

First Contact

By Dragonien

"All systems are green. Path is clear. Awaiting final authorization for FTL Jump."

Darren sighed to himself as he flicked the radio receiver off. Reaching up to tug at the front of his suit the tiger shifted in his seat to better adjust where the tail portion of his suit stuck out behind him. Despite his confidence in the mission he still found himself breaking out in a nervous sweat as the moment approached. Any moment now the word would come back from ground control and he would be the first live person to make the jump to faster than light travel. As the silence dragged on waiting for them to respond he skimmed over the control panel again and again to ensure that he hadn't missed anything; looking for that one red light in the field of green that would tell him to abort. Then, the radio crackled to life with the feminine voice of the ground-control operator.

"Everything is green on our end. You are clear for jump. Good luck, and Godspeed."

With a deep breath, Darren reached down and pulled open the glass case covering the FTL jump switch. With one last check to ensure his harness was secure, he thumbed the button. The whir of the engine vibrated through the ship for a solid three seconds as it built power. Then, as if a cork popping from a champagne bottle, the ship abruptly bolted forward at speeds previously unimaginable. Darren found himself pushed into the seat despite the ship's inertial dampeners working to compensate for the drive's momentum. After a solid five minutes keeping a death grip on the armrests of his chair, Darren heard the beep of an alarm overhead. Thankfully, it was simply the notification that the drive was powering down. Seconds after, he saw the blur of lights that the view from the cockpit had become slow then a close-up view of a foreign planet pop into view as the ship abruptly slammed back to sub-light speeds. That's when the notification alarm turned into a dangerous, warning klaxon of the proximity alert. Darren's eyes went wide as he realized how quickly they were approaching the planet filling his view. There was no time to turn or break and his ship was coming in way too fast.

The FTL drive had worked flawlessly. But their distance calculations had been off. Instead of dumping him out in empty space a few light-seconds away from the planet he'd ended up almost right inside the atmosphere. As his hands danced across the controls, it was all he could do to angle the ship to avoid a direct collision with the ground.

Smoke billowed up from the metallic wreckage. Bits and pieces of metal debris that had broken off during impact lined the impact crater and mixed their own, smaller, plumes of smoldering smoke with the larger ones above. The ship had left a nearly half mile-long furrow in the ground where it had impacted and skidded through the ground before finally coming to a

stop; half buried in the mound of displaced dirt it had created. Miraculously, for all the damage the ruined scrap that had once been an interstellar space ship had taken during its uncontrolled re-entry, the pilot had survived.



Darren let out a rattling hack of a cough as he struggled to regain consciousness. The tiger was still sprawled out on his front a few yards away from the ship; having crawled himself free of the wreckage shortly after impact before he had passed out. His whole body ached as if he had whiplash in every joint rather than just his neck and even his attempt to push himself up to his hands and knees sent spikes of pain through his limbs. During his first attempt to get upright his arms had given out under him and the faceplate of his space suit's helmet slammed into the ground as he face planted into it. The second attempt fared better and at least this time he was able to get up enough that, when his body gave out, he toppled backwards onto his ass rather than face first again. Now able to push himself upright into a sitting position, he turned his attention to his surroundings only to find himself face to face with some kind of alien creature.

Alien was the only way he could think to describe the creature he abruptly found himself face to face with. It was leaning forward so the front of its face, or at least what Darren thought was its face, was less than an inch away from his helmet. It didn't actually have any facial features, though. It looked almost like a cross between a jellyfish and some kind of amorphous goo-creature. It didn't actually have any discernable distinct body parts but rather was simply a single blob of dark blue, slightly transparent, solid goo. On the 'face' of the creature rather than any features like eyes or a mouth it simply had two yellow lights recessed back into the depths of the ovoid shape that Darren assumed was its head. It's eyes, he'd guess.

