

Routine Survey 238.k15.74b.42

A Short from the New Worlds Universe

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Space tore open for just the briefest of moments to allow the small craft to return to the standard dimensions. Its white, featureless hull caught the light from a nearby star, gleaming with a brilliance not seen in this corner of the galaxy. Sleek and silent, it glided forward without any visible means of propulsion.

The one occupant, an amorphous, gelatinous organism by the name of B'Ol flowed between the controls in the cramped cockpit. Excited ripples danced across its surface as the ship's instruments rapidly charted the surrounding planetary system, processing data faster than comprehension allowed.

The ships navigation array confirmed the location of nine primary planets and several planetoids that were all right where they should be. B'Ol flowed over the controls, comparing the data with readings from many cycles ago by an earlier survey team. Adjusting for unaccounted stellar drift, it noticed one of the moons of the second gas giant was almost a full kilometre from prediction. Ripples of a different pattern spread across its now slightly greener jelly.

A yellow light cast an unpleasant hue through B'Ol's body as it flashed an urgent pattern. B'Ol caught some of the photons and spun them round idly for a moment while the ship confirmed the presence of something. Dispelling the light, B'Ol shifted into a higher position as the ship continued to assure its pilot that something was not as it should be.

B'Ol willed the ship to fold space around itself once again. It could have left the ship to continue its survey and gone itself, but space was chilly and dealing with the personal radiation shielding was always a chore. Besides, there was no real hurry.

The third planet in the system had one abnormally large and tidally locked moon. B'Ol stared at it through the ship's sensors for a long moment while the signal trace located more precisely. With elegant grace reflecting its occupant's arrogance, the craft descended toward the lunar surface.

The object in question was of similar size to B'Ol, a piece of mangled machinery. B'Ol's viscous form rippled with recognition. Scanning the warped metal and faded serial numbers, it confirmed its suspicions; debris from an errant ship traveling at standard FTL speeds. B'Ol retrieved the required information from home planet servers.

It could have been a groan that escaped B'Ol's dorsal gels as it glowed a faint shade of blue. After logging and confirming the record, the craft quickly vaporized the offensive item and turned upwards, returning to lunar orbit.

B'Ol had saved the best for last. The sentients of the green-blue planet had discovered how to use the electromagnetic spectrum to transmit information, a milestone in early development. Deep space arrays had detected this, and the planetary update mission had been requested. Bol had jumped at the opportunity, watching primitive sentients had always been a hobby, at least this time it received official sanction.

Parking the craft in a stationary orbit above a more populated urban centre, B'Ol finally left the confines of the ship. It hesitated for a moment, anticipating the thrill of the next few minutes and deciding on the best way to savour the experience.

B'Ol's mass expanded and divided in the space behind the ship until there were eight distinct copies. It gave each a copy of its intellect and tasks to perform. After setting the ship in

autopilot with a casual thought, B'Ol descended to the surface, eager to meet these 'humans.'

Procedure must be followed. Remaining unseen and unsmelled, B'Ol's component parts each found a different corner of this small world to explore.

Information began to flow to his core consciousness like a torrent of stellar plasma. After taking a moment to learn their languages a few headlines jumped out.

"Announcement of the Royal Betrothal," a Monarchy in one of the countries, how quaint.

"Independence is granted," by that same country for another on the opposite side of the planet. 342 million lives with a little more freedom, which was a promising sign.

"400 million in aid for Turkey and Greece." An interesting move, and on misguided principles. The intent was there, but the execution was... insufficient. B'Ol lowered the species' ethical quotient by a few tenths of percent, and a few more when it read about the destruction of Heligoland. After so much recent destruction, it appeared the humans had not tired of it.

"International Monetary Fund." Others like it as well. There were early signs that the species was beginning to work together. Ba'athism had a few ideals along the right lines. It was clear that a world reeling from war had forged new ideas and was attempting new philosophies. The distribution of wealth was not out of the ordinary for a species of this level of development, and B'Ol thought it likely that they'd begin to fix this in the coming cycles. Something more unique caught its perception and it shifted its focus to a clone residing in a warmer climate.

"Captured flying saucer on ranch in Roswell." B'Ol clones across the world undulated rhythmically in unison. Finding the human responsible for this, B'Ol observed the creature closely. Observing neurological function in early cultures was normal procedure, this person would be as good a choice as any.

As B'Ol observed the man's thoughts unfolding, the experience reminded it of how slowly consciousness could operate and yet maintain a semblance of sentience. Executive function over base impulses despite chronic latent emotional dysregulation, this was typical and matched the previous findings. Their brain function had remained unchanged despite the rapid progress of knowledge.

B'Ol's ship signalled the completion of the survey, and after coalescence, it re-entered the cockpit in orbit above Earth. It was time for a closing statement and choosing how to summarize this world in a few lines would be a challenge.

'Mostly harmless to all but themselves, the humans of Earth display typical behaviours for a class 0 pre-contact civilization. Early globalization and the beginning of industries fuelling a population explosion, without unity of purpose, are likely to cause degradation of natural resources and social unrest in the coming cycles. Continue protective quarantine. Contact not advised. Recommend default survey interval.'

Stretching a protuberance through the control manifold, B'Ol hesitated before submitting the survey data and report. It was fine. Shifting to hues of purple, and emitting modulated infrasonic waves through the cockpit, B'Ol pushed the ship back into the void.

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