



"You are the Sun"

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They were aboard a ship? Going to the outer system? Which outer system? Ambrosius Aberdeen found himself panting, as if near a heart attack.

"We're staying on board, for a multi-year voyage. We're just throwing it all to the wind. Is that what you're saying?"

"Of course it's what I'm saying," Delph said. "Are you telling me you'd even think of considering staying off Saturn? We can hitch a free ride on an out-bound light-rider? And it's already our habitat?"

Aberdeen said nothing. There were too many positives attached to each of these points even to begin to formulate objections.

"Honestly Brosius. This is it. Our first omega chance since we left Mars."

The theory of the omega chance was that in space certain occasions offered themselves wherein one was able to change the entire direction and speed of one's life on a single turn. In Space it was usually best to do so. Small agents could be lofted enormous distances in spacetime for free or just as often for pay, if they were ready to drop everything on a moment's notice, and probably never return. In space, velocity, direction and speed were as radically negotiable as they were all-important.

"Brosius, this is a dream come true. A free ride to Uranus or beyond? No strings attached? On a real life light-rider? It'll be faster than you think. We can do something together again."

Aberdeen had never regretted leaving Mars. If the decision hadn't quite proven an omega chance, they were right to have left Mars when they did. As had been obvious to anyone who looked twice, the Martian ties to the concerns of Earth were too intimate for safety. And not long after their departure, the entire scene which gave birth to their music was forcibly extinguished.

But still that had not been the end of Do-Nothing-Aberdeen, their collaborative act. DNA fans were among the crews running the Lunar Martian circuit. They had already helped spread the music all through the inner system. Delphic Do-Nothing and Ambrosius Aberdeen found themselves offered passage to Saturn on a first wave freighter in exchange for weekly performances for the crew. They jumped at the chance.

Surviving off Titan for the next two system standard years, in a steamy, sweaty communal hub they were expected to do more to help than just play music, though that was appreciated too. After they adopted Lila in '42, their family won a lottery to take over an open habitat in the freehold at the Saturn-Titan L1-Lagrange, a prime stable location that AIs had also made possible in the 30's. Early to Saturn System, they found a healthy little community at the Hub with easy flies to most of the moons. Theirs was a lovely place with gorgeous Earthviews, though bare as bones. Now it was draped with living plants, flowers. Bees made honey and mushrooms connected the habitat's water system directly to the plants now. A gardener was still needed, but these days little more.

DNA still played music at Freehold parties maybe twice a year, and now and then over the W.I.G. or by and for themselves, and for Lila of course. She played the holoharp. Music was as important to their survival as live vegetation, simulated sunshine and reading. But they'd not released any tracks in years, and professionally they'd moved on to following their individual obsessions into vegitecture and spacecraft design.

Delphic Do-Nothing shook out his gray locks. They splayed Medusa-like into the zero gravity, shamelessly flaunting their survival. Delph was Ambrosius' senior by six years, the records stated so unequivocally. And though between them there existed those senses of egalite and fraternite that grow naturally among those who have shared the stage, the biome, the habitat, and for a few unspoken weeks a unisphere, he nevertheless in times of crisis tended to project the unfounded sense that his own superiority was not simply numerical. Yes, there had been days when the two of them, however improbable, had been lovers. No one knew about that, of course. Only Lila and he had sworn her to secrecy. Even now rejecting such histories, Delph's visage, personality soon to follow, inflated with that familiar separatist pride that had become increasingly hard for Aberdeen to bear.

And there was still a pulse of worry. "What about Lila?" Aberdeen whispered, as if they were being eavesdropped upon. For all he knew they might be.

"Certainly Lila's gotten the message, same as we have. She receives all urgent communication inside there, as you know."

"I want her confirmation before I commit."

Their eyes met and held, Monocle permitting.

They were used to sharing unvoiced depths. They were both full re-gens, meaning they had, for whatever reason, given up their old lives and histories altogether. They knew today as much about their former selves as those selves had wanted them to know, that is to say very little. That they were both Earthborn was self-evident. Much of their memories, and perhaps their

genders, had been artificially implanted. Ambrosius could remember his first ride up in the C. Clarke Elevator back in 32 as if it were perfectly real. One of a specifically selected group of habitat bioengineering students invited to a conference in the Danish Domes, he went AWOL en route to the moon, jumping ship to join the the anarchist orbital hub called High Wichita, in those days in geosynchronous orbit over what had been Wichita Kansas.