Even as his mind tried to analyze what he was looking at his body ratcheted up his adrenaline another notch and a strangled gasp of shock escaped him. He tried to scramble backwards, not even reacting as he painfully pinned his tail under his backside as he tried to crawl backwards. When he tweaked his chest during his movements, though, he did react. His shocked cry turned into a yelping hiss of pain from what he could only assume had to be a couple of fractured ribs. When he felt his back bump against a piece of his ship's wreckage Darren realized he had no more room to back pedal. Despite his retreat, the alien's face hadn't retreated from in front of his helmet at all. Instead, what Darren assumed was the analog for its neck had simply stretched from its main mass so that its head stayed the same distance away from him. At his gasp of pain, though, the creature recoiled slightly then backed off. Whether from fear at the unknown sound or concern at recognizing a sound of pain, Darren wasn't sure. With the creature's analog for a face no longer filling the view out of his helmet Darren did notice another, far more concerning problem though.

His Helmet's faceplate was cracked.

Even as he went slightly cross-eyed to stare down at the small spiderweb of cracks, most likely from when he had fallen on his face earlier, he could see the crack widen slightly. The tiger had no idea what the air composition was or if it was even breathable. For all he knew the air could have been full of mercury and carbon-monoxide and he'd be dead within seconds of breathing it in! He was still too addled from the impact and high on adrenaline to make any rational decision. He couldn't even figure out what part of his situation to freak out about the most: the crash and his near-death, the sudden confrontation with an alien life form, or the damage to his helmet and his potentially upcoming death. The alien had begun making some strange noise somewhere between a musical vibration and the squishing sound you make when you stick your fist into a mayonnaise jar. It had even pulled out some strange looking object that seemed to be made out of crystal and was waving it in his direction, but Darren had no idea what any of it mean. He was too focused on staring down at the damage to his helmet as the internal warning of his suit losing pressure began to beep in his ear. The shifting pressures inside and outside the suit only made the cracking worse.

"Fuck it." Darren growled to himself in frustration. If he was going to suffocate, he just wanted to get it over with.

Taking a deep breath to savor the last of his suit's air, one that painfully inflated his lungs in his damaged rib cage, Darren reached up to remove his helmet's face-plate. After holding his breath for only a moment in hesitation, he spread his nostrils wide and sucked possibly the only breath of this alien world's atmosphere he'd ever smell.

It was... sweet.

It was strange, the way the air smelled like it had a taste. It's like when someone is frying onions and the smell permeates the air so thoroughly and thickly you can all but taste it on your tongue. Except this scent had a strange sweet tang too it, almost like the powdered sugar in a pixie stick. It took Darren several moments of sucking in lungful after lungful of that oddly enticing air that he was actually breathing it! he wasn't suddenly suffocating and his lungs didn't feel like they were being burned from the inside out. Other than the painful agony of his bruised and cracked ribs creaking each time he breathed in too deep, he had no trouble breathing in this atmosphere whatsoever. In fact, he actually felt pretty amazing now that he'd gotten a few lungfuls of fresh air. It wasn't until he took his third deep breath that he realized there was no longer a sharp pain in his chest when he breathed in too deeply.



"What the?" He said aloud, causing the creature in front of him to recoil from the unexpected sound.

His hands tentatively brushed against his chest before pushing in on it expecting to feel a sharp pain from agitating his cracked ribs. But the pain never came. Experimentally, Darren sucked in as deep a breath as he could manage. Expanding his lungs out to their fullest he didn't even feel a tightness of a recently healed injury, much less the sharp pain of broken ribs. When he raised his gaze back up from his chest to look over at the alien he saw the creature had some strange object held in one of its arm-like appendages. The strange T-shaped crystal seemed to be emitting some kind of faint light in his direction and making beeping noises as the light moved up and down the tiger's torso.

"Hey, what is that thing? What are you doing?" Darren asked, reaching an arm towards the device the alien was holding.



Before his arm got halfway between them, though, it stopped mid-movement when the tiger felt the shoulder and sleeve of his suit pull skin tight then simply rip open along one of its

seams. Eyes going wide, Darren looked down at his arm and found that thick tufts of his own fur were sticking of the seams where they had all seemed to split open simultaneously. That wasn't what had him so confused and amazed, though. Instead, what caught his eye was the fact that his arm was ripped! He'd been in good shape previously, he'd had to be in order to be chosen for this mission, but the thick mound of muscle for his bicep and the steely tendons along his forearm were a whole magnitude larger than he'd ever been before.

