large, formless, but clearly alive had followed their trail.

"Cycle external cameras," I said as people started muttering curse words under their breath or praying to a deity that, up to this point, they'd never believed in.

"ALPHA TEAM, COME IN," said the AI.

Something arced through the air and impacted camera seven. Blood and gore dripped down the screen, before the view switched. Just outside the airlock, one of the marines was laying in the dirt. Well, his head was anyway.

"Shields up!" someone yelled.

"ALREADY ACTIVE," replied the AI as a thud shook the ship.

"*What the fuck was that?*" one of the scientists screamed.

"UNKNOWN," said the AI. "ADJUSTING SCANNING PARAMETERS."

A few tense moments passed before it spoke again.

"NO CREATURES DETECTED. ATTEMPTING FREQUENCY SHIFTS OUT OF NORMAL RANGES FOR BOTH VISUAL AND AUDIO FIELDS."

Another shadow fell across one of the cameras, and something pushed against the shields.

"I HAVE BEEN ABLE," the AI said, "TO DETERMINE THAT WHATEVER IS ATTACKING US CANNOT BE PICKED UP BY USUAL SENSORS. THEY FALL INTO THE VISIBLE SPECTRUM RANGE OCCASIONALLY, SPECULATE THAT THIS IS WHEN THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO BREACH OUR DEFENSES. I HAVE SOME POTENTIAL AUDIO THOUGH, IF ANYONE IS INTERESTED?"

Als don't understand sarcasm very well, so when one of the remaining Marines said "Yeah, sure, why not?" it took that as an affirmative.

I never want to hear that sound again; it made me believe that Hell is real.



Every night since it's been the same; the creatures trying to get to us, whilst we try to reliably determine where, and how many of them, there are, and if they have an Achilles' heel. They've started emitting infrasound waves too, everyone feels the dread.

That's also making the Marines twitchy: they're wanting to shoot something, but every time we've tried it appears to have no effect. The shuttle lasers, useful for destroying small objects but able to be used defensively in a pinch, just pass right through them. Kinetic weapons do much the same.

I have a theory, but I'm scared to voice it, in case it's correct. I think these... *things* occupy a higher dimension, only dropping down into ours when needed.

We've still got no comms, either off planet, or more than about ten meters from the airlock. No one wants to go much further than that anyway, in case one of the "phantoms", as we've started calling them, takes them.

So, I'm invoking the Cassandra Protocol and leaving this as a last testament to what we've seen here. If anyone finds this, please, *please*, get off-world immediately. Don't ever come back. You can't see them, you can't sense them, you can't kill them.

I can only advise that...

Oh. The AI's sounding the siren. One moment.

One of them has managed to get in past the shields.

Oh Jesus Christ, help us.

Find the Author



[@thatburntwriter](https://twitter.com/thatburntwriter)



Night Shift

by Alastair Millar

Hey, I know it's partly my fault; I should have been more careful. But damn, the place is designed to make you relax and lose your inhibitions, right? Where there's no dawn, there's no end to the nightlife, and that's the whole point of going all the way to Dis: a rogue, wandering gas giant that has no sun. Five days by warprider from Earth, it's also unburdened by many of the more tiresome Terran laws, which adds to its appeal.

You've got a kind face, so I don't mind telling you: running some romance scams, perhaps with some badger games on the side, was what had brought my less than scrupulous self the 80 lights to get there. Sure, the fare wasn't cheap, but I was planning to make it back and more; and if all else failed, I'd have a holiday. But as it turned out, all else did fail. Within two hours of arrival, I'd been made by Cilla and Carrie, enforcers for Stygian Jack, current emir of the local grifter community. They expressed very, very clearly that any freelancing would be deeply hazardous to my health, and I'm not stupid, so holiday it was.

I spent my week sampling what Prosperina Station, Dis' largest orbital, had to offer. From the very tame (family holoshows, low-gee circus acts) to the extremely adults-only (whatever you're imagining, only more so), it's got something for everyone: all against the background of the planet's extraordinary luminous bands.

It was in a bar attached to one of the viewing lounges that I met Andy, not long before I was due to ship back home. He was tall and spindly in a way that suggested he was born and brought up offworld – maybe on Mars or one of the Colonies. We'd both tried to place our orders with the live barman at the same time, and mutual apologies led to conversation. It didn't take long for me to realise that he was another lost soul, and I was glad to find someone I could relate to. One thing led to another, and I spent my last 'evening' with him in a stateroom on the Oceanic levels, surrounded by warm blues and greens that complemented those deep, brown eyes that I wanted to drown in.

I woke up groggy and found that he was already gone. My commband was chiming with warnings that I'd maxed out my generous credit limit in the preceding two hours, while I'd been in a satiated post-coital sleep, and it was only then that I realised I'd been had. Me! I'd fallen for the oldest trick in the book! And now I knew how my own marks felt: used, abused, stupid and dirty. I don't mind telling you, it was a shock, and it made me rethink what I was doing with my life. Seriously, a real come-to-Deity moment.

So here I am, back dirtside in New Medellin Spaceport a reformed character. I even managed to talk to a guy on the trip back who's some big investment honcho in London, and he's offered me a job – says he needs someone to spot the scams for

his business. Which sounds great, and gives me a chance to go straight, but my ass is flat broke, and I'm in the wrong hemisphere. Look, I know we only just met, but if you could lend me the cost of flight, I'll pay you back double by the end of next week...

Find the Author

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The Final Countdown

by **Kayleigh Kitt**

I keep looking at the inside of my wrist, willing the florescent digits to speed up or slow down. Whatever.

In reality, my stomach's churned since it registered months, now hours.

Some people are decades older and their timers still haven't run down. Some have been elated at reaching zero, others, not so. At birth, we're all given a countdown timer. People are extracted from the community once the display expires. No one returns. Rumours are rife.

It's luck of the draw some say. Some people can't bear the idea of what the future will hold. Suicide rates are high.

My time is nearly up, and I'm seventeen. No one can remember in living history someone my age having a timer this short. I've been the focus of fascination, gossip and conjecture.

I pull my hat a little further down, and the collar of my coat higher, then tug my sleeve at my wrist.

Twelve hours until I discover my destiny.

The idle speculations my friends over the years keep circling, like a vintage record, repeating the same few bars. Acidic bile keeps erupting against my teeth and my belly rolls.

We've seen the trucks arrive outside houses before, men all dressed in black disgorging to attention. They don't come to the door of our homes. Like sentries, they stand next to idling, sleek ebony hummers. You can try running but you don't get too far, the timer has an inbuilt tracker. Escape or resistance is as successful as fighting thunder with a fart, gran says.

I've said goodbye to my family already, of course, they've known since my birth. There were no tears, just hugs of acceptance, tinged with sadness.

My timer beeps with a vibrating tingle and I resist the urge to check my wrist for the confirmation of nothing.

In the closing curtain of darkness, the front door clicks home behind me, the outlook reminding me of all the times my brother and I watched, noses pressed against net curtains to the glass. Many wailed and thrashed against the soldiers, and there were those who walked resolutely down the path to their fates.

And now it was my turn.

Dad always said I was a scrapper. Instead, I hold my head high, hands not pushed into my pockets, like I normally do and stride towards one of the rumbling vehicles. There's a bite to the air, scorching my lungs with a metallic flavour. One of the hummers sports a piece of tinsel around the aerial as if that will make a difference.

I calmly say, "Let's get this over with."

A Guard flashes his pearly whites at me, except they're not white, more like nicotine-stained. Strange as smoking was banned decades ago. I take a seat in the deep upholstered vehicle, not bothering with the belt. If it's considered an act of defiance, then so be it.

In the velvety evening, the hummers deposit me in a startling white hanger, nearly empty save for an expensive, private-looking jet. After encouragement from a finger poked in my back, my boots ring on the metal treads up to the door of the plane, a steward gesturing me into the interior.

Inside a man in a white suit warmly greets me, offering me a seat. I stand.

"Congratulations. You'll be joining another 4,000 people going to Mars. We've screwed this planet up, so you'll be doing the re-run there for humanity."

"What?" I know my mouth is hanging open.

"We've been watching you. We need you Alex because you are one hundred per cent human."

