

# ALIEN

## *From Inner Space*

*by*

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I never really know what it is, but I never feel alone. It was something, I remember it came over me when I was exactly eight years of age, then the youngest cadet ever to enter the space exploration program in the city of New Verona. The day before, I didn't so much feel alone, but I felt there was more of a void to be filled : something that I felt was the reason I was curious about outer space, the universe, and life in general.

The next day I said goodbye to my parents and got on the bus to go to the school grounds. The children on the bus, all minimally a head taller than I was, chattered in both amazed and definite excitement, questioning and projecting what they expected the program and their future lives to be like. The bus passed through cities, marshes, and forests, collecting the newly to be initiated from the remotest of places known to young man and young woman-kind on our planet. Places we had by now all been to see, hoping to see more beyond the sky's horizon, venturing deep into outer space.

At the end of the journey, we passed through the gates of our school, the bus parking behind an enormous orrery displaying the motions of the planets in the Nickbud solar system, an atom of the known universe to many species, the first other solar system known to mankind to have intelligent life. We hurried to get off the bus in a cramped row of kids, shoulder to shoulder, all trying to make our way out at once — "Let me through! Let me through!" — to be greeted by last year's cadets.

My curiosity turned out to be something else, not a void, for as soon as I shook Doozel's hand — he was a curious little creature, a humanoid from the Nobigone nebula — I felt fulfilled. The void was gone and I was at peace with what I was, where I was, and what I meant to do with my life. Doozel, I found out during our long conversations during our holo-adventures in the bare space recreational yard, had had the same experience entering the program, much like everyone else. It was something that had been and for as far as I now know always will be a part of the program's culture, something that joined all of us together. That day I was to be initiated by him in the academy and we have since then been friends.

Today is another day, for there is no sun that rises to

illuminate our children, no moon that beckons the oceans to rise, no dew to gather on the sweet honeybee as it so diligently collects its pollen at the break of dawn. It's just me, my crew, and our families looking out into the sparkling darkness of space as our ship ventures forward toward a blip on our electromagnetic radar. An anomaly, possibly a small rift in the space time continuum, the one thing we have been searching for ever since Sir Everglast of Whinnigold and Pook Tee Ook of the planet Sepa Eht-Fo three hundred years ago stumbled upon the possibility of its existence through the research of our intergalactic science council.

What does such a space rift look like, you might ask? The answer is that it doesn't look like anything, but it feels like everything, joining all opposites into one experience. You'll feel both a void and being fulfilled in the same part of your being. You'll feel both attraction and repulsion in every place of your being, not just physically but also your mind, in all directions at the same time. It will feel like everything that can't exist has just come into existence. It's both the purest and the most convoluted experience imaginable... Or at least so it says on the conclusion of three pieces of paper filled with math, uninterpretable by most human and alien beings, but understood by a silent agreement communicated by a single look of both Everglast and Pook. The conclusion they came to, was that it was both the end and the beginning of everything joined in one, containing everything and nothing, "Everything and nothing" being the only words they noted at the end of their calculations.

My fingers touch the soft fabrics of the arm rests of my chair, provided to us by the Aveletis, fabrics not unlike silk but stronger than titanium. They give but they never tear. We are not a battleship, but if necessary they will hold their own, offering us protection if we have to hide

behind them, but we can expect that if we meet our demise in battle one day, we'll be gone, but the fabrics remain, possibly as the last remains of our ship in outer space, be it blown to smithereens.

Not fully in reach, I look around me at my peers as they track their measurements, not just to analyze the possibility of there being a rift, but of all that we hope to discover in space : hidden planets, dark stars equally hidden because they only emit UV-light, microscopic space aliens, and quite simply the few specks of dust we encounter floating in outer space. A speck of dust may be but dust to the average beholder, but to science it can contain a most unexpected answer to any problem we face. We never know until we find it.

I feel a sparkle inside of me, something that was there before and that wasn't. A void, fulfillment, both at the same time. It's tiny, so tiny I'm not even sure it's there or that I want it to be there, but there was a sparkle a moment ago. I push myself back slightly, deeper into my chair, hoping to reach back to find it, but the ship has moved on hundreds of miles already, even before I can think of pushing myself back in my chair.