Now, all these years later, had his own 1Gen "spacer consciousness" re-awakened? Certainly, yes, space felt clear and vivid again. Aberdeen tasted wonder at the vast possibilities unfolding for the committed and courageous out past Saturn. Things were so dull and spent off Saturn. Nothing even approaching the Jupiter system innovations were happening here. Even the rings were almost gone.

"Just send Lila a mail," Delph suggested.

"Good point." Supposedly messages got through to her within minutes in real time, even if posted in that world, by hawkwind or whatever nonsense, it took months. The only other option would be to force entry into her unisphere. Then they'd have to break her connection manually. This sort of shock to the system had never yet been necessary.

He raised mind-screen for text.

LILA? You got the news?? Can we talk? Discuss this? Delph thinks it's already been decided. Well, has it?

He sent, with emergency alert, then quickly added:

Please reply when you get this.

"She may prefer to immerse for the majority of the voyage," Delph said.

"But if there's no signal leaving a light-rider -- that as I understand it being part of the deal here--"

"Yes. The entirety of the received photoelectric velocity must be absorbed. We can send no signal. But signal can of course be received. All signals must be. The sails act as constant super-antennae."

"How the hell is she going to stay in her game then, if she can't send back?"

"Now you know it's not really a game. Be fair." Monocle went red, so Aberdeen knew Delph was reading his dialogue: "A WEIRLD -- Worldwide Environmental Independent Live-play Domain -- is a 4d MMORPG imaginary info-architecture, containing a virtual biosphere built bottom up, by and for spacers. The first WEIRLDS were Artificial experiences explicitly designed to relieve the claustrophobic, imaginative, and psychological stress on biological entities surviving, separated from a dying Earth. Collaboration with autonomous AIs in the 30s opened the so-called "psychoscape." The living theater made possible by the multi-noded brain net of the ten thousand plus users, became an idea-space for transitive VR. Though a fiction built out of a collective unconscious, the psychoscape is at least as solid a grounding as any reality we purport to exist upon, or inside, offering our own individual minds deeper, and more natural imaginative experiences than space can possibly provide."

Why attempt to stem the infotide? Of the two of them Aberdeen was the only one who had actually entered Lila's weirld, albeit only for a disorienting ten minutes his time (seven or so hours, her time). He let Delph continue.

"Most of them have fallen out of use weirlds lost most of their popularity wherever living was relatively easy. New imitations don't have access to the same AI programming that helped get the first ones off the ground. The early ones, like those along the Goddesses Network that Lila uses, are rather exclusive properties now, more regulated than many prefer. They are believed to have analog connection to the original biosphere. As I think you know, a long-term

"player" in those worlds may have a richer lived experience than any thing we tin canners dwellers can hope for. In the meantime, we know she can come out of the sarcophagus and perform ordinary tasks, while immersed. You've seen her playing tennis, or even getting snacks from the galley while sleeping in her weird. I don't see why we shouldn't let her stay in there until she wants to come out, at least."

"So if she breaks connection, would her character die? Be taken over?"

"Not at all. Though her ARP is theoretically no longer even located in her body, it will snap back to its origin brain when she logs on again (the intelligent, decentralized network is still running, one presumes) at voyage's end."

"Or at a convenient drop."

"Or at a convenient drop along the way, yes."

"Imagine spending the first four years of your adult life lucid dreaming in a fictional environment."

"She's isn't dreaming," Delph, or Monocle said.

Do-Nothing had won his beloved piece of prize 1Gen tech in a Poker Game in Parson's Crater in the 30s. He had taken great pride in keeping Monocle fully functional ever since. As a result he had never bothered to get implants like Aberdeen and Lila. He couldn't even log on to a weird like Aberdeen and Lila. Delph stayed fully informed and connected, but it all came through that single eye. By now the right side of his face had conformed to that oval, giving him even without Monocle the face of someone always just surprised. Ironic, since he hated being surprised.