Find the Author



Midnight Double Feature

by Tony Daniel

I love drive-in movies. I mean, how could you not? Two movies, jackpot bingo in between? Concession stand food? C'mon! In the privacy of your own comfortable car? I do miss the speakers that hung from your window, though. That tinny mix of sound from that scrappy speaker only added to the fun! I get it, though. Michael Bay explosions and Tarantino soundtracks work better thru the ultra-stereos and eight-speaker systems most cars have these days. But back when I drove my 1970 Plymouth *Hemi Cuda*?

Alas, the good old days....

I do appreciate these retro drive-ins, though. Seeing *Phantom of the Paradise* and *Carrie* both in one night? On a four-story screen? Closest people like me can get to heaven!

I stocked up at the concession stand before they started the first feature. Not that I needed to, of course. I just can't resist a couple of chili dogs. A burger or two and a double order of onion rings. And of course, a bucket of popcorn the size of an office wastebasket. Extra butter. I tend to forget how good food tastes, but I do still enjoy it from time to time.

I toyed with getting a milkshake, but I'll be drinking through the night. And speaking of... lookie, lookie, lookie, here comes Cookie. Goth girls are usually more into the blood and gore movies, but she must be a real film fan, can't take her eyes off the screen even as she walks to the bathroom.

Be right back.

Mmmmm, that's tasty. She must have had tacos earlier. Now, let's make sure she... yep. There we go. Oops, slight stumble there. Nope, that's from those boots, not my fault. I didn't go too hard with her. Just a friendly smile, ask to borrow a lighter for my cigarette, step in, catch her eye just right. Take her hand in mine as I lean towards the flame. Boom. A few sips from her to wash down those onion rings, and all good to go.

I stand with her until she shakes off the confusion. "Thanks for the light, gorgeous."

I'm back in the car just in time to see Paul Williams have the guy who'll soon be *The Phantom* tossed out of his mansion.

I love this movie. Great damn soundtrack, too, believe it or not!

Hard to believe Brian DePalma directed this and *Carrie*. They're so different in tone, but you can see DePalma in both films if you know what to look for.

Oh, my. A blonde in short shorts and a Van Halen shirt, and in tears. That's too easy to pass up on.

Be right back.

Jesus, that was almost too sweet! Southern girls do love their sweet tea and chocolate. Glad I didn't get any candy earlier; I'd be a hyper mess right now. Thankfully, a chili dog can cut through the taste.

Jessica Walter was so beautiful in this movie. This and Argento's *Suspiria* would be an interesting double feature. I should drop that idea in the suggestion box by the concession stand next time I head that way.

Oh, look! A couple brought their dog! I love that! I should get another dog. I miss having a big old' mutt to play with. I was told dogs don't like our kind, but if you get one as a puppy, they learn quickly that you can be trusted.

Damn, it's been, what, thirty years since I had a dog? I need to remedy that.

Oop! Jackpot bingo time!! No chance of grabbing another drink right now. Folks are out and about, buying snacks, hitting the bathroom. Cute couples wandering towards the swing set and teeter-totter in front of the screen. How thoroughly 1955 of them.

Well, damn. Missed a double bingo by one friggin' number! 1-24, I hate you! Double bingo, double jackpot *and* a ten-dollar concession coupon? C'mon!

Okay. Let's go, Sissy Spacek! She and Piper Laurie are brilliant in this!

No way. *No way!* We got a couple fight a row over! Guy must have gotten too grabby after the shower scene! Oh, she is pissed! This might be a nice top-off for the night. He's got a beer in his hand, and she's a little wobbly herself. Ahhh, there it is, *the apology*. Everybody saw that. Now we wait for her to realize the beer needs to escape.

PJ Soles and Amy Irving were both so lovely. PJ with her red baseball cap, that tomboy sweet look but pure high school mean girl attitude. The perfect 70's nemesis in a horror movie.

And we have a bingo! Beer boy's girlfriend is on the prowl for the bathroom. Neckline is a big "nope," though, not in that tank top. Guess it's a wrist this time.

Be right back.

Ohhh, that was good, and beer boy hasn't even noticed how long she's been gone. Somebody's gonna walk back there, wonder why this girl is passed out by the bathroom and get a good whiff of beer and think she's a typical drunk-and-pass-out candidate. She'll come around, all woozy and weak "somebody find my boyfriend," and get her back to the car.

And sure enough, here we go. Two Miss Helpfuls, and my midnight snack weaving and weak-kneed between them. Bless their hearts. That's it, help her get in the car. Beer guy looks disappointed: no after party at the boat dock tonight. Shoulda been nicer, dipshit.

Well, that was an excellent double feature. I'll sit here for a few, let the traffic ease up a bit.

Damn, my tank is full! Chili dogs, burgers, onion rings, and three healthy drinks from a few lovely ladies. Can't beat that.

I wish pet stores were open this time of night. I really do want another puppy...

Find the Author

 [@CaptainTony](https://twitter.com/CaptainTony)



Short Story

An Infinity of Silence

by Jan Karlsson

Looking out through the porthole gave him no satisfaction. It never did. An infinite blackness that appeared to have no end. A featureless expanse of nothing. Yet, every day, several times a day, he would stare out. Watching. Waiting. Hoping. Praying.

An old, paper calendar sat beside the thick glass that stood between him and the vacuum beyond, listing at an angle on a hook that, mere millimetres deeper would have created a puncture that would have rendered him dead within the space of a few moments. A lingering, painful death that, if he were honest with himself, he would welcome.

Welcome it, but not initiate it. Faith had that effect on people. Faith had brought him out here, to lift a hand to the emptiness and hope to touch the essence of God. An essence, a presence, that he hadn't felt back home for so very long. Not that he had ever had that much faith to begin with, but events tended to either make one believe or to lose that faith forever.

Brought up Lutheran, becoming atheist, love, loss, faith. In that order. Any other man may have blamed God. Any other man may have become lost in the despair of solitude. Not him. He took strength in that solitary existence which was one of the reasons he had fared so well in the tests. He could cope where others broke. He rose where others fell.

Only he and a select few others had the requirements for the mission that, should it prove successful, would bring the entire world to the brink of a new age. An age where he hoped spirituality would take the place of selfishness. He believed it because his love had believed it, even through all the pain and suffering that plagued them until they could stand no more, and then continued to live for several, tortuous months onward.

He couldn't stay there after that. He couldn't live in a world that allowed that kind of suffering to happen. And yet, he forgave a god that, should He choose to, could relieve the suffering of all. God didn't work that way. God guided. Shepherded. What mankind did with their lives, how they lived, how they died, had to remain the

province of mankind. Those people, those mortal souls, he could never forgive. That loss forged something unbreakable within him.

At least he had thought it had. Out here, beyond the rim of the dreams of the most imaginative prophets, he had found even his will could bend, weaken, and in the end break and shatter. He had yet to reach that point, but he suspected it would not be that long before it came, rushing toward him, reaching out to claim him.

If only the minuscule sliver of hope happened more often. If only it lasted longer. He waited for it, day-after-day, night-after-night, even though those terms had lost all meaning so very long ago. He glanced at the calendar, filled with crosses and filled again, and again. Three years. Three years of waiting for that single, short space of time to come. An impossible moment that happened all too infrequently.

Soon, though. Soon he could try again. He had waited for this moment. Waited for such a long time, but soon. He had calculated the frequency, measured the distance, worked out the timings. He could do it. No more than five kilometres, but, here, it may as well be a thousand. No vehicle. An environment almost designed to hinder and hamper any attempt, and the one deciding factor. The temperature. Another impossibility.

Out there, it grew colder even than the vacuum of space. As though something made it colder. The actions of a cruel being that wished only to torture. A fanciful notion, but he had no other explanation for it, and, after all, he believed with less evidence. God, however, was tangible to him in his heart. This creature, this being, if it existed, had no place in the warmth of such a place.

Only for a short time did the landscape warm enough for travel, yet, even then, without the suit he would freeze within seconds. Enough time to reach safety. He had calculated it. Adjusted those calculations for the low gravity, the terrain, the air it would take to reach the destination. He could make it. He had to make it.

He understood the reasons for having the return vehicle so far from the habitation. Should anything go awry on take-off, at least those that remained in the habitation would not suffer any ill effects. Those kind of engines could make quite the explosion, after all. Except there were no others in the habitation and most likely no others would ever come here.