As if trying to grab attention from his first arm, he heard a now familiar ripping sound coming from his other side. Looking over, he saw that his other arm's sleeve had ripped apart at the same as well to expose just as much newfound muscular flesh as his first arm had. It was only then as he started to really take stock of himself that he realized just how tight his space suit had become. Tilting his head, Darren realized he was actually having to look down at the alien who seemed to be staring in just as much shock at the tiger's sudden transformation as Darren himself was. Staring down at himself, he saw that his pectorals had burgeoned a good inch forward farther than they usually did, looking ready to shred the front of his suit open the moment he took another deep breath. His legs further down were just as ripped and muscular as his arms had become and just the act of Darren shifting his sitting position a bit caused them to flare and shred open his pants legs much like his arms had done to their sleeves.



He tried to take a deep breath to calm himself down, his mind already overloaded from the panic of his crash to the wonder of seeing an intelligent alien and now the strange transformation his body seemed to be going through. Unfortunately, barely a second after his lungs had started to feel with that pleasantly sweet air the sound of ripping fabric and splitting plastic filled the air again. This time the change was more obvious, Darren able to actually see his perspective rising higher an inch at a time. He could feel his shoulders broadening to the point the back of his suit tore open and his chin stretched outwards to knock against the inside of his damaged helmet until it split open around his expanding head. His chest tore the front of his suit apart in a shower of confetti and even his boots burst open as his clawed toes tore through the front of him in a desperate bid to make more room for themselves. The alien had started to retreat away from him out of fear but Darren stopped it in its tracks. One of his now meaty arms reached out and cupped the back of the creature's 'head' like palming a melon and held it in place near him.

"What are you doing to me?" the tiger asked, unable to help but grin slightly as he realized his voice had gotten deeper and more resonant thanks to his new size. "Did you do this? Can you even understand me?"

The alien, for its part, had dropped the strange device it had been holding and was trying to squirm its way free of the tiger's grasp. While its body seemed mostly amorphous, its 'head' seemed to need to retain a certain minimum shape and mass, otherwise it simply would have compressed and slid between Darren's fingers. Though the tiger wasn't trying to be outwardly aggressive, the sheer fact of his growth mixed with the admittedly intimidating show of his enlarged teeth weren't doing anything to alleviate the creature's worry. Panicking, the creature did what anyone might do in a situation where a much larger creature had them trapped. Its face seemed to stretch upwards, then split open near the bottom, the two sides of its newly formed 'mouth' elongating then hardening into teeth-looking crystals, and bit down on one of Darren's fingers.

"Ow! What the fuck?!" the tiger exclaimed, his arm jerking back away from the creature.

Taking the opportunity, the little alien scampered a good dozen or so yards away from the Tiger, though it still stayed within viewing distance rather than running off completely. Darren, for his part, sucked in a sharp breath in pain as he raised his finger towards his lips. The bite hadn't actually done that much damage though it had drawn blood, but it still ached enough to irritate him. He hardly even noticed that his perspective was rising again in a fresh spurt of growth until he looked down and saw that he was effectively naked at this point, the last tatters of both his suit and uniform beneath laying in a pool of scrap cloth around him. Struggling to make sense of everything that was happening to him, Darren returned his gaze to his injured finger only to have yet another curve ball thrown at him.