"In fact from the player's point of view," he was saying, "we are the ones asleep. I doubt that you and I Aberdeen have fully begun to explore the nature of our own AEPs, to be honest. Auric Energy Patterns are more really us than anything else, but they're also transitory, fragile. The literal stuff of imagination."

"Say Lila was in there, and then, gods forbid, this ship was destroyed. Would her character stay alive?"

"Yes. The psychoscape permits the disentanglement of separate simultaneities. The AEP isn't limited to one timeline."

"But where is the brain experiencing that self still in the game?"

"Think of trees in a forest. When one tree died, the others could keep that stump and root system going. Psychoscape is the mycelium substrate between brains making such things possible. The old lab-grown AI's could program wave-entangled algorithms so that a perfect AEP can be held indefinitely in and by the brain net. And if the body is in a working sarcophagus, in a stress-suit, stationed on a biological feedloop half as hardy as the one you yourself have designed for us here, then Monocle says four years immersed could well be healthier than being out here."

Aberdeen wasn't convinced. He had never explained the whole thing to Delph, but he had been quietly disturbed on his only visit to the psychoscape. He'd gone at Lila's request once, to have their literature class there. They'd mostly talked about books and had argued, and he had let that color the memory in such a way that he had shelved it.

Accustomed as Aberdeen was to the stress-suit necessary for sarco-immersion, the smart carbon add-ons necessary for Goddesses Network seemed more than ordinarily intrusive, in his memory. A sort of mental exoskeleton formed around the body, with tendrils delicately invading every orifice. A hand-like protuberance grasped the genitals. And then came the sense of falling backwards into darkness.

But a globe appeared out of mindscreen. Part of the surface was observable, though most of the slow-spinning sphere was still an undiscovered blur. Five small moons circled around it, each more crackpot and peculiar than the last.

On the visible surface, only the silver gleaming sea and its coast seemed at all mapped. One sparkling peninsula gained special focus and detail. With a thrill Aberdeen found himself flying down just there, strapped to the back of a great bird. They were descending into a full scale reconstruction of a biosphere. He hugged his ride as if for his life, and he felt that creature living, full of warmth and strength.

They set down at the outskirts of what appeared to be a quiet, prosperous seaside port town. One felt particularly human in that fairylike world. But in a dreamlike way, a delay between thought and world caused the thick and fragrant air to lighten, almost as if it were some clear, anti-tactile liquid. A strange chill inside of him, the weird telling him he was cold. The golden light of the establishment he was approaching drew Aberdeen in such a manner that he realized he didn't even have control of the character he occupied.

He felt very much alive and real, but when he touched his own body, it was evident it wasn't quite skin, wasn't anything at all, a sort of imaginative casing projected from the weird on to him. His skin felt rubbery, like an s-suit that even covered your face.

The rule was anyone who entered casually like this into the weird must perform a peripheral service. He found himself bearing a sort of scroll-like tube imbued with the words Morfred, waterwoman of Kai, at the Sign of the Crane.

Delph had chuckled about that for some time; they still raised up the memory of Morfred, waterwoman of Kai out of the blue if the occasion seemed to demand it.

Sure enough the inn had a long-legged bird painted on the wooden shield that hung down over the open door. The look was medieval/fantasy but with a touch of elegance and simplicity.

The Inn had a small postal distribution hub outside. This consisted of a number of holes in the cemented wall, just big enough to slide a tube such as he carried through. One of these was labeled KAI. After delivering the tube there, he entered.

Inside, the "hod" or tavern sheltered a diverse assortment of characters, most he had to assume were not non player characters. The proprietor and his workers were serving a clear golden liquid from large bowls built into the very bar. He saw there were tables outside in the back. There a strong, short-haired young woman waved him over. In a sleeveless tunic of woven pale white leaves, she wasn't anything like Lila at all. Except for those gray eyes.

True, not even the same color, but he recognized them immediately.

All this made Lavasilver Froyce as she called herself, as real, and in herself, as he was. She was really different. That was the peculiar sensation. Lava apparently remembered the other world perfectly. She was extremely amused to see her dad in the form of this rough, hairy skinned courier at hod.