They had made a mistake. A simple mistake. A mistake that had sent the mission to a very different destination than the one intended. Not to a new Earth. Not even to a planet in a star system. Instead, he arrived here, upon a rogue planet out in the vast stretches of space between the stars, a lone wanderer in the black with only a single living soul upon its unforgiving surface now. In truth, they didn't need to send anyone at all. Lucky for him, they had chosen to man the mission. He was the man. Sent with everything a future colony would need to succeed. All but the people.

A finger tapped the date upon the calendar that he had waited for so very long. Any moment now. Any moment and the alarm he had set would buzz and he would see if his calculations were correct, which of course they were. Unlike his colleagues, he didn't make those mistakes. Only two other times had this event occurred over

the space of his lonely three years. Those events had given him enough data to make his calculations, and those calculations had fuelled his desire to succeed at all costs.

His love would not have wanted him to give in. Their faith would not allow it, and he would not allow it either. He had to keep fighting. To strive. To endure. To try to survive. Any moment. He could almost hear the tick, tick, tick of a clock that didn't exist here. Yet he didn't check the time. That would only mean he didn't trust his calculations.

Even though he anticipated it, the buzzing sound still made him jump and he almost ran to the EV suit closet, clambering into the cumbersome outfit, fastening everything tight, sealing it from the ravages of the environment outside. Batteries at full charge, heating elements coming alive. Slow, ponderous steps to the airlock. The wait until the light turned green and another wait, upon entering, for the outer doors to open.

Steady steps outside at the exact moment the rogue sun rose over the horizon, bringing blessed warmth to a land that didn't even freeze. The planet had no water. No ice. No snow. Only cold, frigid, dusty rocks. Warm enough now. No danger of freezing for the moment. Five kilometres. No rush. No wasting of precious air. No exhausting himself. A steady stomp, stomp, stomp. One foot in front of the other.

Reach the return vehicle and let the autopilot do the rest. He had no time to bask in the sunlight that only touched the surface of the planet once a year, and only then for an incredibly short amount of time. So short that the day lasted only for a few hours. Enough to make the journey. Just enough.

Half-way! He had made it half-way and, even now, through the darkness of the visor, he could see the outline of the return vehicle that awaited him. No time to celebrate, though. No time to waste. Step-by-step. Onward. He would make it and return to a home he never cared for but for a short, languid time while in love.

With the terrain mapped out using a drone during the last appearance of the rogue sun, he knew the landscape as well as though he had walked the journey every day. He knew the path, had travelled it virtually so many times. Every dip, every crest, every pebble and every rock seared into his mind. Every little variable added to his calculations. Not a single possibility left to chance.

One foot in front of the other. Steady. Unhurried. Inevitable. Almost there. A check on his air reserves, only to make certain, told him he had enough air in the reserves to last those last few hundreds of metres. Should he allow it, he could even succumb to the euphoria that had started to build within him, but he had to contain an enthusiasm he never expected to feel.

He held no love for home, not since that devastating loss. Or, at least he had thought so. Now, as he approached escape from a planet even more miserable, he considered that he still had some affection for that little blue rock. Somewhere, deep inside. It was, after all, the only place in the universe that had humankind scurrying across its surface. That did make him smile as he approached the final hill before the almost languorous slope down to the return vehicle.

Steady, regimented footsteps came to an abrupt stop as he crested the rise, and he saw something that he could not have calculated for. He remembered something occurring some six months before, a minor tremor that had passed so fast that he had hardly registered that it had happened at all. A momentary blip that he could have dismissed as the habitat settling. He knew now that it had heralded something far more profound.

A crater sat between him and the return vehicle. A collapse of the surface that he could not have foreseen. Possibly in the region of half-a-kilometre across, not so substantial, except that it would add time to the journey that he could not afford. Already that rogue sun had long passed its zenith and fast approached the horizon. The precious few extra moments it would take to scramble down the sides of the crater and clamber up the other side would take him far past the point where the planet would return to its unnatural, frigid normality.

He couldn't circumnavigate the crater, that would take as long, if not longer. Nor could he stay here. He could not return to the habitat in time. Caught between places with no chance of reaching safety. He had miscalculated. The one thing that he had left. The only thing he could rely upon and it had failed him.

No! Not the only thing. Not the only thing at all!

Faith. He had faith and if he had only that then he held within him the most powerful of motivations. He could make it to the return vehicle because he believed he could. He would reach it and he would leave this wretched, impossible rock. One step. Then another. Then another. He could make it. He would make it.

He had faith that he would make it before the fall of the long night.

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Nightfall

by Alan Vincent Michaels

"Lucilius! Come inside! You mustn't be watching the Feast of Pompeii. You're too young."

"Yes, Mother," I whisper. "I'm still being treated as a child, like my dearest Sister."

I watch longingly as the people dance and sing, some without *vestis* — their clothes long gone — parading down our street. They're so alive!

"I'm thirteen *annorum*, Mother," I say louder. "But you don't care."

I turn hard on my heel, pulling our villa's wooden street door closed.

Nothing I can say persuades her. I think Father would be easier to convince, if he ever comes home from that land from across the western sea.

Bri-tan-nia. Yes, that's its name. A land too far away for him to send us a regular messenger, except that one time he sent word after learning of my Sister, Aurelia's, birth.

I don't remember him clearly, but he's left Mother, Aurelia, and me alone for far too long!

I know he's one of Caesar's most trusted generals, but he's my Sister's and my Father first.

"Lucilius," says Mother from the villa's courtyard. "Please join Aurelia and me for *cena*."

"Yes, Mother," I reply, looking at her tired face, as she stands before the wall fresco with all manner of wild animals jumping and running. The scene always reminds me of Father's wild stories.

"Will Father be joining us for our meal of the day?"

"You know he's holding sway over those barbarous *Britons*. He's one of Caesar's most important—"

"You say that every time," I say, maybe too sternly. I walk towards her, watching her expression change.

"I don't know what else to tell you. I miss him, too, Lucilius."

"I know you do. I hear you crying at night when you think I'm sleeping."

I watch tears well up in Mother's eyes. She touches her face and turns away.

"Come and eat supper now, my Son."



The table hologram display paused.

"That was, unbelievable!" said Dimitri Hollander, the New Pompeii Archaeological Team's chief patron. "You said I'd be more impressed seeing it in high-def, three-dee, instead of just seeing a V-R vid over Swift. You were correct. Absolutely *cor-rect*. I'm blown away! A lot of my money well spent."

"What you just saw were the clearest memories we were able to retrieve from Lucilius' vitrified brain," said lead archaeologist Alexis Kantar. "Of course, we had to augment his engram data. The Japanese team edited in historically accurate renderings, filling in the gaps: dialogue, house details, sounds, insects, clothing, speech, his sister, the crowds. We're so fortunate there was enough of his flash-glassed brain tissue and actual blood cells to get at his DNA."

"Wait, this isn't all of it, is it?" asked Dimitri. "You said the team found two-thousand-year-old images of Vesuvius erupting and the initial ejecta hitting the city."

"Yes, we did," Alexis said. "I wanted to set the stage for the next vids."

Dimitri looked around the lab, staring at the plaster casting of young Lucilius' contorted body lying on the long display table, and then at the insanely expensive, one-of-a-kind, engram-scanning chamber that held the obsidian-like remains of Lucilius' brain, which had turned to glass instantaneously as the pyroclastic flow swept over Pompeii and its people.

"Remember, for the Pompeiians, it was like being in a village-wide kiln at over five-hundred-twenty degrees Celsius," said Alexis. "It's a miracle any bits survived so well-preserved. Most did not. An incredible set of circumstances and sheer luck for us to find the rarest of rare human remains, and only the third such set of brain tissue ever discovered."

"I'm ready to see the rest," Dimitri said. "If they knew finding the first vitrified brain at Herculaneum almost a hundred years ago what we could do with it today, they'd be amazed. I'm amazed. I can't say 'amazing' enough."

"Dimitri," said Alexis, "The engram data used for Lucilius' next videos was extremely fragmented. The whole team did their absolute best, but it still may be difficult to watch..."



"Mother!" I cry out. "The mountain's on fire! I see it out my window. Everything is burning!"

I watch as streams of smoke and flames rise high into the sky.

"Lucilius! Aurelia!" Mother shouts. "Get under your beds. Now!"

"That won't save us from Jupiter's wrath," I cry out.