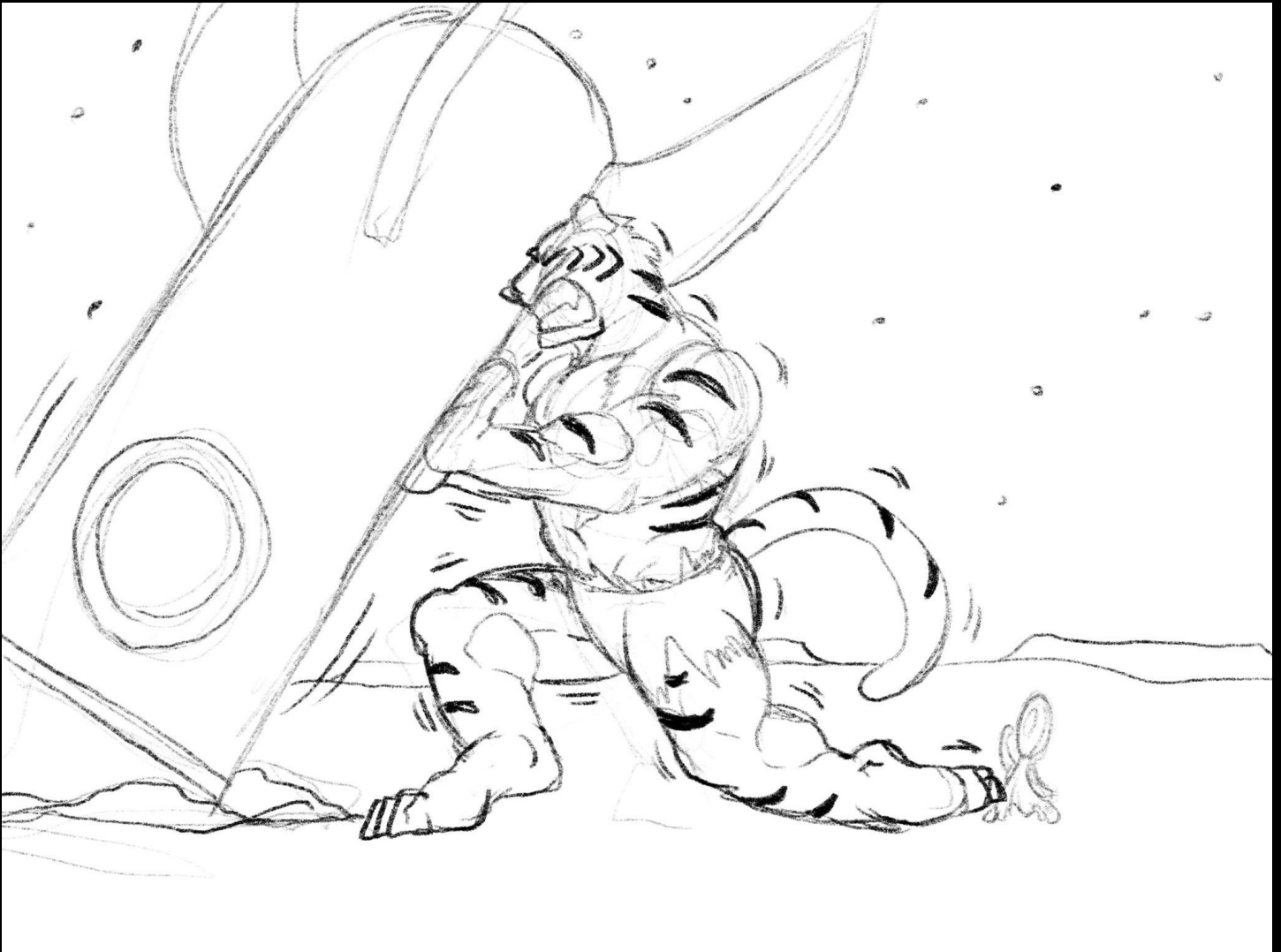
It was healing.

Right before his eyes he could see the wound closing up like one of those flower life-cycle videos in fast forward. In less than five seconds the entire injury had vanished as if it had never been there. Before he had a chance to really contemplate what could have caused such spontaneous healing a metallic groan echoed from behind him followed by a squawking gurgle of a sound from the alien he took for surprise. Feeling the wall of the damaged ship's hull shifting against his back, Darren turned around only to have his eyes go wide at the sight of the ship beginning to shift and tilt forward. Apparently, the ship had been more precariously perched where it had crashed than he had intended, and even the minor jostling of his enlarged body bumping against it had unbalanced the whole thing. It was going to fall right on top of him!

