

A Million Bits

I was on the International Space Station when something truly gigantic shattered Earth into a million bits. Suddenly, an alien spaceship that was parked nearby became visible. I saw huge electrical discharges jumping from one chunk of Earth to another – fortunately I knew better than to expect to hear thunder in outer space. A huge chunk of Earth flew towards me and instinctively I ducked and cracked my head. When the aliens, called *WineGor*, pried open the ISS, I was out cold. The rest of the space station was quickly shredded by oversized chunks of rock and detritus from doomed Earth.

The aliens tried to find and save any lives that they could find, but Earth had been erased, including dogs, whales, trees and cockroaches. Somehow, I finally swam to the surface of my consciousness and decided that my dream was real. That's when I met Nancy – at least that's what I called her because I couldn't pronounce her name.

The alien thought-spoke into my mind and told me that Earth had been obliterated by an object that was the core of a burned-out star which had been wandering through space since time-immemorial. Her head looked like a huge fledgling robin, complete with a beak, tongue and blinking eyes.

I thought back to her about hunger and thirst. A meal was soon produced, and I gobbled it up. That was when I realized that I was probably going to be okay, but I looked up at her huge beak and wondered if she would wind up eating me.

"No, we don't consume sentient beings."

I thought-spoke "Are all humans dead?"

"Yes, sorry. The star's collision has caused it to change course slightly. We're trying to calculate its new trajectory. We have to see if it will cause further harm."

Periodically, brown goo and water showed up and I ate.

A few days later, Nancy appeared and said "We have to go to a planet called *Note-P*, because it's in the path of the star."

"My name is Sam Maskers. Can I help?"

"Z-Nancy-xo-fo-ax-pola-bap-something," she replied, as she flitted away.

I surmised that I was a caged specimen, so I started keeping this journal. I circumnavigated my cage many times, but there were no visible walls.

In a few days, another giant baby robin appeared and warm-water began to rain down from the top of my cage. I was startled, but then I stripped naked and showered. Then, a warm glow filled the cage, and I dried out my clothes and myself. After dinner, I slept very hard.

I dreamt that everyone died. I dreamt of a burned-out star hitting Earth and shattering it to a million bits of junk. And then I awoke, and realized what a horrifying dream that was, until I looked around and saw a large robin staring down at me from the ceiling of my cage, and then I wept.

"Poor human," it thought-spoke.

"Swell," I thought, "they can all read my mind."

"Yes, now get some sleep."

I laid down and dreamt more horrifying dreams.

In a few days, Nancy returned and I realized that she was about 25 feet tall, but with the body of a baby robin. I hoped once again that she wouldn't pick me up like a worm and swallow me whole.

"No, Sam, I won't do that. You're one of the rarest objects in the universe. We're chasing after the rogue star, and we'll overtake it and warn the *Note-P'tians*. Maybe they'll have a chance to escape before it hits their planet *Note-P*."

"Can you stop the star?"

"Not with this vessel, we don't have enough mass."

"Will they survive?"

"Probably not, but we'll try."

It suddenly dawned on me that she had not said no, she had just said that we didn't have enough mass. "How much mass does it take to deflect it?"

"About 3.5 percent of the mass of the star"

"That's the rule?"

"Yes – 3.5 percent produces a 1 degree deflection. That will be enough to save *P-Note*."

I'm a computer scientist, but I'm also a pretty good pool player, so I pictured our ship bumping the star to nudge it out of the way.

"Yes, that's it," Nancy thought-spoke, "but we're not 'weighty' enough."

Then I recalled a bank shot that a friend of mine taught me when I was a younger: one ball hits another ball, which hits another ball, which then lands in the chosen pocket. The 'combination shot' was devastating to unsuspecting pool players who didn't think that I looked like a hustler.

"Exactly what are you saying?" Nancy thought.

"If all you need is 3.5% mass, the *P'tians* solar system can supply it: your ship can deflect a small planet into a bigger planet, and smash that into the wandering star. They'll lose a couple of planets, but the population will survive."

"I've always said humans are brilliant!"

We arrived at *P-Note* in a few days. Our ship's armament was turned to maximum. I aimed it (with some English), and then discharged it towards a small outer-planet. In a few days, in slow motion, it slammed into a Jupiter-sized planet, and a few days later, the rogue star's path intersected – the collision deflected it 1.03 degrees up, out of the galactic plane. The *P'tians* were safe.

The *P'tians* never knew that we saved them from extinction because the rogue star was ejected from their solar system while it was so far from their sun. One night they noticed the brightest planet in their night sky simply disappeared without warning.

Nancy said "*P'tians* are far less advanced than humans so we should leave them alone lest we scare them to death. Also, remind me to never play pool with a human."

Soon we left *P'tians* space and now we're on our way to the next assignment and I'm a paid crew member, not a specimen.

"A journey to the stars starts with a megabit," I joked.

Nancy just blinked.

NOTE: This story is in the format of "flash fiction," which allows a maximum of 1,000 words.