I hear Aurelia scream. I take a step towards her room, but the floor shakes and I lose my balance, falling to my knees. I crawl under my bed, heeding Mother's command.

"Mother, you are so much like Father. I know now how Father could have left us alone for so long. You truly love us!"

I scream, covering my ears to block the din and the growing roaring sound, then pulling my arms around my head as stones smash through the clay tiles of the villa's roof, pummeling my bed and turning everything into the darkest night.

Then the heat.

"Save us all, oh, glorious Jupiter! So that Father can find us—"



"Intense!" said Dimitri. "This'll be so much better than the Tutankhamun golden mask world tour and the Grand Egyptian Museum's V-R or whatever-you-call-them animations. This will be the centerpiece of my New Pompeii Archaeological Museum! People from around the world will come to see Pompeii's last moments, literally, through Lucilius' eyes."

"I saved the best for last," said Alexis, smiling. "We also found Aurelia's glassed brain tissue. Her engram data was better preserved, but there is much less of it. This time, with only minimal augmentations, we can show two real, simultaneous points of view."



I hear Lucilius shout, "Fire!"

"I don't want my heart to burn like wood," I scream over the din, crawling under my bed, my fear welling up from deep within as the floor shakes again.

"Oh, loving Venus, I implore you! Please save Mother! Save Lucilius! Save me! Don't let this be our end!"

Tears run down my cheeks.

Stones hit my bed.

The darkest night falls upon me.



Read more about ["Preservation of neurons in an AD 79 vitrified human brain"](#) in the U.S.

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IRL

by Jason H. Abbott



The tire of Breanna's car bumped the curb as she stopped.

Unable to discern any painted lines on the road denoting a parking spot or much else on the street in the pouring rain and dark, she swore, reversing the vehicle and nudging it into better alignment beside the sidewalk. She left its engine running as she checked her smartphone clipped onto the dashboard.

“Okay, here at last,” she said, confirming the navigator screen had her at its destination. “Two wrong turns and a dead-end later.”

She closed the app and removed her phone from its clip on the heater vent. Its back was warm and welcome in her hands after two-hours of driving through cold October rain.

Breanna hit the text notification and opened the ten messages she heard coming in throughout her drive from New Hampshire to Massachusetts. Her thumb scrolled the list up to the first one and she started reading.

Again, I'm so sorry to drag you out in the middle of the night!

Be safe. I'm sure the roads are bad. I have terrible timing!

You're a genuine friend to do this.

I know it's a weird thing to ask out of nowhere when we've never met before IRL.

I just don't trust my cousin with him.

Are you running late?

We need to finish this quick when you arrive, I'm afraid

I wish I'd invited you down or come up to visit a long time ago.

I'm a mess tonight, we can't chat long

Bre? Are you still coming?

Her fingers tapped out and sent a swift reply to the chain: *I'm here!*

The phone dropped onto the empty seat beside her as windshield wipers beat a rhythm. Rubbing her palms together to banish a chill, Breanna leaned over to the passenger-side window and peered out through rivulets of water and a fogging inner surface. The apartment complex along the sidewalk was four stories tall: a converted old red-brick mill at odds with the flat-topped buildings from the 1970s neighboring it. She spied its entrance as the smartphone vibrated, announcing a new message.

Great!

I was worried something happened

Breanna replied in seconds. *Sorry! Bad weather and the roads here are like a maze. I'm parked outside now.*

It's okay! Ring 3-F at the door and I'll let you in.

The elevator's right inside. I'm on the 3rd floor, 3-F.

TEXT when you're at my door. Doorbell is broken.

DON'T knock! Chupacabra next-door will bark for hours.

**Chihuahua, not chupa*

She nodded after the series of buzzes, responding with a single thumbs-up emoji and sliding the phone into the pocket of her coat.

On the street, the compact car switched off its wipers and headlights, removing their reflected glare from soaked pavement. The engine followed before Breanna exited into the downpour, dampness seeping into her sneakers. Dark blonde hair almost dry after the drive became wet again in the few moments it took to dash around the vehicle onto the sidewalk. She hurried under an awning above the entrance, locking her Toyota with a press of its key fob and hearing its klaxon reply.

Drenched but sheltered, she peered over eyeglass lenses smeared with raindrops to poke 3-F on an old, dirty beige push-button panel.

"Dori?" she asked the intercom. "It's me."

A loud buzz and click responded without reciprocal reply. She took hold of a wet latch handle and gave the heavy door a solid tug to open it.

Inside, she took off her glasses and shook them somewhat droplet free before redonning them. Breanna scanned the ground floor she stood in, finding the elevator as she wiped the soles of her shoes dry and the automatic closer slammed the entrance shut. The lobby was empty and dim as she left the black vestibule rug and crossed worn tangerine sheet vinyl one hour after midnight.

The phone in her pocket vibrated, and she checked it standing at a door with scratches on its russet painted metal.

Sorry to be rude. It's gotten so bad I've lost my voice.

She pressed the up button on the wall plate to the side, then texted her back: *It's ok. About to go up. Are you sure you're well enough to drive yourself to the hospital after I go?*

I've got that covered, thanks.

A ding from the opening elevator interrupted her sigh, and she shook her head entering a dingy compartment sided with faux wood paneling. An annoyed prod to the controls started a rattling jaunt upwards. Thirty seconds later she exited onto the third floor, wet sneakers squeaking on more vinyl flooring. She found herself at one end of a long hall stretching the length of the building. Beneath ceiling lights half turned off for the night, she walked alongside pale-yellow walls until she reached a door labeled 3-F.

Breanna lifted the phone in her hand. *Knock-knock.*

She waited, listening after sending the message. The intense rainstorm outside became but a susurrant of percussion within the structure's thick brickwork, the hum of fluorescent bulbs above her not completely drowned out by it. From inside the apartment, she detected the faint sound of wheels on a gaming chair moving, and the creak of someone sitting up from it. A shuffling gait approached the door from the other side, but stopped with it still closed. Muffled breathing, labored and wheezing, replaced it.

"Dori, is that you?" she asked, hush-toned.

Three quick hiccups responded.

"I've heard enough of those escape past your mic mutes to tell that's you. You're in rough shape, aren't you, sweetie?"

After a few moments, a text answered.

Yes, I'm a mess.

"You've really lost your voice?"

Yes.

"Let me in."

I will, but wait ten seconds after I unlock the door.

So I can go into the other room from the kitchen.

"Why?"

I look terrible. I'm embarrassed.

It'll make you upset.

"Dor, I watched my nana be eaten alive by cancer until her last day. It doesn't matter how bad you are right now, I can handle it."

Trust me, I know you think you can.

That you would if you could.

But you can't.

"Is it contagious and you don't want to tell me?" Breanna asked, hearing another spasm of hiccups. "I have KN masks in the car if I need one."

No. You can't catch this.

It's a hereditary disease, like all my other problems.

PLEASE, just wait and let me get out of sight. OK?

"Okay, I promise."

Turns and slides undid a couple of locks before the restricted wheezes left with footfalls. Counting down in whispers, she reached the number ten in the hall as wheels on the gaming chair rolled as if bumped. She hesitated a few more seconds and her phone whirred.

Come in

Breanna entered a modest kitchen with walls the color of pastel mustard, like those in the corridors, but well-lit by the ceiling lights above. She paused, squinting as her eyes adjusted from having been in the dim.

"Meow."

Her droplet-speckled vision turned to the cat carrier on the floor beside a small dining table. Behind its zipped-up mesh, an orange mackerel tabby matched her gaze with his green eyes.

"Oh! Hi Nemo," she said to him.

The automatic closer shut the door with a gentle click as she crouched down to greet him and touch the fur on his offered forehead through the screen. "So handsome, like in all your pictures."

From an adjacent room came a brief clack of mechanical keyboard typing before a new message.

My beautiful boy.

"Are you going to be nice to auntie Bre while your mom gets better in the hospital?" she asked.

He answered with another calm meow as more clacking came from the other room.

He'll be wonderful.

I know you'll take good care of him.

I'm texting now with the phone app on the computer BTW

It's easier right now.

She checked the messages and stood, her nose wrinkling as an odor of rotting decay under an inadequate mask of air freshener chemicals and scented candles hit it. "Dori, your breathing sounds horribly congested, so maybe you can't smell what I can, but—"

Sorry. It's the trash.

