

3B: Alien Life

The crew of Pod 2 wrapped up their expedition without releasing the algae into the alien environment. It was agreed that they would allow the planet's natural evolution to run its course without interference. 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.

“Hey, Ginger! Can you hear me?”

The voice on the other side of the phone was slightly muffled through the sound of mild static. Ginger adjusted the phone against her ear as she sat back from the desk in her office.

“I can hear you, Malachi. There's some static, but your words are clear.”

“Alright, cool. It's hard to keep a signal going from the twilight zone, so I'll talk quickly before the call can cut out. Did you get my email? With the photos?”

Ginger smiled despite herself. “The email with the new species? Yeah, I got it. It's pretty incredible. Your work is amazing. How many have you identified now?”

“One hundred seventeen, but that's just me personally. I still hold the record, but Dwight's been catching up with me.”

“One hundred seventeen new alien species identified on the green planet...” Ginger repeated slowly. “And here I’ve been spending my time just staring at stars.”

“Speaking of which, how’s are things at NASA? Is it *more* or *less* wild than work here under the sea?”

“Both, but in different ways. Speaking of which, I have good news.” Ginger took a breath, pausing for dramatic effect. “I think I found it.”

“Found what?”

“The green planet!” she declared. “I think I finally placed the star maps we brought back years ago. I still need to confirm some things, but I’m almost certain that I finally found the right location. We took some pictures. The planet is so far away that the image is just a fuzzy dot, but I’ll send it to you anyway.”

“Are you serious? That’s amazing!” Malachi’s voice rang with excited glee.

Ginger laughed. “We make quite a team, don’t we? Studying alien worlds together?”

“One world, at least. I guess that’s just the job we were meant to have. Uncovering secrets about the origin of life by uncovering life on an alien world.”

“Winning victories for humanity.”

Thanks for reading.

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