

Planet Orbus

By A. C. Zito

“Land the ship, Donakin. Land it before it lands *you!*” Quota felt impatient. It was her first mission outside of the outer hemispheric galaxy belt on the Eastern Nubella Spectrum. The spectrum, so far, had been desolate. No lifeform for trillions of lightyears in either direction.

“I’m afraid the mission will be nothing but another failure. But if you’re feeling optimistic then I’m feeling optimistic.” Donakin looked down at the cloudy planet. It contained wisps of green to show there was land but nothing like he had ever seen before. Donakin was used to land being spread out in large clumps taking up large portions of the planet. Not in thin streaks; thin strands like the planet had been clawed at by some ferocious animal like a jaguar or a bear. Quota seemed to be surprised by this peculiarity as well.

“Have you ever seen anything like this?” Quota asked. Donakin shook his head.

“No, Captain; have you?” She shook her head as well.

“Let’s record that in the log, Cyprus.” The ship’s computer lets out a stream of beeps showing acquiescence. The planet wasn’t *that* big. Almost like a pinball compared to the bowling ball they called their home base.

“There’s green so that means there’s life.” Donakin sighed out, feeling eager that there was, at least, *something* to be hopeful about. But Quota seemed unmoved by the observation.

“Two out of the forty-six other planets we’ve visited had life. But neither of those two had the life I was hoping for.” Donakin quickly lashed back:

“But the chances of finding intelligent life are one in a million. Can’t you, at least, be grateful that out of the forty-seven planets we’ve visited, so far, *two* had some form of life that gives us hope to colonize and advance as a society?” But Quota didn’t see it that way. She saw the mission as a failure so far. Intelligent life means societal advancements far beyond what home base has ever found current data on. With more intelligent life means better understanding of what the livable universe holds and concludes with the livable universe becoming more livable and unanswered questions that are still being asked by home base now having viable solutions.

“I want glory, Donakin; prestige! I want to drive down Sunset Boulevard, and I want to be one of the few Life Finders that live on that street. They’re the celebrities of the celebrities! They’ve got everyone eating out of their shoes! I want that! I’m tired of eating out of others’ shoes. I want that crazy, unrealistic dream of mine to be a reality.” Donakin smiled, meekly. He had dreams too but not like Quota’s. What they were doing now was, alone, a dream in itself. What Quota wanted showed that she expressed desires that would never be satisfied.

“You want glory... or you want money? You’re greedy. You don’t care about anyone else. All you care about is the wealth you plan to acquire from selling off the brand of whatever caveman or cavewoman you find. Just like all the other Life Finders.” Quota ignored him. She was too busy looking at the gun that shoots nets from its tip. The net had the electric voltage it would send to the intelligent lifeform charged and ready for action. All they had to do now was find the blasted thing!

“I want to be the one to catch the intelligent lifeform, Donakin. I want that feeling of euphoria Life Finders are always talking about when they make an appearance on television.” Quota licked her lips as she held the net gun up to her cheek feeling the cold touch of its metal outer casing. Donakin spit out, angrily, feeling repulsed just looking at her:

“What I want is to just be happy. All I want in this world is to be able to pay the bills on time, to have food on the table for not only me but my loved ones, to have the money when rent is due, and for everyone around me, family and friends, to be happy and healthy. And what I want is to be able to help other people in the world too when help is needed. I want to do my part as a human in this society and not make a complete and utter fool of myself while I try to enjoy my stay in this game called ‘life.’ And Quota... I understand that this is your way of trying to enjoy *yourself*... but it doesn’t actually look like you’re *really* enjoying yourself. You look stressed out. You look feverish. You need help. Maybe see someone when we get back to home base. Maybe see a *counselor*... some time off where you can just relax and take a breather will do you an awful lot of some good. And remember; we were only assigned to fifty planets. It’s almost over. Then we’re home free! And if we *do* find intelligent life, all we are to these beings are aliens that have come from outer space on a routine visit. We’re here for fifty planets; we’re out after fifty planets.” Quota wasn’t sure if Donakin said anything or not. She was too busy gearing up. She looked to him to see if he was ready. His face looked concerned.

Does he want to know if I want anything? She thought to herself.

“Get me a bagel.” She decided she wasn’t hungry, but it looked like he needed something to do, in the meantime, while Cyprus landed the ship.

When I find intelligent life, I’m never using this computer system ever again. Cyprus is outdated by, at least, two centuries. And she thought about how she could, quite possibly, get a better-looking lackey than Donakin. But the Life Finders *always* keep their original lackeys. It’s good luck!

And I need all the help I can get She thought to herself.

