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3492 Words

## DRIFTING TOWARDS PURPOSE

By Colby Chambers

“This station isn’t going to hold up much longer with the magnitude of these blasts!”

Socran yelled.

“They have gotten much too strong for our technology!” Donde cried back as the red light flashed above him. “I’m not sure what it is, but we need to figure something out. Because this station is not going to be able to handle many more jolts like that one.” Donde said as they ran down the hallway.

Socran thought to himself, it must have been 15 years since him and Donde had arrived on Gantavya Station. “Why is it always right when I fall asleep that these happen?”

Donde didn't get a chance to answer. They arrived in the main hall surrounded by at least 100 other beings, almost all different species than the one next to them. Donde himself was an Aleoe, long-time friends of the human race and the first intelligent species humans had ever encountered.

"We have everything under control. It was just another cosmic blast sent out by the nebula. We are still investigating to make sure there was no critical damage." Hukai said. "As the captain of the Gantavya Station, I can safely say you may all resume previous operations.

Socran hadn't slept well in weeks due to inescapable intrusive thoughts. It didn't help that now, for three nights in a row, the blasts had interrupted his REM cycle for a mandatory check-in at the main hall just so Hukai could tell them all is well.

After a long night restlessly dozing in and out of consciousness, Socran woke up contemplating yesterday's events. "I really hope we figure out what's going on with these blasts. I need some rest." Socran stammered in between bites of his breakfast. "I thought that maybe these were a new wave of the original signals that brought us here, but command is just writing it off. At this point, they need to figure out how to stop them or at least turn off the alarm." Socran complained as the fluorescent lighting exaggerated the bulging bags beneath his eyes.

Donde ignored Socran's complaint about his sleep, "I remember when the signals first started. We met the humans near Trappist 1e who were receiving a completely different type of signal."

"The same thing happened to us and the Ssuves" a large furry creature crouched in the corner stated. "It wasn't until we got here that we realized that every species had gotten different signals. Some of them we had never even heard of."

“I just want to know why? Donde and I have been here for 15 years. And Hukai’s people, for over a hundred. We send 10 crews every day to go and investigate the nebula but no one has ever found anything. So here we sit on this asteroid, waiting on what may just turn out to be nothing.” Socran sighed. It just seemed like a waste of life to him.

“Maybe the point of the signal was to bring all of us here. Maybe it was part of some grandeur plan to see what intelligent life forms can create if we are all brought together. Or maybe it is something far greater than anyone in the universe could possibly imagine.” Donde replied.

He thought back to the first time he had met Socran, it had been at least 30 years ago. He and Socran’s brother had been investigating seismic activity on a moon near Donde’s home planet, Trappist 1e. The three grew to have an inseparable friendship. Socran had always been hard headed, a fighter; he would never let anyone push him around but eventually his fire was subdued.

“I just am tired of being stationed on this big rock. I want to explore the galaxies like we used to.” Socran said as he sipped his coffee.

“Maybe we will again one day.” Donde added. “Or maybe we will explore something no being has ever explored.”

“Eh, it will never be like old times anyway.” Socran said with a depressed tone resonating in his throat.

Socran abruptly changed the subject as another human entered, “Nice to see you finally out of that lab. I was starting to think you were never going to leave.”

“Someone has to do some work around here.” The human sarcastically rebutted.

“Korva, you’re new around here. We all used to have the attitude you do.” Socran replied.

“Don’t take him personally, he’s just having a moment. Grab a seat.” Donde added.

His seat rattled as Donde awoke at his desk after a long night of working. He grabbed his things and met Korva in the hallway. “That had to be the biggest blast yet.” Donde yelled out as he and Korva jogged towards the main hall for their routine update.

“We must be missing something. I just don’t think these blasts are coincidental.” Korva replied.

“Well we *are* orbiting a forming star. Most of the Astro-chemists think it’s probably the releasing of gases.”

“I know. But I just don’t think this is any normal star. It has defied just about every law of physics since it was first discovered.”

Donde thought to himself, maybe she’s right. Korva was easily one of the most intelligent beings that he had ever been in the presence of. She also worked harder than anyone he had ever known. “Hey, where is Socran?”