I lean forward, thinking I might have to catch up with it and Polu turns her head, *looking at me* with those very same beautiful brown eyes that struck me the day I saw her enter the school — a year later than me, a day younger than I was when I entered — *away* from the Dust Board as it was popularly labeled. Officially it was called the station for observation and analysis of minuscule objects and particles, but Dust Board was funnier, because it was the equal and opposite in excitement that it typically drew.

When I saw her enter school, I immediately stepped up to her.

People in our school always had a bit of a soulmate thing that every year would become bigger and better, adding new soulmates. She joined me and Doozel. We also introduced her to Equam "Bonzai" Balooza who had welcomed Doozel to his first year.

Bonzai was an oak of a little guy : strong as a tree and tiny as one can be. Cornians had had an interesting way to adapt to their unusually high gravitational fields. You should see him jump on our planet, Earth. We went and he tried and succeeded : the first flightless being to scale the Mount Everest in three steps. Cocky little rascal too, as he jumped down, he said, "Next year, I'll do it in two. Year after that, not just one to go up, but I'll jump over that damned mountain. You just wait and see."

We had them all aboard the ship, that's how crews grew in our school... And I married her of course... How couldn't I? Those beautiful brown eyes and one of the few people that could interpret Everglast and Pook's work. She never ceased to amaze me with her bright words and wit. Wit mostly enjoyed in private, that rivaled mine to the extent that I only found myself to be barely humorous, quite the opposite of what others thought me to be. Polu, I catch her eye and she catches mine, asks me, "Are you all right?"

I nod and I see her eyes sparkle. She told me that I always said her eyes sparkle when she saw mine do too. "I'm good," I say, "I think we're drawing near." She looks out the bow window, out into space. Stars pass by as she presses her desk's touch pad and all of the lights turn off covering the bridge in a solemn darkness.

Most of the crew feel it's one of those things that make you realize that you're there, alone in space. Darkness and nothing above you, below you, front, back, or on either side.

In the dark her pupils widen as do mine, as we stare out into space, but I see what she feels, what she senses : nothing. She perceives nothing out of the ordinary.

Her eyes widen and she feels her belly with one hand. She points and says, "It's not out there, it's —" pointing to her belly "— in here. I can feel it, but there's nothing to see. I get what the equations say, everything and nothing, but it's strange, because I would hope to see everything and nothing, but I can't, I knew I wouldn't but I wanted it anyway, but I do feel it...! And... It's so much more!" She turns the light back on. I can feel it too and say, "I know."

We all stare out the bow window and I ask, "How many more clicks?" Daisy Delorean, our navigator and tactical specialist, a woman always in time and before your time, checks her desk and reads, "Three clicks. Should I put on some mu- Oo!" She sits up straight and she's not the only one. All of the crew look around them, trying to find their bearing. I can only barely see it.

I can only barely see out of my eyes as fifteen-thousand lifetimes of experiences wash over me, ingraining themselves in my soul, but it's so much that I can't make any sense of it. Daisy can barely look at her desk and whispers, "One click..." We try to hold on to our seats. I don't know what washes over us, but I can see all others see it too. I force myself to look at Polu and I see her look back at me. I always knew she had specks of green and yellow to her beautiful brown eyes, but now her eyes tear up as these very same little specks oscillate, their size rapidly changing between big and small. She screams, "I can't control it!"

The ship comes to a halt. A mild shimmer of the light of the stars behind the rift gives away its location as it distorts spacetime and gravity, causing the direction of the light to

bounce between two narrow extremes. You can't see the rift, you can feel it, and you can see effects of the alterations of the spacetime continuum reflected through shimmering gravitational fields.

Wars, love, death, birth, being born, dying... It all washes over us in mere seconds. I manage to exclaim, "Get - us - out of - here..." It feels like a silent cry, but I can see Daisy's head twitch a little and back as she hears me and her hand moves to the navigation pane. She presses down and pulls back her fingers with all her might, an unsurpassed effort quickly overlooked because of the fact that there is no throttle, just a flat touchscreen.