The doors opened, and the sweet smell of fresh air hit Quota’s lips.

“Cyprus, scan the perimeters to see if intelligent life exists.” The computer let out a series of beeps before shutting down.

“No intelligent life, Quota. But there’s still hope.” But Quota didn’t want to believe it.

“Scan the perimeters, Donakin. This forest looks to be millions of years old; could be almost a *billion* years old if we’re lucky.” Donakin tugged on Quota’s arm looking straight forward, speechless.

“Oh, it’s *something*, alright, Captain.” He pointed at the squirrel that climbed a nearby tree. Except, it was hard to call it a squirrel at all due to how only the outline of its body took the similar shape of a squirrel. The rest of the body was of a completely different entity. Its transcendence was unlike anything out of this universe.

“Donakin... I must be going crazy! That... that... animal; it’s a sub-species of the ancestral animal, the squirrel, from Planet 1, that’s for sure, but I don’t see how it has any worldly qualities ever found, *ever*.”

“I’m sorry, but you said *Planet what?*” Donakin asked, unsure.

“Earth,” Quota replied, angrily. She knew he should’ve known that. The ancestral home bases are all found in the history books: Earth, Mars, Titan, and Gliese 667Cc. But this didn’t look like an actual animal at all. More like a robot like Cyprus. It had thin, glass features so you could see right through it. Almost like there should’ve been an opening so you could pour in your morning o-j before you got the day started.

“What’s that over its head, Quota?” Quota, at first, didn’t know what Donakin was talking about. But, taking a step closer, then she saw it: glass orbs hung suspended over the transparent animal. And in them, swirling around in a thick density were differently colored clouds of smoke. They floated above the creature’s head rotating around it in no particular order. And with each orb, a single-colored cloud was found floating inside. One orb contained a blue smoke, one a red smoke, one a pink, one purple, one yellow, one orange, and that was that for the main orbs. But there were also much smaller orbs that floated above the main ones that were much harder to make out what colors they had inside.

“I want one. I want one, Donakin. Get me one of those *orby thingies*. Get me one, *NOW!*” Donakin backed away from Quota, ever so slowly. The fear in his eyes couldn’t be concealed. But it didn’t matter one bit. Quota was too preoccupied with the dollar signs, and the house on Sunset Boulevard calling her name.

“There’s no intelligent life, Quota, it’s time to move on. We should leave.” But Quota wasn’t having any of it.

“*Here, squirrelly-squirrelly-squirrelly. Here, squirrelly-squirrelly-squirrelly.*” Quota cocked her net gun. The animal seemed to have heard the noise, and one of the orbs flew into the transparent animal, and it filled up with the purple smoke. How it filled up with purple smoke seemed to interest Quota, but her heart was thudding too fast to observe the peculiarity of the situation for a second longer. She fired the net, and, instantly, the creature was wrapped in the thin, webby material, squealing in agony as it came thudding with a crash of branches onto the ground floor. Not only did the creature send shards of thin glass that made up its body into millions of pieces, but, one after another, each of the creature’s orbs came falling to the ground, shattering into *trillions* of pieces. As each orb hit the ground and the colored smoke rose up into the air, Donakin watched in horror as with each orb smashing, Quota’s body jerked in some type of resistance from what became of her actions. After it was all over, Donakin looked

at Quota waiting for her to say something. She stood there, silent. She stood there, still as an arrow; unwavering from how catastrophic the event turned out.

“QUOTA, SAY SOMETHING,” He yelled out in terror. Then, suddenly, Cyprus’ computer transmission rang out:

“The planet has been categorized as an orb planet. Action protocol is to leave immediately before possible emotions are lost. If emotions are lost then protocol is to leave the lost victim. They hold threat to space-travel and to home base. The protocol is to...” Quota finished for Cyprus:

“Make the livable universe more livable and unanswered questions that are still being asked by home base having viable solutions. Protocol is to leave lost one. Protocol is to leave lost one. Protocol is to leave lost one.” Donakin began slowly backing away and towards the ship as he listened to Quota repeat those same last words with no hesitation at all to stop. All throughout the planet departure, those same words kept ringing in Donakin’s ears:

Protocol is to leave lost one. Protocol is to leave lost one. Protocol is to leave lost one. Donakin turned to Cyprus and said:

“Cyprus; turn on the log.” He then slowly let those words that needed to be slipped out, out: “Let the log show... that the lost one has been lost.” And Cyprus and Donakin slipped away from the planet, Donakin feeling the surge of emotions rush through him, feeling them more than he’d ever felt them in all his life. Because Donakin knew it and Donakin would forever know it: that *he* was not a lost one.