“He said he isn’t wasting his time for them to just tell him it was nothing.” Korva replied.

“You know he hasn’t always been like this. He used to be excited about life and motivated to work on this ship like you are now. He was the most adventurous being I knew, by far.” Donde explained.

“What happened?” Korva asked as the alarms finally stopped blaring. Leaving a silence around them as they walked down what seemed like an infinite hallway.

“About 12 years ago his brother was killed. Silus thought he felt something calling to him from the nebula so he grabbed his stuff and left. He got on his ship and flew right into the heart of it. All we found were the remains of his ship. It had been absolutely demolished and we never figured out what happened or why he did it.” Donde said with a sadness resonating in his throat.

“Was the ship hit at close proximity by the blast?” Korva asked.

“We don’t know. If so, it was too small for any of our scanners to detect it.” Donde said as they finally reached the dining hall.

Hukai was already up front. “These blasts are continuing to get bigger and bigger. Soon our station will not be able to withstand the force of these explosions. We have located another asteroid about 5 AU away and we will begin preparing the base to land on the asteroid immediately.”

“But, we will be too far away from the source of the signals! This will drastically reduce our ability to study the nebula without being close enough to get quality samples.” A Phex near the front shouted.

“Why didn’t we get a say in this decision?!” Another being yelled from the other side of the room.

“Everyone please settle down. The council has voted unanimously to make this decision. If we do not move, the station will inevitably be destroyed. Without the base, there is no way to do this research at all.” Hukai asserted.

“Socran will be happy to know these blasts won’t be interrupting his sleep schedule anymore.” Donde muttered to Korva.

The next morning Socran woke up to a sudden jolt. He sprung up only to smack his head on the bunk above him. “You’d think that a space station that they designed for a long-term mission would have more practical sleeping arrangements than bunk beds.” Socran said to himself as he rubbed the balding spot on top of his head. A couple seconds later a loud alarm went off, piercing Socran’s ears. “Are you kidding me? Twice in 12 hours.”

The alarm continued blaring and a voice echoed from outside the doorway. “Guys! Come look at this!” Socran gazed over and saw Donde rubbing his four eyes, looking just as annoyed by the alarm as he was.

“What could possibly be worth this ear-piercing sound that basically serves as an alarm clock these days.” Socran said with an irritated tone in his voice.

“Look! The Nebula. Something is happening!” the young Cajvex said with an excited, yet unsettled tone.

Socran walked up to the window and saw the most beautiful array of light and colors beyond a spectrum his eyes had ever been able to decipher. It was something he could not even comprehend. All he could think to describe it as was a combination of the sun setting on the night sky back on planet Earth. Just when it gets dark and millions of tiny fireflies would appear illuminating the blackness.

“Everyone get to your departing station immediately.” Hukai’s voice abruptly came over the intercom. “We are doing an emergency take-off. We will explain in further detail later, but as of now you have 10 minutes until departure.” Socran was stunned by the announcement, but what was even stranger was the uneasiness that he noticed in Hukai’s voice. He wasn’t sure if his translator was malfunctioning in his ear or if Hukai was actually showing any emotion. One

thing that he was sure of is if they left now, he would never know what happened to his brother. Or at least he would never live to see it.

“Donde, grab your suit. We’re are going into the Nebula.” Socran called out.

“Socran, that’s not a good idea. We have a better chance surviving a spacewalk without helmets.” Donde shook his head as he replied.

“Donde, this is our chance. This is what we have been waiting for. We *have* to go now.”

“I just don’t think it’s worth it right now.” Donde barely got to finish his sentence before Socran interjected.

“This is it for me. Just take me close and I will take a particle sample. We can meet back up with our station at the new coordinates. I need this. I feel like something is telling me to go check it out. I don’t know what it is, but I need to try and find out.” Socran pleaded with Donde.

“Okay, but we need Korva for the sample. She knows exponentially more about nebulas than either of us.” Donde responded.

“Don’t drag her into this. She’s young and has her whole life ahead-“ Socran was cut off by the young human entering the room.

