

New Suns

The sight of a new sun never got old. It was the best part of the job.

Yob liked to park their harvester just outside the solar field and watch. Ancient texts talk about fire and Yob imagined it looked something like this, the bright orange reactions brought a sense of peace. Dark pockets drew their eyes, waiting for the eventual explosion. They could sit here and watch until all time had wasted away.

This time was special—a yellow dwarf star—it meant they could get closer. Harvest longer. No need to explain their long absence. Rednammoc Elitsnrut's long winded badgering played on a loop in Yob's mind, fraying the edges of this serene moment.

A few moments more won't hurt.

As Yob aligned their harvester to move into collection range, they noticed a blip on the radar. *Another vessel?* They had heard of this, rumors of contact with other harvesters in the early days of exploration. Other ships in space. The Doivxe had a protocol for what to do if they ever encountered other humans, but Yob had always considered that theological nonsense.

If there were others out here, why had they never been encountered before? Space was vast and the Doiv-xe had seen most of it. In fact, Yob remembered the day they hit the edge well. They had just been a child of five at the time, but it was a moment burned into their brain. The ship had shuddered and groaned so fierce, they were sure it was the end of days. Pain had lanced through their skull as the alarms screamed of impending dangers and intense red lights strobed. Then, everything was quiet.

Imaginations running away on me again.

It was probably just Elitsnrut sending someone out to check on them. Even though Yob always came back within acceptable parameters, always with enough energy to power the ship through to five more stars. They were the best harvester on the ship, so what if they liked to enjoy the beauty of their work? Most of the people back on the ship would never see something this magnificent this close.

Yob checked the comms channels...nothing. Strange. They stood up to move the orbital camera into focus, remembering at the last second to not stand fully erect. *Whoever designed these harvesters must have been unnaturally short.* Yob was struck by a familiar sight as he narrowed in on the new vessel. Another harvester? Impossible.

That didn't look like any of theirs. Yob knew every ship on Tekcor. The camera's controls slipped out of their now sweaty palms. Yob was sure they heard those same alarms blaring now and the red light on the comms channel seemed to explode in the cockpit. Their eyes were locked in, mind racing. Who or what was on the other end of that line?

The warmth from the sun never got old.

Light poured through the windows, Alex's skin prickled in response. He felt like he was back home, sitting poolside with a drink. Next to him a girl, maybe two. A perfect summer's day.

The hull reverberated and he was forced to open his eyes. A million miles of blackness filled his view. The sun, nothing but a speck. Alex maneuvered his ship for a better angle and closed his eyes again. Even out here in the asteroid belt, Alex had the sun.

A noise on the comms alerted him to a message from Greg, his commander. He was behind quota again. The message continued to politely inform him to get his "thumb out of his ass" and go harvest.

Well said, Greg.

Alex muted the comms, rubbed his temples, and blasted towards the nearest asteroid. Suffice to say, he hated this. Each rock was the same. Just mine, eat, sleep and repeat.

He wanted to quit but he didn't have a whole lot of options. Nope, it was either the drill or the eutho. Not ready to die, he mined the rock in front of him. A small little badge appeared at the corner of his screen when he was done.

Congratulations on your ten thousandth rock!

He had been sick of this job by the tenth rock. How the time ticked by. He continued to harvest, Greg seemed a bit more pleased and he hit his mark. Alex sat back in his chair, and turned on the tele-projector. Some lady spoke about the latest comp sim. Not like he would ever afford that.

He changed the channel and settled on some show about the foundries on Venus. He'd always liked Venus and wondered how they were able to colonize such a place.

An hour passed and the inky nothingness outside took its toll on him. His eyelids weighed down but the instant they closed shut, a blip sounded. Then another.

Goddammit Greg.

Alex looked at the comms, the last message had been received an hour ago. Besides, he had muted the comms earlier. Another blip, a little louder. Alex glanced at the radar. There was a small dot.

Impossible. He had never seen another miner out here. The miners were placed to make sure of that. But the radar only picked up other harvesters. It couldn't be anything else.

The blip came closer and closer. Louder and louder. A shadow passed over his ship and the cockpit cooled. His breath caught in his throat, Alex turned towards the window. Blocking the sun was a harvester. None that he had ever seen before. One he shouldn't be seeing.

