

We Are All Aliens

"This is Alien 3, do you copy? Over?"

"This is Alien 4, I hear you well. I don't think we need the walkie-talkies, we're right next to each other. Over."

You should be more romantic, she spoke with a faint smile. In the small orphanage located in a semi-urban area with no streetlights to erase the night out away, there wasn't much things for entertainment. So the boy and the girl, during summer nights, would climb the mountain with an old telescope and toy walkie-talkie.

"Tonight's a good night for stargazing, Alien 4."

"Yeah, not a little cloud in sight. No need for the telescope. There's Altair, Vega, Deneb..."

As the boy named each star, the girl pointed them out with her finger. Eventually, her slowly moving finger stopped at one particular star.

"And there must be Mars."

The boy knew what that star meant. Mars, the star containing the girl's dreams and despair.

At five years old, the girl joined the boy's family. She was told her parents had taken a brief trip to the place above the sky. She believed she would return to her parents' embrace the day they got a new home on Mars.

The day she realized that Santa Claus was just the orphanage's security man, the girl wept more sorrowfully than anyone else. Seeing her, the boy silently vowed to stay by her side.

"I'll go. There might not be Mom and dad there, but..."

"Yeah, it would be nice if you could."

"It's not 'nice.' I will go."

Jab jab. The girl poked the boy's side with her finger, a sign of dissatisfaction for meddling in someone else's dream.

"I didn't say anything."

"Your face says it all, doesn't it? You were trying to say it's impossible in this rural place, in this situation, in this school, right?"

Slap! This time, it was a slap on the boy's back. The girl's palm left a stinging, deep pain.

"Stop hitting! It really hurts now."

"Guys should endure a bit. And..."

The girl looked up at the sky again.

"Just because it doesn't fit other people's standards doesn't mean it's impossible, right? We're aliens in this world, anyway."

"Right, that's true. We've already deviated from the orbit."

"Don't say it like that."

The girl pinched the boy's cheek and turned his head towards the sky.

"We are not deviating, it's just a different orbit. My orbit is already heading toward space. I was born to go there. When I look at the sky like this, I hear Mars calling me."

Please don't talk like that. It feels like you'll leave me behind alone. That was the boy's true feeling. Just as the boy was the girl's last family, the girl was the only family the boy had.

But he couldn't say it like that. The name 'Mars' was already a curse for the girl. They had more than decades to live together, but the girl would never escape from that name. This clever girl would leave everything behind and move forward in the blink of an eye. Still, the boy promised himself to fiercely chase after her. He had vowed to make sure she wouldn't feel lonely anymore.

"Are you listening to me? You seem lost in thought."

"Right now...I'm thinking about you."

The two closed eyes. The boy bowed to her and the girl quietly tilted her head.

Deep in the dark mountains, in the quiet night sky, the falling starlight, the fading crescent moon, warm lips, unforgettable memories. They were all aliens.

Twenty years from those unforgettable and precious days. The young boy who had grown into a man was participating in a conference and concluding a Q&A session. As the Q&A began, all of the participants directed questions, filled with skepticism and uncertainty, toward the man.

"According to your paper and today's presentation, you introduce an ideal substance called Draxium. It seems to have ideal properties, with the only problem being its inaccessibility. The exact definition of its properties and synthesis method is not precisely defined."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I haven't established a replicable system yet. I'm trying to send samples to as many institutions as possible for validation."

The professor, upon hearing the man's response, shook his head in dissatisfaction. What he truly desired wasn't just a small sample but a method of synthesizing the substance.

Next, a voice arose from a gathering of corporate figures. A woman, the CEO of a renowned

company addressed the man.

"Thank you for your insights. Your company is one of the most prominent startups in our industry. However, it seems the expectations surpass the scale of the company. Not just as a company CEO, but even as a mania of novel technologies, it's quite disappointing. Are there any plans for IPO or investment?"

"Thank you for your interest, Mrs Michelle. Truthfully, I haven't decided what to do. Increasing the capital is one thing, but whether it will help achieve my goal, I'm not sure."

