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6EQUJ5



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Grimsby glanced over his shoulder. It always took too long to set the dials. Sweat broke out on his forehead as the needles on the power generator grew steadily higher. *What if someone noticed? Too Fast. Too Fast.* His hands shook as he set the power dials back to a lower setting. Nervously he glanced around the room. He leaned back in his seat, trying not to make a sound. He could feel his blood pounding in his ears.

“Grimsby, what are you doing?”

Grimsby’s heart raced as he turned to see the watch commander in the doorway, flanked by two black-uniformed security guards.

“Just running up the equipment for a signal strength test, sir.” He shifted in his seat.

The watch commander waved off the two security guards and strode up to the control panel. “You got the frequency set at 1420 megahertz. It’s not proper procedure. Nobody uses this for a test Grimsby, nobody. Didn’t you learn anything in radio school? It’s the natural emission frequency of hydrogen.” The commander did a rapid staccato tap with his foot.

“Yes, sir, I know.” Grimsby blinked several times. “But not at this level. I was working the generators up to a full power burst. As high as I could get it. Maybe thirty times more powerful than would be normal.”

The watch commander narrowed his eyes. “Whatever for? You know sending out such a message, on this frequency is forbidden.”

Grimsby’s hand started shaking again. “I was going to aim it at one of the old communication satellites. One of the ones we don’t use anymore.”

The watch commander shook his head. “You still haven’t told me why, Grimsby.”

Grimsby rang his hands together. “Well, you see sir, I was going to aim the signal at one of the ground receiving stations.”

The watch commander crossed his arms. “Which one?”

Grimsby mumbled.

“What are you saying, lieutenant?”

Grimsby had stopped sweating now, but his face getting warm. He could feel the wet rings under his armpits. “The university, sir. The one they use to search for alien life.”

Grimsby noticed the watch commander roll his eyes. “Whatever for?”

Grimsby tongue was dry. He licked his upper lip. “Their grant is coming up for renewal in a few months and they haven’t found anything. There is this friend of mine and he’s going to lose his ...”

“How’s that going to help us, Grimsby?” the watch commander interrupted. His face turned to a scowl, almost disdain. “If they get more money, it means less for us.”

Grimsby straightened up. "I don't think so. sir. You see, if they get more money, we can go to government appropriations and say, look you gave the alien hunters more money. They'll be embarrassed, and they'll give us whatever we ask for."

A smile crept across the watch commander's face. "Good thinking, Grimsby. Go ahead and send your signal. I'll be back tomorrow night, so you can give me a full report." He marched out of the room, boot heels clicking on the floor.

Grimsby let the air he was keeping in his lungs out with a gasp. Sweat started pouring out of his head. He whipped the perspiration off the console as he adjusted the targeting dials. He gave a silent prayer he was alone. Any observer would have noticed he was not pointing the signal at any satellite, but at a dim G-type main-sequence (G2V) star, casually referred to as a yellow dwarf. *Levy needs to get a real signal. If you want someone to say hello, you need to say hello first. That's what Levy always claims.* The astral-boys in D-section had identified the third planet as a possible source for alien life. Officially it was LJ-5731965, but the astral-boys tended to refer to it by its nickname, Earth.

Grimsby pressed the button.

"That should wake someone up."