I feel a mild jolt as the ship propels us into backward motion, but all is relative, so what does it mean to move? Plenty, I would hope, but the experiences don't stop. They just keep on coming : civilizations won and lost; species evolving, devolving, self-destructing, re-evolving — it keeps washing over me as if it all is one experience, forcing me to let go. I try to make sense of it, but I can't. I have to let it go. I scream, "Don't think about what you see or you'll go insane!"

Around me everyone stares blank ahead. The experience stops, but the memories remain and I feel like me, yet not me. I look at my hands and they are my own yet they aren't. I know who I am, but I feel like I'm something other than me too. It isn't the rift that causes the new experience, I *don't* feel everything and nothing. I *do* feel I'm me and not me. Something about me has changed.

Daisy halts the ship and checks her screen. "Captain? What am I looking at?" she asks. "Distance," I say and she looks at her desk again. It reads, "Five clicks, Captain. We're now five clicks away from the rift."

I don't *know* why I say it, I *feel* it, "We are not alone." We briefly look at each other in the ship, but we all turn inside. "It's all right, we've been watching you and studying you, but this was never supposed to happen," I hear both inside of my head and everywhere around me and in me. It's a foreign voice. We all have the same dumbfounded look on our faces. I ask, "Did we all hear that?" and everyone nods.

"Get me out of this hive," says the voice. I look around me, everyone else too, back and forth. "I think he means us. We're a hive? What does he mean by that?" asks Polu. We all hear it, "I'm stuck. I'm not supposed to be here. Get me out of here."

I look at my hands. They haven't changed, but everything I see I witness as if it has become undiluted, a clear and pure perception of reality, as if I don't just see what's right in front of me clearly, but also everything behind that. I can see my bones rest, my blood cells flow through my veins, cells in my body rest, divide, reorganize, die. I can even see every atom yet it's also the same reality I've always seen : basic, physical, colored through experience? I can see them both? Objective and subjective reality?

How can this be?

"We are one, but you are many... We weren't supposed to be made known to you and now we have merged. We're stuck in your plane," the voice lectures and we listen. Caitlin 'Booger' Atkins, always the woman of the hour when you're down to party, responds, "Stuck in our plane? Man, I'm stuck on another plane if this shit be real, y'all."

She also looks at her hands. Others look at their bodies. It's a whole new thing. "Booger, can you focus on your radiation readouts and tell me what you've got?" I ask. She does and looks around her, "Nothing we don't see. It's all

there, don't you see it?" I look around me and I do, no doubt about that. I can't deny it, it's the way it is, and state, "Truth." Booger laughs, "I be thinking truth and fiction be one."

The voice urges, "Just get me out of here," and I ask, "How?" The voice, although you would expect it to panic, stays calm, its tone, cadence, and its intensity never changing, "We aren't into mathematics and dynamics, we only witness what is. Our science is social, continuously ending and continuously beginning, every moment in time to us is both finite and infinite for us to linger there as long as we want. If you can separate us, we will both be stuck with you forever and separate again in every moment after that moment, as you perceive it, but before and after never are, I can only relate to what is. I don't get what you witness, I just witness it. Get me out of here."

Polu asks, "Let me just get this straight, you're from a parallel dimension that lacks the perception of time? In your perception there is no time?" The voice responds, "You seem to have a perception of how moments relate. We don't. The words you hear are words your minds shape based on my testimony, but even my testimony in a sense is a moment." Booger giggles, "Man, when my brother at home hear this he be going crazy."

"Captain?" Polu beckoned and I look at her. "I need pencil, paper, and an eraser," she says. I don't mind asking, "Is it okay if the eraser is attached to the back of the pencil?" and she replies with her beautiful smile and beautiful brown eyes, "Captain, you know it isn't." I can hear her friendly mocking chuckle as she finishes her sentence. "You know where to find it," I say. She replies, chuckling, "Aye, Captain!" and runs off the bridge.