I had stuff go bad.

I've been too sick to leave and take it out for weeks.

"That's okay," she said, detecting an added waft of old fish. "Would you like me to take it out for you?"

No. My cousin will do it soon.

Breanna eyed the tall plastic garbage can, and the domed, round lid sealing it. "And you're still sure you're up to driving yourself to the hospital like you texted earlier? I'm here. I could drive you there and come back to pickup Nemo after."

No. I'll manage.

"I'm," she said before pausing to wave her phone at the dark, doorless entry. "I'm worried you might be so ill that you're not thinking straight. Maybe we should call an ambulance?"

Don't call 911

Angry hiccupping and typing preceded another buzz.

FUCKING DONT!

"Is it an insurance thing?"

Yes, but

"Jesus! It isn't worth your life, Dor!"

You have no idea how much other trouble it'd cause.

None.

Me AND you.

"Okay, fine, I'm going to drop it," she said, putting a palm up in surrender. "I came here to pickup your cat and take care of him while you get better. If that's all you want me to do, I'll do it."

Thank you.

"But I'm still worried about you."

I'll be alright,

My problems aren't fatal, just gross.

Often painful, but dying isn't part of the package

Don't worry.

She looked up from the phone and scanned the kitchen. Blue drawers and cabinets clashed alongside its yellow walls as she sighted the sink and a bottle of dishwashing detergent. "May I clean my glasses for a minute before we square away the rest with Nemo? They're all smeared from the rain."

Of course.

Paper towels are between the stove and the fridge.

"Thanks," Breanna said, sliding the smartphone into her pants pocket. A hiccup from the unseen room seemed to answer as she took off her eyeglasses and ran them under the faucet.

"Are the hiccups part of your condition?" she asked above the water. "Once, after you logged off from a session, gamemaster Dave wondered if they were Tourette tics. I hope it's not rude to ask now. Nobody in the group ever wanted to risk making you uncomfortable. We love having you in the campaigns and as a friend too much!"

The vibration of incoming messages came to her pocket as she rubbed a dot of detergent over her lenses and rinsed them off. Under the spotless and empty double sink, she dried her fingers on a hand towel adorned with clownfish and regal blue tang before checking the texts, holding her still wet eyeglasses.

It's my condition. It affects my breathing.

I adore the group. You guys are wonderful. <3

You the best of all, Bre. That's why I trust you with Nemo.

"Awe! You too, Dori," she said, putting her phone on the countertop to rip a paper towel off its roll. "After you're better, we'll spend the day together when I bring him back!"

There was a hiccup from the dark doorway, but no typing.

Breanna put on cleaned glasses standing beside the refrigerator and noticed a printout pinned on it with mermaid-styled magnets. It featured a picture of a heavysset white woman in early middle-age. Short-necked, bulgy-eyed, and with hair thin from alopecia dyed an unnatural shade of red, a wide and warm smile beamed at the camera as she held an orange mackerel tabby kitten.

Beneath it was a caption: *Thank you, Doris Eliot, for adopting with the Kingsport Animal Shelter!*

"This photo of you getting Nemo a few years ago is the best!" the woman a generation younger than Doris said. "Why haven't you ever shared it?"

The smartphone buzzed on the counter. She picked it up, crumpling the used paper towel while walking towards the reeking garbage.

No hat.

"You don't always have to wear one or a cosplay wig," Breanna replied, pausing before she leaned down to lift off the can's lid. "It's what you are on the inside that—"

Something akin to a gagging, coughed hiss came from the shadows in the adjacent room. Loud enough to flinch her into stopping. Muffled within the apartment next door, a chihuahua yapped a few quick barks until hushed by unintelligible, half-awake words. Head turning to the darkness past the doorway, she saw nothing but the dim glint of the lit kitchen reflecting off the vague squares of pictures hung on a wall.

The phone vibrating added to the shake of her hand.

DON'T! It's full of flies!

"O-okay," she stuttered, releasing the paper towel wad to bounce and roll off the domed cover and onto imitation parquet flooring.

Long strings of typing began on the computer keyboard, the intermittent buzz of received texts coming in between them.

I have to leave soon.

Sorry, I'm stressed.

I am so happy you can take him.

Nemo is my baby.

Please give him lots of love!

"I will, Dor. I'll bring him back like he's been at a spa!"

All his papers and vet information are in the pouches of his carrier.

His favorite toys, too.

He only had a few cans of cat food left. You'll have to get more, sorry.

"No problem," she smiled.

He likes fish. <3

Ok. Now this is IMPORTANT:

In one pouch is a bundle of envelopes.

I need you to mail them for me, please.

Please! Please! I've been too sick to go out and do it myself.

"Uh, sure? Just letters to the post office type stuff?"

Yes, exactly. Thank you!

They're all addressed, sealed and everything,

I didn't have any stamps, but on the kitchen table there's some money.

Take it all, it's yours. Use it for cat food and whatever, too.

Breanna checked the tabletop, and beside a cluster of plastic bottles in a half-empty shell of shrink wrap was an open envelope. Within, she found a neat stack of cash that she stopped thumbing through after finding four one-hundred-dollar bills on top.

The letters are mostly to let my family know what's going on

They don't have email or trust phones. I'm the clan freak, LOL.

Another is a rent check and notice to my landlord

That'll square things up for a while.

"This is, way too much for cat-sitting a few weeks or a month!" she said, putting the money back on the table.

It's a couple thousand. My emergency cash.

With my disorders, I was planning for something like this to happen

Eventually

But it progressed quicker than I thought

Now my piggy bank is a gift, a thank you:

For being a bright spot in this mess.

My family hates normal pets.

My cousin would hurt my baby

I needed to rehome him with someone I trust

"Rehome?" she asked as the message notifications continued to whirl in.

Someone from outside it all.

You

He can't follow where I'm going.

In Nemo's papers is a document giving him to you.

I've signed it. You only need to do the same.

Because after you leave tonight, you'll never hear from me again.

"What? Dor, what the hell is going on? I'm here in the middle of the night after you messaged me in a panic to come and get your cat while you deal with a medical issue. Now you're hiding in another room and giving him to me? I'll never see you again? Are you dying? Skipping town? What kind of trouble are you in?"

Hiccups and something like a gurgled whimper preceded more clacking.

I am trouble. It's in my blood.

The less you know, the better.

I'm sorry I lied to you. Was afraid saying too much would scare you off.

"You were right, this is getting fucking crazy! I'm not even sure it's really you in there typing anymore."

Do you remember that after-session talk we had last year?

Just you and me.

The one where we found out we both dreamed of being mermaids as kids?

It got a little spicy!

"Okay," Breanna answered, "stop. Yeah, only you and I would know that."

I liked that conversation.

Trust me, please?

She sighed. "Alright, but please tell me the truth!"

The truth is, I don't want you to get hurt.

The truth is, the less you know, the safer you will be.

Please, PLEASE, can you take the money and my cat

And go.

Please mail the envelopes. One will bring my cousin in Maine down here.

He'll come with his sons from Hattie

They'll cleanout my things here, I'm sending them a key.

PLEASE! Promise me.

"I promise, Dor," Breanna said. "I'll love Nemo. Keep him safe and happy! The letters will be in the mail as soon as the Epping post office opens. Don't worry."

DON'T mail them from where you live.

Send them from somewhere else.

DON'T contact my family or tell them how to find you

They won't like you. They'll be trouble.

"What are they? *The Mafia?*" she asked, evoking a wet, phlegmy snicker of a reply from the dark doorway.

I wish. But if they do talk to you,

If any cops or FBI, too

Tell them all I said was I'm going to stay with Mom.

My family will understand.

"This isn't about there being no cats allowed at your mom's place, is it?"

That's not stretching the truth, much.

It's great. Tell them I said that, too!

But please, please, don't say anything that'll make anyone curious

There'll be trouble for you.

You need to go now.

"That's it? Just 'you need to go now?'" she asked.

I need to go now, too, now that we're done.

Bye, Bre.

You're an outstanding friend.

She picked up the envelope of cash from the small dining table. Folding it, her eyes returned to the bottles and half-empty shrink wrap as she tucked the money inside a coat pocket. "Goodbye, Dori. I'd offer you a hug, but..."

Haha

"Do you want a last minute with Nemo? I could wait outside and—"

No

I've already said farewell

Cried enough tonight.