The discomfort of the corporate figures was obvious. They were global executives or major investors in renowned companies. In contrast, the man's company was a small-scale venture surviving solely on bank loans and minor support plans.

"I understand concerns about technology leakages, but we aim for mutual growth through healthy collaborations."

It was a subtle message left by the woman representing corporate figures, suggesting a reconsideration.

"Thank you again. But I have another goal."

"A goal? Collaboration with other companies might help you achieve your goals."

The attendees nodded in agreement with the woman's words, but the man couldn't align with them.

"Oh, my goal is actually to send a manned exploration mission to Mars."

There was a murmur among the attendees. The man had participated in a space development project five years ago, the project that sent his partner into space. After an inexplicable failure, the man left the government, but his career hadn't been nullified.

Some sneered at him dreaming of hollow visions. Others were puzzled, wondering why he hadn't stayed in the government if that was the case. Some expressed pity for losing a loved one and losing his mind.

"I'm aware that it sounds awkward. But please, consider me a romantic of this field who's striving to fulfill the dream left unfulfilled."

He smiled. He found it quite a decent joke on his part, but the chairman's reaction wasn't favorable. No one knew what to say to a man speaking of the deceased.

"We've always been outsiders in this society. Without each other, we understood nothing. Without each other, we did not mean anything. I'm like a bird missing one wing now. Even if I block my ears, I hear the voice calling me. When I close my eyes, I see that lovely smile. I can't stand being alone in that cold place. So, I'll go and bring back Sophia."

The man poured out his incomprehensible pain. Those attending silently listened to the man's declarations, resembling a gathering at a religious ceremony.

"But ladies and gentlemen, still, I'll make a promise. I won't go alone. That isn't our dream. I'll take you all to Mars instead of her. I'll make our society step into the next phase. I hope everyone here remembers this moment. It'll be recorded as the beginning of the space age."

The man set down the mic and left the chair. There was a vague round of applause, showing understanding from a few who had comprehended the man.

"Hello, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your time."

"Hello."

Nineteen years after the Mars Declaration, the man, now with a head of white hair, was

seated in a studio. It was the first public appearance since announcing the impending launch of a manned mission to Mars a week earlier.

Accompanying the announcement of the launch, the man unveiled what he had been preparing. The first item that gathered attention was the ignition device for terraforming Mars. And next in the spotlight was the Platinum Disk, a storage device labeled as the successor to the Golden Disk carried on Voyager probes. This massive encyclopedia contained humanity's knowledge from basic arithmetic to the latest astrophysics.

"Even with the recent announcements, the world is still buzzing around you. Today, I'd like to talk about something you've never publicly disclosed before."

"The Platinum Disk?"

"Yes, that's correct."

The man was quite straightforward making it smooth to have an interview with him.

"You have worked quite a lot, and yet, you've kept that hidden. It must have been quite challenging to focus solely on what you presented last week. Is there a particular reason you add such an extra burden on your project?"

"I didn't struggle as much on this. If you insist, inviting specialists was the task, and when they're well taken care of, they're more than willing to participate."

The man pinched his thumb and forefinger into a circle. His company was the largest corporation globally, and he was its owner. The reporter wondered how much he might have made from it.

"Still, that's hard work. What meaning does it involve?"

"It's the Ark."

"Ark?"

The reporter questioned in bewilderment.

"Yes, the Ark of human knowledge. A repository left for access if humanity doesn't survive on Earth in the distant future. It's structured with the hope that it might even perfectly replicate other species and our civilization using genetic information."

As the man spoke, the reporter's expression grew serious. Originally expecting an answer like "to show Earth to a lover," the response held a different weight. It was a solemn warning that despite all efforts, Earth might indeed be facing destruction.

The environmental changes on Earth were happening at a faster rate than the development of man's technologies. There were only a few places left where humans could live without external suits or body modifications.

"I need a moment to think, and I didn't get to the next question. Thank you for the answer."

Recovering conscious by a sign from the director, the reporter moved on to the next prompt.

"Some are concerned that there's an excessive amount of information. If this data were obtained by an extraterrestrial civilization, wouldn't it pose a risk to Earth?"

