

### 3A: The Green Planet

The uncapped cylinders of algae were ejected from Pod 2 across the surface of the green alien sea. The two expedition vessels sank as gentle water flowed to fill the space they left behind. The waves gleamed below the dazzle of nebulae and starlight.

There was a bit of a scare during the return descent. The expedition had stalled too long at the surface while discovering that they were on an alien planet. The spherical portal had begun shrinking as the expedition had progressed, fluctuating erratically in diameter. The portal had retracted into itself until it was too small for the pods to pass through by the time they finally returned. Word came through the radio from Lemuria that the portal would grow again if they could wait for just one hour. By then however, Pod 2's oxygen levels had dropped to nearly dangerous levels. They wouldn't make it even *half* an hour.

They were saved by Pod 1, which had been carrying more oxygen tanks than Pod 2. It was a very close thing. The hour passed, and the two pods passed through the portal safely to planet Earth. Cheering rang through Pod 1, Pod 2, and through the crackling radio contact with Lemuria.

Malachi was guided through the NASA building by a secretary in a pencil skirt, who was nearly as tall in her grey high heels as he was in his flats. They reached the end of a hall and turned into a large room full of massive computers and other electronic equipment. He was turning in circles marveling at it all when a familiar voice caught his attention from behind a series of monitor displays. Ginger stepped into view and waved at him excitedly. The secretary quietly departed.

"Malachi! It's so good to see you!" Ginger called, approaching quickly. She wore a tucked in blouse and dark work pants, and she'd grown her hair out long enough to tie up into a neat ponytail. "I'm glad you made it."

"Of course, Ginger," he said with a spreading smile as he regarded her. They reached for each other's hands and shook warmly. "Glad to see you're fitting in so well here, Miss Space

Cadet. How've you been?"

"Very well, thank you. And how has life been under the sea?"

"Cold, dark, wet. Full of new fish species to discover every week."

"And new worlds to explore?"

Malachi grinned cheekily. "Only every chance I get. You should come visit sometime! It's been years."

"Yeah, I guess it has," Ginger nodded thoughtfully, then shook herself and gained a new glint of excitement in her eye. "I have something very important to show you. Follow me."

She lead him to the series of monitors she'd been working on when he'd arrived. Spread across four monitors was displayed a great map of space. Stars, planets, and other astronomical bodies were all labeled with numbers and letters. She pointed at one tiny dot among many and beamed with pride.

"There it is," she declared. "We finally found it."

Malachi leaned closer, staring at the simple dot with growing awe. His hand rose to cover his gaping mouth. "Really? Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," Ginger said. "When I heard that you were vacationing topside for a while, I knew I had to show you this in person."

Ginger leaned over a mouse and keyboard, typed something, and then selected the dot to enlarge the image. The enhanced picture was fuzzy and unclear, but the little dot of a planet gained a striking shade of swirling green color.

"I'm pushing for the newest space exploration missions to target this planet and its star system," Ginger added, still beaming.

Malachi shook his head as he turned to Ginger, briefly at a loss for words. He glanced back at the little green dot and finally asked, "Why space travel? You know we don't have to go the long way around to get there."

"True," she acknowledged. "But the Lemuria portal is an unreliable gateway. It's unpredictable, and we both know from our pooled findings that the portal won't exist forever. Someday it's going to shrink down to the size of an atom, and maybe disappear entirely. We aren't able to use the portal for anything dependable besides short term exploratory missions.

Besides, with the success we've seen in the building of the Mars colonies over the past few years, the world is excited and ready to go searching through space for a second Earth. The green planet is our best bet. You've already started the terraforming process for us with all the work you've done at Lemuria since graduating, and it all started with those two little doses of algae."

"The air won't be breathable for thousands of years at the least, though," Malachi admitted thoughtfully. "Probably hundreds of thousands. Changing an entire planet's atmosphere and ecology takes a long time."

"True, but consider this: it's going to take us thousands of years to reach the green planet with our current rate of space travel technology. You can work from Lemuria to set the terraforming into motion *now*, and by the time our colonies arrive to begin habitation the planet will have already become significantly more hospitable."

The two Antioch College alumni regarded each other and the distant planet displayed on the screen for a few minutes.

"We can do this," Malachi finally murmured with the return of his characteristic shining grin. The dark skin of his face crinkled with well worn laugh lines.

Ginger nodded. "Of course we can."

Thanks for reading.

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