"I get it," the blonde said, slicking back a few wayward strands of wet hair while reading the messages. She grabbed one of the clear bottles and lifted it. The plastic was rigid, not at all flimsy like the disposable sixteen ounce containers they resembled. Within, a transparent liquid easy to mistake for water betrayed itself as something else sloshing like viscid syrup. A turn to its label gleaned her nothing other than it seemed to be a dense paragraph written in Chinese.

"Are these the supplements you were talking about last session? The stuff you said was helping your condition?"

There was a loud bang on a desk accompanied by the cracking of glass. Her phone buzzed alongside angry keyboarding and chihuahua barks.

Stay out of that shit!

You'll end up worse than me!

Breanna slapped the bottle down and stepped back.

LIARS!

It accelerated everything!

ITS NOTHING BUT SHOGGOTH MILK!!!

“Dor—” she managed before the squeak of the gaming chair’s wheels and someone rising from it cut her off. Furious typing continued, pounding on keys with enough anger to break them.

I thought I could beat this

Not live this life

But it's over!

Bre! GO THE FUCK HOME

DELETE ALL THESE MESSAGES AND GO THE FUCK HOME!

The chair rolled from a bump or push. As Breanna stared through the entry into the unlit room, she saw it jolt into view.

Picked up, fifty pounds of furniture careened through the shadowed air, breaking objects and slamming into a wall unseen. She dashed to the doorway to get her first solid peer into the room at its threshold, seeing a vague blur pass across the dim illumination of a distant streetlight in a raindrop coated window.

Only the yap of the dog next-door and a worried mew from Nemo joined the muffled sound of rain in the seconds that followed. She stood there a long minute as the animals fell quiet. Until a few hiccups broke the new silence.

“Dori! What the hell was that all about? Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

She saw the blue light of a smartphone appear, casting a faint outline on the top of a bed at the far end of the room, and the chair resting sideways atop it. It also revealed damage to a wall as Breanna felt the whirl of a message.

Go away

“No. You either let me see what’s going on with you, or I’m calling Nine-One-One!”

The glow turned off concurrent with a gurgled sigh.

She glanced at the computer where Doris had been typing. An esoteric image serving as the monitor’s lock screen, a multitudinous crab-legged thing, illuminated a cracked but intact glass top desk. With a shiver, she looked away to the wall angled flush against the other side of the doorway. Here hung the pictures she glimpsed earlier.

Breanna nodded, looking over the old framed photos, some in sepia, and the console table beneath them. These she had seen in the background without detail whenever Doris streamed from her webcam. Her eyes lingered a moment on a collage of color Halloween photographs of her in Ariel costumes spanning from

childhood to her early twenties: the progression of an adorable little girl into stunning young womanhood before the toll of her afflictions took root.

She stumbled over a pair of women's dress shoes and a handbag abandoned on the threshold, but maintained her balance.

Thereafter stepping onto an area rug with a pattern impossible to discern in the darkness, she walked to the edge of the light shed by the kitchen and scrutinized the table's narrow top. On it were charcoal sketches and a small watercolor made by her friend's hand of a favorite subject: Nemo.

Last on the console was the conversation piece and experiment in abstract sculpture Doris called *Mother* as a joke when she asked its name. It loomed like a collum of writhing snakes, an obsidian hydra that she shunned turning away from its visage.

"I hate that damn thing even more now seeing it in person, Dor," she muttered, giving her phone a pair of shakes to turn on its flashlight app.

The woman tried again after it failed to activate, then gave up frustrated and walked with caution by the lesser shine of her device's touchscreen instead. She passed indistinct shapes in heavy shadow. One revealed itself to be a stationary bike draped in laundry.

Breanna reached the foot of the bed. In the added light from outside, she found a dresser opposite it. Proceeding between the two, towards where she saw the other smartphone's glow a couple minutes ago, the toe of her sneaker bumped something.

She picked up a snow globe from the floor. Its dome broken and wet in her grip, the little red-haired mermaid perched on a rock within stared at her with painted eyes. Her fingers left the memento upright on the dresser as the window went dark.

A huge hand grabbed her face, covering her mouth.

Shoved against the wall with her screams muted, she dropped her smartphone and grappled the attacker's arm with both of hers, thrashing and kicking. But the immense strength pinning her one-handed was unyielding, her strikes provoking little reaction from the hunched, hulking figure at least seven feet tall. In moments, cold realization swept over her eyes that whoever held her possessed brawn enough to snap her neck or worse on a whim, but hadn't.

Breanna's nostrils flared in panicked huffing, nose above clammy fingers.

Her struggling ceased even though her hands remained clenching the limb of her assailant. Its skin felt damp and smooth, with resilience like rubber to her scratching nails. A creature leaned forward and down, meeting her eyes as it exited shadows to pass into the mottled dim light of the streetlight far outside filtering through the rain-soaked window beside them.

It was barrel-chested, hairless, and inhuman. Grayish or green in the gloom, its eyes were red rings in black pools set into a jowling face that was a mix of fish and froglike features. Long, sinuous limbs of lean muscle followed a humanoid pattern from a thick torso, ending in webbed and clawed digits.

The creature wore no clothing nor bore any telltale sign of a human sex as muscled shoulders brought its head on a short neck closer to hers. Labored, wheezing breath accompanied the up-close meeting of their gazes, Breanna tearing up in muffled panic.

It reached for the bed with its free hand, keeping her pinned against the wall as it turned and looked down at the smartphone it returned with. Taloned fingers powered on the touchscreen and worked it with practiced skill that belied their brutal crudity.

Spellbound watching the creature, her phone buzzed several times where it lay on the floor.

The ichthyic being put its device on the comforter. A long, scaled arm then retrieved hers from the rug and offered it to her.

Breanna's hands refused to abandon their grip on the thing's wrist. It squinted, holding the phone closer with a hiss that displayed shark tooth fangs in its broad mouth.

She let go and took it, shaking as she unlocked the screen. Its huge, webbed palm remained clamped onto her as she read the messages.

I won't kill you

I won't hurt you

But if you SCREAM and bring the cops here

They'll bring the government in

And they will hurt and kill you for what you now know

Please, PLEASE, start trusting me!

Released, Breanna gaped above the smartphone clenched in her trembling fingers. "D-Dori?"

Three hiccups came in succession, opening and closing gill flaps on the sides of an amphibious neck as Doris nodded. She then turned and lumbered away, leaving her phone on the bed as feet perhaps more akin to fins plodded back to the front of the room. The blonde put her own hand over her mouth now, containing uncontrolled sobbing as loathsome claws unlocked the computer and started typing. Soon, the device she held in a limp grasp whirred again.

Remember that dream you had of becoming a mermaid as a kid?

The reality isn't as pretty as you thought, is it?

"What happened? How is this possible?" she asked, taking a tentative step forward.

There are many impossible things in the world

Most people are better off not knowing them

I didn't want to put you in danger by making you aware of one

*There are people that kill my kind
Like the government men with their secret wars and death camps,
Then there is my kin, who has hated mankind for all your history.
Both will kill you if they discover what you've seen
Ignorance would have kept you safe*

"I'm, so sorry," Breanna said, stopping a few feet to Doris' side, "I wanted to help or make sure you were alright. I've been hurt and alone before. Like you, I don't have a lot of friends in real life. Maybe I'm too eager to keep the ones I have."

No, you ARE a keeper. Period. Don't feel bad.

I misjudged you.

I apologize, I wouldn't have put you in this position

If I'd understood how good you actually are

"Mermaids... stick together. Right?"

She shuddered, her gills fluttering as she made a subdued and wet laughing or snickering sound while typing.

We did say that once, didn't we?

"Yeah," Breanna nodded, "after the spicy stuff."

I dreamed of staying human

I wanted to be where the people are

To be like you

Living a human life, or as close to one as I could get

When I was young, I'd hoped I'd be one of my family's "unfortunates"

The rare few who live, grow old, and die human

When my change of life started, I fought it

I fought a fate I didn't want

And lost that fight so badly, I'm fully matured before my time

She heard Doris heave a sigh and reached out, hesitant as she touched the squamous skin of her hunched back. Froglike eyes turned to her above a mouth unable to smile, but with a blink and semi-bow, a webbed hand rested on the woman's shoulder.