"An extraterrestrial civilization? So, you mean aliens? Who's actually worried about aliens? I've never talked about aliens."

No one else held as much information about space as he did. His company had never officially confirmed the existence of extraterrestrial beings. Discussing aliens felt like a joke.

"There were similar discussions during the launch of the Voyager Golden Disk. But we're heading towards Mars now. If there's a life form capable of interpreting the data, they'd be at a similar level to us. If there are such beings on Mars and they haven't been discovered yet, then

this thing would be so advanced that such data would have almost no meaning."

The man spoke, his smile unwavering. He implied that if such great beings exist, the reason Earth remains unvisited by extraterrestrial life forms is due to their lack of interest. While there were many possibilities to discuss, the man knew this wasn't the place for that.

"That's right. In fact, there's one more reason. You probably already know it."

Though this was a space for showcasing corporate technology, it wouldn't be proper to continue on a solemn theme. After considering an alternative for a moment, the man decided to address the story the public wanted. Even if it was an inevitable but unwilling topic to bring up, there was not a single hint of lying in the man's words. He swallowed the slowly emerging tears and spoke in a choked voice.

"Wait for me, Sophia. I'll be there soon."

It was one of the most focused moments in later interviews.

"Congratulations. You've officially become the first human to successfully land on Mars. This marks a new beginning."

A message was transmitted into the man's mind as he took his first step on the Mars

The man responded in silence. In truth, he didn't need to convey the message. The speaker was the personification of the auxiliary module connected to the man's brain.

"Chairman? Have you finished your appreciation? Can we disembark too?"

"Sure, everyone can start your tasks. I've got something to find."

The man replied to the crew that had accompanied him.



The man left the departing crew and headed for the wreckage of the Genesis, an unmanned craft that lost communication due to an unidentified error 25 years ago during landing. The preserved condition of the craft was proof of its time spent in a world different from Earth.

"Look under here. Here must be the point, right?"

As a fallen sheet of metal was removed, a hole large enough for a person to enter was revealed. It was a gap previously identified through unmanned probes.

"Scans don't work here. Be cautious. I am not sure of the depth."

Although the auxiliary module issued a warning, the man descended into the hole without hesitation, seemingly already aware of what to do.

"It's okay. It'll be fine."

The man descended almost recklessly into the expanding hole, which widened to form a cave-like space.

"I think we're almost down. Detected echoes from below."

The module's words were soon proven as the bottom emerged. The man realized he had reached a vast, wide space that was hard to outline even with the light from his spacesuit.

Exchanging warnings and responds with the module, the man surveyed the surroundings. His calculations deduced that the distance from the spacecraft couldn't have been too far.

"Over there... over there."

Spotting a form in the corner of his vision, the man urgently rushed toward it. Despite the inexplicable gravitational difference, which held his ankles, there was nothing bothering him. It was the moment he'd dreamt of for 25 years.

As the light got closer, the figure began to emerge. Her right arm was more of a tentacle than an arm, her legs had adapted into reverse joints. Her skin bore a pale cyanic color devoid of warmth, accentuating the prominent crimson veins. Thin hair grew on the bat-like wings protruding from her back, similar to the features of the mythical creatures.

However, she was the girl. The man quietly embraced the girl. Light shone behind her. There were two forms, human-like but not human, standing together. The man locked eyes with one of them. Though significant, this wasn't that important. The man closed his eyes and whispered to the girl.

"You're not alone now. It's okay."

I'm sorry it took so long. I won't leave you alone from now on. It felt like the girl was moving a little. As if to assure she wouldn't be left alone, the man tightened his arms around her.

"You've come back to me. I don't want anything else if you're here."

"Unidentified object. Correction: The movement of an unidentified creature form was detected. Destination expected to be the Evangeline."

The module delivered a matter-of-fact message. Everything was going according to the man's calculations, and it knew he wouldn't be concerned no matter what the module said.

"Chairman? What's there? Only one organism is detected on the sensors. Are... are there aliens out there?"

A crew member noticed the anomaly and contacted the man, who didn't respond. Such matters were unimportant.

In this moment with the girl, the man ceased to be an outsider.

Yes. They have been aliens. Until now.