"Why are you watching us?" I ask and the answer is instantaneous as in without *any* delay, which feels strange, since when no time passes, no thought passes, as we feel it. "Moments and time are both separate and the same, but how you experience past, present, and future, in our experience can never be.

"Why do we mean to be if we just are? What's the sense to just being? Is there such a thing as what you call purpose? We feel complete, because we are complete, but we have no sense of lacking," an extraordinary answer to an ordinary question. Where would I be, if I just was and had nothing to explore, no adventure to engage on, no purpose? And if there's no end to it and no beginning, would it be possible to feel, manifest hope, love, and loss? Is there meaning to what just is? It all feels so terribly... Static.

We wait, but not for long, and Polu runs back in, waving a piece of paper in her hand. "Captain, I've got it, but I also think I've got a solution for our friend!" she exclaims. "A solution? What kind of a solution?" I ask. She halts in front of me. "For teaching it time," she says, pressing the paper literally into my face.

I jolt back a little bit and take the paper. She lets go immediately so it doesn't rip. I look at it. "Get it?" she asks with a smile on her face, but the math is as complex as Everglast and Pook's, which is a thousandfold more complex than the way Newton wrote his Principia, and that man was right about everything, when it comes to physics anyway. He didn't write it the way he did, so we wouldn't understand. It was so complex, because that's what it is. We just didn't get it.

"No, I don't," I reply dryly. "I know, but I'd marry you again and again anyway," she says. "I appreciate the gesture,

but please don't mock us for having the kind of insight you have. What are our options?" I ask. "Not having Captain, for not having the kind of insight..." she says, hiding a smile. "Rub it in," I reply and gesture her to continue.

"At first I looked at closing the rift and what that would do. This will lead to our beings being separate again, like before, but then our friend that we don't just like to *keep* in mind but now actually get to *have* in mind would still not understand time. I've found a way that allows the rift to dissipate, which opens up the dimension of time to our friend, adding it to its being and the being of others of its kind," she said.

"What do you propose? Do we just fire something at it?" I ask. "No," Polu replies, "that would close the rift.

"We have to position ourselves in the middle of the rift. Before we do so, we need to acquire a very specific spin, rotating the ship around all three axes at specific angular speeds, allowing us to act like a catalyst to the local gravitational field, allowing the rift to dissipate into time... Or time into it, really.

"We can't do it by hand, but I have been able to formulate the equations for our navigation so we can preprogram it and let the ship handle it. Then we just have to see through it and figure out whether we can make it out alive."

I look at her, amused, my lips slightly tense, trying not to laugh. "I suppose you can see my eyes sparkle," I ask, "because that's what I see in yours..." She holds up the papers she has drafted. As she opens her mouth to speak, we all hear a voice ask, "Is that the answer to time?"

I reply, "No, the answer to time is time. You can't analyze it, much like you can't analyze color. You need to experience

it." Polu smiles briefly, "Quite right. Can I hand these to Daisy?" I gesture, "I suppose you can. I'm not quite sure what you mean by making it out alive, but that's sometimes also what we risk our lives for isn't it?"

Booger replies as Polu walks to Daisy, "I think she mean we be going insane if we don't know how to handle the situation and that might mean out here, we die," to which I reply, "Well, without any kind of insanity, the universe would be far more boring. Care to wager?" Booger lowers her head slightly, looking up at me from under her eyebrows, "Are you sure?" to which I reply, "I'm most definitely as we so eloquently prefer to put it, sure."

Booger reads the readings on her desk and says, "For real? Okay, my bottle of 2021 Dom Perignon against your 2019 Greybeard Heather Dew Scotch. If we don't go crazy, I offer you half of mine, you offer me half of yours. If we do go crazy, you offer me the other half of yours, I offer you the other half of mine. Deal?" I reply, "A fair challenge... Crew, let's get time, let's get lucky, let's get waisted."

Daisy hits the "Save"-button of the maneuver pane and states, "Trajectory locked, Captain : its duration, ninety-three point five-one-o seconds — per your initiative." I hold on to my arm rests, pressing myself back into my chair slightly as I look around me. My eyes rest on Polu. She notices but focuses on the bow window.