His hand moved unconsciously to the comms panel and sent a request. It connected.

The only way it could have connected is if it was a similar ship. The idea of a spider-like alien with six arms and eight legs crossed his mind. But it couldn't be that. It had to be Greg or another miner.

Alex sat back, eyes stuck on the ship in front of him. He waited for the request to be answered.

The comms screen flickered on and Yob leaned forward, tension holding them erect. Beads of sweat still pooled in their palms and they found it hard to hold onto anything. Even the air they breathed felt stale.

Yob was shocked at how much the small creature resembled them. Bi-pedal. Humanoid. Far more furry though. Yob found themselves focusing on symbols in the alien's ship, symbols that resembled those in ancient texts. They wished now that they had paid better attention in history class.

"Saluton, Mia nomo estas Huligano," Yob said. They figured an introduction was the best place to start. The figure on the other end of their screen was grainy and wore a look of consternation. Best to alleviate their concerns. "Tio estas vi neniŭ malutil."

As the creature garbled out gibberish, Yob was convinced they had heard sounds like that before. Rudimentary language, they were sure. Obviously a creature in a spaceship is capable of higher thought. The niggling sense of familiarity lingered. At least the creature didn't seem dangerous. Yob's shoulders loosened and they sagged in their chair.

What did the creature want?

Those are some big eyes.

This was the first thought Alex had when the comms turned on. Aside from the eyes, the rest of the alien creature thing was kind of familiar. Two arms, two legs, a head and a body. The limbs might have been a bit longer than average. The hairless head was supported by a thin neck. In fact, it had no hair at all. Alex knew this too because the creature didn't have clothes on. A detail he wished he had noticed far earlier.

The second thought he had was how was he going to talk to this thing. He was spared the embarrassment of trying when the naked humanoid thing talked first. Alex recognised a few words from his Language and Culture programming as a kid. It sounded a little like Spanish. He only remembered how to say his name from the class and friend from a Modelo ad.

"Uhhh, Mi llamo Alex" he fumbled out. "Amigo", he said pointing at himself.

Those big green eyes blinked once. Alex knew there wasn't a shred of comprehension behind them. How was he supposed to talk with this guy? He knew this wasn't covered during orientation. Not that he had paid much attention anyways, so maybe it had been.

Alex tried again, this time with a bit more enthusiasm. Alex grabbed a pen and wrote his name on a piece of paper. He pointed at himself again, and then the card, then at himself and then the card. Each time, he pointed a bit more aggressively in order to get the point across.

The thing seemed to understand. It unfurled its long, four jointed fingers and wrote YOB on a screen. It pointed at itself, then it pointed at the screen. The creature had a name, It was Yob.

Of course it's name is Yob.

Yob watched the primitive creature in awe. The scan of its harvester came back and a wave of shock overtook them. This harvester was working *asteroids*. **Asteroids!** This humanoid thing had a ball of infinite power and it was neglecting it. For rocks.

A kernel of an idea burst from their brain and blossomed into action. Yob knew what they must do. What any good person would do with knowledge. They must share it. Their ship would only take what they needed, Yob had harvested enough for the next star on their path. The universe seemed so young here, there were vibrant stars everywhere.

All the ship's data, the specs, anything that could get them out of this stone age. Trembling with excitement, Yob had to compose themselves before dragging every file into a data blast. Everything they would need and Yob was even able to find compatibility instructions for that ship in their histolog. Seems this tech had a common ancestor. *Huh*.

There was a footnote in their courses, Yob recalled, how Terrans had once learned to harvest from the sun. It was a deity for many of them too. How silly. If it had helped their people so much in the past, then Yob could pay that debt forward for someone else.

The creature had continued its crude gestures in an attempt to communicate, but Yob knew that their time here was short. Too much longer and they'd risk someone else coming to find them. That would be too much. So they sent the data over and fired the ship's thrusters. Yob hoped that would get back to the asteroid farmer's ship and someone could make sense of it.

With a wave, Yob killed the video and started the journey back to their ship. The star's golden hue warmed them from the inside. They couldn't wait to see the next one.