“I’m in. I chose to risk my life to do this work. I am ready to *actually* do it.” Korva exclaimed.

Socran shook his head, he knew that there was no time to waste bickering. “Fine. Meet me at the ship in 4 minutes. Donde. can you manually open the hatch?”

“I will try. Who knows. Maybe they haven’t closed it yet.”

Socran thought back on all of the crazy adventures that he and Donde had been on in the last 30 years. Donde was the kindest being in the galaxy and Socran’s best friend. He had a deep belly laugh that always brought a smile to Socran’s face, even when his brother disappeared. But,

Socran knew he needed Donde's help. He hoped nothing would happen to him, but Donde was an amazing pilot and the only person that could get him where he wanted to go.

"I'll go grab my equipment!" Korva called out eagerly. Socran knew she had no idea what she was getting into, but there's a chance that she would get the sample that she wanted and could return as a hero. Socran didn't care, he needed an answer.

Donde arrived at the hangar and approached the door operator. He told him to get to his "new assigned station" which was a room he had made up. Luckily, the newbie ran off to follow Donde's orders, allowing him to push the manual override to open the hangar bay door.

"Bridge to Hangar Bay. Why are you opening the hatch?" boomed over the intercom. Donde knew that if they were going to make it to the nebula, they had to hurry. He rushed to their departure ship meeting Korva, but Socran was nowhere in sight. Just as he finished preparing the ship for take-off, Socran promptly appeared at the hangar bay. Over the intercom a loud voice ordered, "Bridge to Hangar Bay, we are manually closing the hangar door. It will shut and lock in 30 seconds. Once closed, it WILL NOT be reopened." Not a moment later, came a loud rumble that shook with a force of a 9.0 magnitude earthquake. Socran was almost trampled by another ship falling on its side.

"Let's get out of here while we can!" Socran shouted as he ran up the loading ramp onto the ship. Donde strapped in and Korva hopped in the seat behind him and followed suit. "Hold on tight. This is gonna be a rough take-off." Donde shouted loud enough to drown out the alarms blaring in the hangar bay and the ships crashing with the seismic waves of the blasts.



As Socran closed the hatch, he started shouting “GO!” He scrambled to the co-pilot seat and strapped in just as the hangar doors began their descent. They squeezed through the opening. No one muttered as much as a whisper until they made it far enough past the station’s magnetic field. Once they put some distance between themselves and the departing station, they turned to see the asteroid crumpling beneath it. The station was rendered unstable by the collapse, but they lifted off with enough time to escape ill fate.

Korva let out a heavy sigh of relief. The three of them knew that they almost witnessed the death of their friends saved only by a few, fleeting moments.

“Cruiser. This is Gantavya Station. We can reopen the hangar doors at 2 AU out. We will arrive in 15 minutes. Your ship should survive, but not for long. You must meet us then.” The radio operator stated starkly.

“We’ll meet you at the new landing site.” Socran barked back to the operator as he switched the radio off.

“We’re probably going to need that.” Donde said in somewhat of a sarcastic tone.

“Take me as close to the center of the nebula as we can get. I need an accurate sample which will only be possible from the heart of the anomaly.” Socran said disregarding Donde’s comment.

“Okay. It will take a few minutes to get there. I hope this old machine holds up or we’re gonna be crushed by about 100 g’s.” Donde responded.

“Wow. This is so exciting! I’ve never been into the nebula.” Korva eagerly stated. “Lab work is fun and all, but it does get boring.”

“This will be my first time in 15 years.” Socran muttered melancholically. “But I’m ready.” Socran had been mentally preparing for this moment for ages. He had been grappling with his

desire to leave the station again, but he could never get himself to face this place since the search for Silus.

“We are coming up on the center of the nebula now.” Donde interrupted the quiet stillness. All they could hear now was the creaking of the metal hull being compressed by the pressure of the nebula.

“I am going to grab my stuff. Pull me as close as possible.” Socran said.

“I’ll get mine too.” Korva added.

They both walked back to the pressure chamber. Out of nowhere, the ship started violently pulsating and threw Korva into the supply closet. Socran rushed over to shut the door behind her and close her inside.