"Dor, I—"

Clawed fingers left Breanna, one coming to Doris' lips as she made a shushing motion and returned to the computer.

It's ironic. I wanted to stay human, even if I was a fat hag.

Now I look like my grandmother after she completed her change of life at 80

*She was vibrant in her new youth, beautiful and desirable, so they told me
I wouldn't know*

Perhaps the Y'ha-nthlei will say the same of me

Making this a twisted, full circle return to my youth

Doris glanced at Breanna and sighed, sad-eyed, before she used a trackball mouse to open a program on the desktop.

You

WE

need to go

This thing here will mulch my hard drive into irretrievability

I have something similar on my phone I'll use in a minute

You delete every message, everywhere you've gotten them from me tonight

UNDERSTAND?

"I-I do and I will," she stammered.

I want you and Nemo to have happy endings

Long, loved lives

If anyone, ANYONE,

My family, a cop, the FBI

ANYONE who asks you about me

You roleplay that nothing weird happened tonight

Roleplay like your life depends on it

Because it will

She nodded as Doris eyed her, hands shaking a little as she straightened her askew glasses. A mouse click started the program and flipped steps left the computer as its screen flickered to black. Stretching as she walked, taller still without a hunch, her head missed hitting the ceiling by an inch.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

At the bedside, Doris picked up her phone.

The river is only two blocks from here

"Somebody might see you."

In this storm? At 2 am?

This is my best chance

"And then?"

I swim the Miskatonic to its end

Lock the door on your way out.

Bye, Bre.

Doris manipulated the smartphone a few more seconds, leaving it on the dresser as its erasure began. Breanna watched her open the window to the chilling downpour outside. She held her webbed palm upturned in the rain for a moment, before turning back to her observing friend.

"Wait," she said, her face a tear-streaked silhouette in the yellow light of the kitchen. "Will you be, okay?"

Claws grasped the broken snow globe. Lifted, she twisted a gear at its bottom and released it after several turns. The sound of the clockwork music box within chimed over the rhythm of the storm. She returned it to the dresser top, then threaded her bulk through the open window as it played the calypso of *Under the Sea*.

In the baptism of a downpour on the fire escape beyond, one last look from red rings floating in twin black pools met Breanna's gaze

A glass plane thudded down, and they were gone forever.

She stood there, weeping, her body numb throughout as the music box wound down and slowed. Upbeat and childlike became disjointed decay. Tin plunking as time and silence inevitably pulled notes farther apart until none came at all in a colder, more disquieting world.

Nemo gave a concerned mew in his carrier.

"I'm coming, baby," Breanna sniffed, lifting her glasses to wipe away tears and clammy sweat from her forehead. She backed out of the room, unable to stop staring at the window while sliding her phone into a pocket.

Her step got entangled in the pair of women's dress shoes cluttering the threshold. She tripped, twisting as she fell to catch ahold of something and instead crashed into the garbage can.

Knocked over, its lid popped off to slide and spin upside down on the kitchen floor as they both hit it together. Rancid slurry infested with maggots and accompanied by flies spilled from the bag within as the toppled container shoved the dining table sending plastic bottles rolling and bouncing to all corners.

The noxious eruption forced a gag out of her as she rose on hands and knees. In fly-filled air she stood up before spreading, blood-tainted ooze touched her. As a Chihuahua renewed its barking at the noise of the accident, Nemo joined them with a hiss of alarm.

Breanna paled, choking back a dry retch seeing what sprawled and seeped over imitation parquet flooring.

A tinge of vomit invaded her mouth as the cat mewed a worried plea. Sneakers navigating past a fetid pile, jumping over the last in hurried avoidance, she snatched the shoulder strap of the carrier. Her dash to leave lifted him up and away before pooling putrefaction reached them.

In the hall, she gave a final glimpse back with terrified eyes while fumbling to lock the knob on the door. Then Breanna ran. Ran to the elevator as a small dog still yapped. In a minute she would run through a deserted lobby, and into the pouring rain on the streets of Arkham outside with an orange mackerel tabby in tow. Not much later, she would pass the city limits with him, vowing never to return.

The automatic closer pulled the door of apartment 3-F shut with a gentle click. Sprawled on its kitchen floor within was an empty, flabby husk: the intact sloughed off skin of a human body with its subcutaneous fats attached and decaying. Face vacant and collapsed like an abandoned mask, it still bore a few thin strands of hair dyed an unnatural shade of red.

Last Look Back



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Serial

The Skyring Derelicts Part IX - The Counterweight

by Peter J Gilbertson

The Middle Pacific Counterweight Station is the farthest point in space connected to Earth, but only because it has the longest antennae. It is one of several counterweight stations in orbit 22,000 miles away from Earth. Working in concert together, each is tethered to the International Satellite Ring System by trusses and rails of nano-diamond composites. The primary function of the counterweights is to maintain the stability and balance of the International Satellite Ring System's geosynchronous orbit over Earth. These stations also provide expansive solar sail arrays, deep space telescope and telecommunication functions, and asteroid smelting facilities; as well as housing and amenities for dozens of human and drone workers.

Now it had all been abandoned by humans and drones alike, except for the Orbital Space Marines.

Mohamed Blackbear looked out the portal through his pan-optics helmet - now fully functioning along with their orbital assault uniforms since the death of Krieg. He watched the last automated cargo pod depart on the magnetic levitation rail system. Like most of the machines above the atmosphere, it was solar powered and possessed advanced artificial intelligence. Yet, the smart cargo pod was still indifferent to its impending doom should Alpha squad's prisoner exchange not go according to plan. It continued its descent, providing evacuation services along the nano-diamond trusses and calculating its return time and maintenance requirements in the event that Mo and his team succeeded in turning Rondo over to the Xoidian emissaries.

Alpha squad sat in the observation lounge where the station workers would usually stargaze, or watch sports. The latter group argued over whether to watch the Terra League Games or Zero G Sports. Regardless of why they came, every worker, if they were there long enough, would gaze down at Earth (or up at the Moon) and think of home, but most of the time it was a loud and boisterous room.

Now the lounge was silent.

Threat opportunities existed inside and outside of the counterweight station. Uncle Samantha kept them posted of the activity outside their scan range. But she had nothing to report.

All of Alpha stood on guard in their functioning orbital assault uniforms with their tandem round rifles loaded and ready, scanning through the windows and down hallways with their pan-optics.

All except for Private Rondo. He was now their prisoner.

The rest of Alpha tried not to watch their former teammate fidget; he stared out the window at Earth, refusing to blink, like he was trying to memorize the planet's every feature. While he did this, Rondo rubbed the orange fabric of his prisoner uniform between his fingertips. Sometimes he'd rub his cheek along his shoulder or break the silence by licking his teeth or taking a deep breath through his nose and holding it. Eventually, the Marines did succumb to temptation. Each had a window open in their pan-optics display focused on Rondo, looking for signs and clues and wondering how in the hell he had fooled them all into thinking he was human.

Mo scanned through the visual displays of his squad optics and broke the silence.

"At ease everyone. Not much we can do if we're double-crossed and they do throw a meteor at us. Relax, but stay alert. Any last requests, prisoner?"

Rondo sat up in a way that reminded Mo of when he'd been caught stealing cookies from Great Grandma Blackbear's window sill.

The prisoner shook out his wrists, still locked inside the high-security shackles. The tungsten alloy bar separating his arms prevented Rondo from massaging them.

But that didn't stop him from flashing his familiar smile.

"Now that she's safe, I could go for a couple of those beers Ria owes me."

The rest of Alpha chuckled. Bravo had managed to escape the jettisoned compression corridor. All of the Space Marines had trained for every scenario, even a decompressed docking chamber tumbling into the atmosphere. Vrett had manually disengaged the rescue rocket from the spinning corridor and regained power after plummeting over fifty miles. He was then able to pick up every member of Bravo squad in freefall.

Nguyenson went behind the bar and filled two clear pouches with amber liquid.

"Sorry, it's not carbonated," he said and handed Rondo both bags. "You deserve the real thing, back on land. Where you belong."

Rondo nodded and said, "I'll take what I can get."

He held the pouch's long straw up to his lips, took a long sip, said, "Thanks, Sergeant" and gave the best salute he could in his shackles.

Nguyenson returned the salute and turned to the rest of Alpha.