"What is this stuff?" He enquired about the sparkling drink that was handed to him.

"Special water. It's hard to explain. Like wine and cider but with some improvements"

They toasted. Ambrosius drank the sparkling brew happily enough. It tasted organic, and tingled as it entered his 'body.' He had the sense, and Lila confirmed it, that real nutrients were being simultaneously consumed by his corpus in the sarcophagus.

As they sat outside, on cleverly constructed chairs at stone tables, he started to appreciate the feeling of wind on the skin. But it felt strangely like a violation. Clouds passed quickly overhead, strange birds among them. Had the drink gone to his head? It seemed so. They discussed ancient Greek poetry, fighting about the Sappho reconstructions as the day progressed.

Somewhere in the silence that followed, she had mentioned she should be getting back, or her "family" would be worried. For a moment he'd smiled, thinking of Delph and himself, and the three of them at dinner, then realized she was talking about her family here, in the weirld.

Even if only in the game, it hurt him to think this family had more hold on her than he. Were there fathers there too? Or only mothers?

On the walk back to the bird that would take his character away, the precisely cut stonework of the city's lanes, the flowing water everywhere bubbling generously, the healthy but kind-eyed characters walking barefoot, in simple homespun fare, but each full of individuality and curious peccadillos. It all seemed too good to be true. He saw a scroll-table even, where a woman sold real fantasy books from the outer world -- A. E. Winnegutts for instance -- as if they were works of fantasy from this one. Not many books from this world he imagined.

She noted his negativity. "I meant to get you back early, Brosius. I'm sorry. Second sun is in the sky. I think that's what you're feeling."

He looked up and instead of a second star in the sky he saw what appeared to be, on the now visible horizon, an enormous yellow eye. A black orb had pupilled the low fat sun.

"That looks more like an eclipse."

"Yes," she said. "That's Zírka, a moon, in First Sun." A strange light shone in her eyes he did not recognize. "There's Second Sun." She gestured. "It's the only reason you can gaze upon First Sun at all." He followed her all across the sky to see a light circle, he hadn't noticed but now which was unmissable. It was edged with perfection, round in the sky like a shining hole or portal to a difference he didn't quite understand. The color itself, almost pink, almost green, baffled him.

"Second Sun is the source of all magic here." This seventeen year old smiled with something like pity at his ignorance.

As he more and more understood that light falling over the mimed natural beauty around him, he saw around things and possibilities that he'd forgotten, or truly never known existed in his own heart. Even to see weeds coming up through the ground under the open sky, the most overwhelming yearning had possessed him.

The next thing Aberdeen knew he was exiting the sarcophagus in his unisphere. Ten minutes had passed, but he felt as if it had been a lot longer.

The Hub's day-care gave all kids entrance to educational areas of the GODDESSES network. Lila had been playing Lavaliver for years. The extraordinary success of the transfer of the natural experience worried him. It was too good.

And to be honest, after, he'd found the weirld experience threatening him with a relapse into the harder days of the re-gen therapy at the Orangerie. It was all too rippling, and luscious. A psychoscape was built by a brain of networked unconscious brains; he knew that already. But on seeing second-sun he'd had the impression some of those brains were truly alien, artificial he supposed. Something was going on in there that he didn't want to, and probably couldn't understand.

Out here in spacetime, there was only the one Sun -- a certain nail-head of fire he'd become rather attached to over the years. Soon it would be getting far far smaller.

"But she is the Sun," Delph had said when confronted with some of this. "Like all of us." From there her 'lectricity lines!"

And they broke into their old hit.

"You Are The Sun" (Do-Nothing/Aberdeen)

You are the sun,
May you always shine.
You're the constant presence
To which all things incline.
From you all 'lectricity lines
You are the sun
And the light of my times.
You are the sun.
You stand for what is true.
Parabolic certitude
Makes my whole sky blue.
But it's me that's blue
Chasing you.

You are the sun
You shine my light
You are the sun
I am the night...

Oh why do you burn me
Why do you blind?
How do you unpack
Water and ti-i-i-ime?

You are the Sun (& once from the top)

Mark von Schlegell

PLUTOHEART

Virtual Composed Logs (2133-2055)