“Socran, can you open the door? When that blast hit the ship, it slammed behind me and I can’t get it to budge.” Korva called out with desperation in her voice. “...Socran?”

Socran rushed to the pressure chamber and began putting on his suit. He grabbed the photo of Silus and sat it next to door of the chamber. “I’m sorry Donde, but I have to do this.” Socran said to himself as he shut the pressure chamber door behind him and prepared to open the hatch.

“It’s not worth it, Socran!” Donde shouted from the other side of the glass wall into the intercom. “What do you hope to find out? I loved him as a brother too. But *I* understand that he’s gone.”

“You don’t know that, Donde. We never found his body.”

“Socran, his ship was completely destroyed; his body was decimated.”

“You don’t know that!” Socran was yelling into the intercom at this point.

“What is your plan? What do you hope to gain? As soon as you open that hatch the gravity will crush you instantaneously.” Donde argued.

“He was my only family. I need to know. It is calling to me.” Socran cried.

“*We* are family. We have been family for the last 30 years. I have always been your right-hand man. I was devastated when Silus was killed. Why do you think I searched every day for three years hoping to find any signs of him?” Donde pleaded with pain in his eyes. Tears of sadness and fear welling at the rims.

“I have to.” Socran said as he smashed the eject button.

The void of space was something Socran was used to. He had aimlessly floated through it many times, but always knew someone was going to pick him up. This time was different. He felt a warmth around him that mimicked the comfort of being wrapped in a heated blanket. He was floating towards the beautiful void in the center of the anomaly. It was the first time in 15 years that he had felt like he had a purpose. He had lost sight of the ship almost immediately after pushing the eject button. It took all of his willpower to go through with it, but he knew he had to, for Silus.

“Socran.” Echoed a powerful voice that felt like it came from inside of him.

“Socran, take my hand.” He turned his head to see Silus. He was without his suit.

“You’re alive! Where’s your suit? Is there oxygen here?” Socran asked, overwhelmed with joy.

“Take my hand.” Silus’ voice rattled his bones. “You have to come with me. You have to know what I know.”

“Silus. Come back with me. I can save you.” Socran cried back. As he reached out for Silus’ illuminated hand.

“I see him. Pull the ship closer, Korva.” Donde shouted towards the copilot. “Grab my hand, Socran.” Donde called out.

Socran continued to reach for his brother’s hand, but a loud blast sent him spinning. “Donde!” Socran cried. He had been blow from the ship and his wench had come undone. He was now being sucked into the what seemed like the center of the burst. “Donde, I’ll get you.” He grabbed onto the hull of the ship.

“You must choose, Socran. You must choose me. I can help you.” Silus’ voice pleaded as his body, no longer illuminated, was being sucked into the nebula.

Socran didn’t know what to do. His brother was his whole world. He had raised him since he was only 12 years old and Socran was five. He loved him with everything he had and he owed him for years of being a stand-in parent. On the other hand, Donde was the greatest friend a person could find. He was always there for Socran even when Silus wasn’t. He had stood by him in the worst times of his life.

Socran reached out. With tears pouring from his eyes and said “I won’t let you go this time.”

“You’ve got me. Now, tell the pilot to take off.” Silus shouted.

Socran opened his eyes to see Donde unconscious and floating, drifting, into nothing.

Socran woke up to a loud, high-pitched, beeping sound. “I got you buddy.” A voiced called out. With blurred vision, he squinted to notice the face above him. It was Silus. He had never experienced this level of fulfillment. “What happened?” He sputtered.

“We were coming up on Trappist 1e and were hit by some type of force. I don’t know what it was, but you were knocked unconscious by a crate that wasn’t secured properly.”

“What are we doing here?” Socran said immediately recognizing the name as Donde’s home planet.

“We are here to pick up our partner for our next mission. An Aleoe called Donde, I believe. We might keep him around if we mesh well.”

Somehow there was a familiarity in this moment. Socran remembered this life-changing day like it was yesterday. But, maybe it hadn’t even happened yet. All he knew was that his favorite beings to exist were alive and well. And in that moment of peace, he closed his eyes and caught up on some long-awaited sleep.