"Let's make a security sweep, Alpha. I think we can cover these two from outside the door. Let them say their goodbyes."

The rest of Alpha squad grunted and nodded. They stood and took turns saluting and thanking Rondo for his sacrifice before floating out of the lounge until Rondo

and Mo were alone.

Mo took off his helmet and sat next to his friend and prisoner. Both of them stared out the large window.

"Got any last words, Alpha Rex?"

"Think they'll find a way to change you back?"

Rondo shrugged.

"Not likely. They'd have to find another trained devouring pod with a birth defect. Mine died after I took this human form. The pods were rare and unique to my planet. Plus, they were a closely guarded secret. And that was before Kreig ignited my planet's atmosphere. Nothing survived."

"Couldn't they find other ways?"

"Guess so," Rondo said and took another sip, and then looked over at the moon. "I would've liked to have a place in the lunar pueblos. I can almost see them from here. You ever been?"

"Just for training, like you."

"I think it might be nice. Dusty and dry, I hear, but quieter. Remote with a great view."

"I grew up around dust and dryness," said Mo. "Stick to the bayou where you allegedly came from. A swamp rat should wanna go back home to the palmettos and mangroves or whatever, right? Didn't you do any character research?"

Rondo chuckled.

"I did come from there, you know. My genetics had to be tied to a likely family lineage. That's how I passed all of the tests. Blood. Skin. Retinal scans. As far as they were concerned I was an unregistered orphan bastard from the South. One hundred percent human."

Mo nodded and took another sip from his pouch.

"The way you acted, your criminal backstory, I never thought we could be friends."

"Is that what we are, Mo? Friends?"

Mo looked up at the Moon and took a long sip of beer. He squinted and stared at the sharp contrast of light and shadow along the craters. Then he got lost in how the regolith gleamed nearly pure white against the rays of the yellow sun and then immediately became impenetrable shadow. He studied the fine lines across the face of the moon, the great meridian across the Moon that connected and separated lunar day and night and then focused on the darkness existing within the craters surrounded by light until the gurgled sound of his pouch's emptiness startled him.

He looked at the flat beer bag in surprise, then turned to Rondo and said, "Need a refill?"

"Of course," said Rondo. "What were you looking for?"

"Nothing," he said and took the empty pouch from Rondo's hand and walked over to the refill station on his soft magnetic soles. "When will we know when it's done?"

"Sam will tell us. The deal was they destroy the planet killer asteroid first and then I am to be turned over. We probably won't even see it. No explosions. Just a bloom of small particles against the sun. The cleanup, however, will be quite the spectacle."

Mo nodded, then asked, "What's it like traveling out there among the stars?"

"Lonely."

The two men remained silent for a long moment staring at nothing.

"I could go with you."

"You could," said Rondo. "But you won't."

"I won't."

"Then what's the problem?"

Mo thought about it and finally said, "I've lost ... we've lost friends in combat. But I've never turned a friend over to the enemy."

"You've never had an extraterrestrial criminal on your team wanted by the authorities in other solar systems before, either."

"How can I be sure about that?"

Rondo laughed. "Trust me, I checked."

"I did trust you. And now here we are."

"You're going to need therapy."

"And more beer."

"I thought you hated this flat, orbital stuff?" Rondo said.

"There's a lot of things I used to think were true." Mo sat next to his friend. "What are they going to do with you?"

"Put me in a very bad place where many of my enemies are kept."

"For life?"

"Yes, but my life might not last that much longer."

"And you chose this. All of this! You turned yourself in by revealing yourself to the Federation. We could have stopped the asteroid."

"Maybe."

Another silence hung over the room. Mo looked up and saw through the lounge's window that Nguyenson was talking to Ria who was trying to shove her way past him.

Apparently, she wants to say some last words too.

"But we wouldn't have stopped the next one or the one after it," Mo admitted.

"We probably wouldn't have seen it. We didn't even see this one!"

"Don't beat yourself up. They used stealth tech to hide it."

"You could have stayed here! We could've kept you imprisoned on the Dec."

"Maybe."

Mo and Rondo paused to drink and watch Ria aggressively point her finger and yell at them behind the soundproof glass until their pouches gurgled.

"Refill?" Mo asked.

"Of course," Rondo said and belched.

His terrible burps even smell human.

"Maybe I'll come back, Mo. My war is over, Kreig is dead. But there are a few other beings I am eager to encounter. If I succeed, maybe I'll be sent to a different off-world prison."

"Maybe I'll visit. Or come bust you out."

Rondo threw back his head and laughed. "Man, I never thought we'd be friends."

"Is that what we are?"

"Yeah," said Rondo. "Never thought I'd have an extraterrestrial as a best friend."

"Ditto."

"Stealth asteroid detected!" Uncle Samantha reported and then just as quickly announced, "Asteroid neutralized. Micrometeoroid debris field detected. Interceptor drones deployed."

"Now what?"

"The Xoidians will work in concert with the Counterweight drones to clear the debris."

"How long will the clean-up take before they can approach?"

"Not long. Maybe ..."

"Maybe what?" asked Mo.

"You could come with me."

"I won't."

"You won't."

"But go on."

"If you ever found my devouring pod and nursed it back to health, it might reward you."

"I thought it was dead."

"You used to think a lot of things."

"I'd need a ship."

"You'd need a lot of things. Just a thought. Now, let's watch the spectacle."

Mo and Rondo turned around and in the lounge and watched the concerted efforts of dozens of Counterweight and Xoidian drones swirling and spiraling around in the blackness of space. Red laser beams fired with pinpoint accuracy, vaporizing the field of micrometeoroids off in the distance one by one. Over an hour passed before it was safe for the ships to dock.

"They're here," Mo said quietly a moment before the enormous Xoidian mothership emerged from the blackness of space. Though it overshadowed the counterweight station, the ship maneuvered through space with ease and gently docked.

Soon a battalion of the beaked insectoids with leather wings appeared outside the lounge. Nguyenson and Alpha squad allowed them to enter and armed emissaries marched into the room.

Rondo stood up and walked past them before they stopped.

Over his shoulder he said, "Later Alpha. Before you get any more answers, you gotta know what to ask."

Rondo proceeded down the hallway, escorted by a squadron of Xoidians. Mo, the rest of Alpha squad, and most of Bravo saluted him as he passed by. The prisoner continued on down to the Counterweight's hallways until he reached the compression corridor connecting and separating the station to the Xoidian mothership. Rondo paused to look up at the moon. He lingered a moment as if studying something on its face until he was shoved in the back. All of Alpha and Bravo took a step forward, but Mo held them back. Rondo glanced over his shoulder and smiled, then he stepped forward and disappeared from view through the milky folds of the extraterrestrial portal. No one moved until the mothership separated from the Counterweight station and departed into the midnight darkness of space.



A few days later, Mo went to see Dr. Nya Rowell in her laboratory.

"You packed?" he asked, even though he knew she wasn't.

"Almost," she said. "Why don't you say goodbye to your friend?"

"I plan on it," he said. "I gotta ask it a few questions."

Mo walked over to the large open vat filled with the mother batch of sentient slime mold and began nudging it with his fingers. The mold eagerly nudged him back.

"Why the New Everglades," Nya asked over the intercom.

"I told you," Mo said. "I want to see where he grew up."

"This is a secure line, just you and me. Why are we going there?"

"To find a new species of extraterrestrial vegetation."

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SciFanSat News

The Bartleby B. Boar Nomination



goes to

Wendy Maxon

for their work

Terror Sleeps Over

About SciFanSat

SciFanSat is a monthly e-Zine of science fiction, fantasy and more! We are open to fictional prose and poetry that shelters with the range of speculative fiction genres.

Full guidelines can be found on our submissions page, but in a nutshell, we are looking for and will accept poetry of 500 words and under, and prose in the following categories: Micro Fiction (100 words and under), Flash Fiction (101 to 1,000 words), and Short Stories (1,001 to 7,500 words). Each issue has a theme, and submissions for that month are encouraged to include or at least allude to it.

SciFanSat publishes on the last Saturday of every month. [Submissions](#) for the next issue open the moment the [current issue](#) publishes, and remain open until midnight on the next-to-last Thursday of the month.

Next Issue Prompt

SciFanSat

The Monthly E-Zine for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and More!

Issue 16
Theme is
Library



Submission Deadline Thursday, November 21st, 2024

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