"Get ready everyone. On my mark..." I say and check left and right quickly. I barely raise my right hand from its arm rest and circle my finger in the air as I take the initiative -- "Mark!"

I quickly grab a hold of my arm rest again and brace myself as does everyone else. Daisy hits "Engage" and the ship spins up, causing a mild gravitational shift. For a second my

stomach presses against the outside of my belly, then it floats. Finally it returns to its proper place, where it enlarges for a fraction of a second as the up-spun ship propels toward the rift.

Looking out the bow window, the stars draw dynamically reshaping spirographs. "Spacey," Booger notices, to which I can't but reply vintage dry, "That's pretty much where we're at." Booger means to reply, but we're already in range for the rift to cause our minds to lose control.

Life, death, birth, love, and hate hit me full throttle, with every other possible experience and feeling you might have, yet it doesn't. All opposites unite. There's no describing it. I shout, "Whatever you do, don't try to make sense of it all!" to which Polu shouts back, "But did you or didn't you say that?" which allows me to reciprocate, "I do and I don't, but I do only love you, that's the one certainty I do have! There is no not loving you no matter what my senses tell me right now!"

Daisy shouts, "Just hang in there, Captain!" which is more difficult than you might imagine, because I do and I don't, and tears do and don't run down my face. I do and I don't know. Nothing makes sense, yet everything does. Nothing and everything, yet it's also the other way around.

"We're in place, Captain! Holding steady! Eleven seconds!" shouts Daisy. Alien races come into being and die out on so many parallel planes, all at once. The beginning is the end is the beginning. I'm losing it.

I can see the tears in my eyes distort reality, but at the same time I can see clearly through them and into everything. I close my eyes, but as closed as they are, they remain open in all directions. I open them again and press backward, gasping, tilting my head backward, hoping to catch some air,

a breath of the air that I'm already breathing. I'm living, I'm dying, I'm being born. My parents meet. I can see it, I'm there. "Thank you..." I hear the voice say, but it sounds different, like a whisper, like a release.

Everything suddenly looks normal, my experience uniform with my past experience and my future experiences not so much not known, but not relatable. We all look around at each other. Not a single crew member doesn't cry. The stars still draw their spirographs. Daisy hits a couple of buttons on her touchscreen desk and almost whispers, "Stabilizing the ship." The stars slow down and become distinct.

The bow window fixes its gaze on what seems to be the distant Cupla Nebula, a cold and seemingly impenetrable place on the exterior, but when you break through the cloud of ice particles you find a place beyond any imagination, with a single planet, no moons, and no stars. The ice refracts the light of all of the stars focusing it on the one point where the planet came into being, allowing it to come into being, and spawn life more resilient than any in our galaxy, with the utmost minimal temperature to sustain it.

The Cuplugs, as they prefer to call themselves, of equal size but even stronger than Bonzai, have proven me wrong after first witnessing Bonzai jump, in that I now do believe there will always be things and beings that will amaze me even more than what I have witnessed before. They're a friendly bunch since co-operation and respect of individual abilities is the only survival strategy that works on their planet. Fail to do so and your first day will be your last. They are born fully grown and, as they put it, they never die all alone.

"Trespassing heaven's gates might slightly equate the mild jaunt into being and not being at the same time like we just did," I say, thankfully breathing the air I breathe.

"Can't say I didn't dig that trip. You owe me Scotch, though!" Booger replied. "I say we share our Scotch and Dom with the rest of the crew. What say you, Booger?" I ask, to which Booger replies, "Booger's always ready for a boogie as hypothesized, tested, and confirmed on many an occasion as just now, *Capitao*."

Polu closes her eyes and I look at her. "Are you all right, my love?" I ask. "I was never in favor of certain daring endeavors, but considering we've been watched ever since we entered the program, I can't but imagine that we were witnessed in every single, shall we say, 'position' we found ourselves in," says she, looking at me with her beautiful brown eyes.

And we all look down, both in amusement and realizing that the definite sense of fulfillment is gone, replaced by a void, a yearning to discover more... More than the everything and nothing we have just witnessed. We are together and we are not alone, but ourselves.

*The End*