It was too large for him to have scrambled his way out of its path in time. So, acting on instinct rather than any rational thought, Darren spun around and braced his palms against the side of the ship in a futile attempt to hold it up. His jaw clenched and a strangled snarl of effort escaped his lips as he struggled futilely to push back against the ship. Even though he was now easily more than twice his original size and had gained enough strength that his hands were actually making tiny, visible impressions in the hull there was simply too much for him to hold up all by himself. Adrenaline coursed through him in his desperate need and Darren sucked in a deep breath before redoubling his efforts to hold the ship up. Oddly enough, despite the immense strain he was under the usual burning sensation of over-exertion that he would have expected to be filling his muscles seemed just out of reach. It was odd, like he could almost feel it but before the ache actually set in it would fade away again. It was then that he saw what was happening. Even as he struggled to hold the toppling ship up, he could see the already impressively enhanced musculature along his arms visibly thickening and swelling with newfound muscle mass. As they did, his arms overall grew larger and longer, hands spreading to cover more of the hull with each passing second as his body began to go through yet another growth spurt. Thinking back to the injury on his finger and his cracked ribs from minutes ago, Darren started to put two and two together. Something was causing his body to exhibit some kind of enhanced healing factor. And now, in a moment of extreme muscle-use it seemed that his body was not only healing the damage to his muscles caused from over-use in real time, but they were actually developing newfound muscle-mass to compensate at the same time. In the span of ten seconds of trying to hold the ship up Darren's body had bloated with the same amount of muscle mass that would have required years of dedicated weight lifting at the gym to generate!

Despite his newfound strength and increasing size the hull of the ship was still too much for him. That's when he felt the load suddenly lighten above him, if only marginally. Confused, Darren looked around briefly then saw the alien behind him had both of its arm-appendages raised in the air and its eye lights were squinted in what looked to be an analog expression of intense effort and concentration. Its arms quaked and rippled as if it were, itself, holding up some immense weight and its eyes were looking right past Darren to the hull of the ship toppling towards him. When it raised its appendages up another inch or so, Darren actually felt the ship creak and heft upwards slightly; taking a bit more of its weight up off of him. Was it

using some kind of telekinesis to try to help him? Rather than question the specifics of what was happening, Darren chose to take advantage of it instead. Redoubling his effort, chest heaving from labored breaths in his struggle against the toppling ship, Darren shoved himself fully against the side of the vehicle. As he did his body continued to grow as if responding to his determination and desperation. His knee dug a deep gouge into the ground from his increasing weight and the ship pressing down atop him while his hands dug deeper imprints into the hull's metal as they spread to cover more of it with every new inch of growth. With one last deep inhale of breath, Darren forced himself bodily against the ship one last time in hopes of finally pushing it off of him.



And nearly fell over on top of it instead.

Lost in his own effort, Darren had completely lost track of his size. Now that he was paying attention again he realized that the ship was no longer threatening to topple down on top of him. In fact, it couldn't have even if it had tried! The tiger's eyes slowly went wide as he realized that, hands still on the fuselage of the ship, he was actually looking DOWN at it now! Darren had outgrown his own space ship. Experimentally, he readjusted his grasp on the ship

and found that it was relatively easy to heft the thing up into his arms now. carrying the entire, mostly intact, wreckage of his ship like he were holding a small ironing board, Darren began to look around his surroundings again. That's when he spotted the little alien down by his feet, its glowing eyes wide in what he assumed was a mixture of awe and fear. That's what he'd be feeling if he were in the little thing's shoes anyway. Darren on the other hand, felt amazing.



"Holy shit." He said aloud, then let out a booming laugh as he realized how loud and deep his voice had become. "I'm huge! Check me out, I could use my ship as a bench press weight!"

Now, the tiger wasn't an idiot. The pieces were quickly starting to fall together in his head as to what was going on. Experimentally, Darren focused his attention on a spot on the ship for scale and began to slowly suck in a deep breath one bit at a time. Just as he'd expected, he saw his body starting to slowly expand larger and larger the more of the planet's unusual air he inhaled. Whatever it was in the atmosphere making the air so sweet, it was also enhancing his body beyond anything that should have been possible! Darren probably should have been a bit more concerned or confused as to what was happening to him, but whether from the simple

power rush of so much raw strength coursing through him or the effect the alien air was having on him all he could feel was a rush of ego and confidence that came from being so strong. He felt almost drunk on the power he held, mixed with knowing all he had to do to get more of it was breath in and it was a miracle he hadn't lost control already.

Turning his attention back down to the little alien his lips pulled back into a feral grin. Adjusting the ship so he could hold it in one arm, Darren knelt down and reached for the little blob of an alien. For a split second he felt a strange pressure on his index finger and thumb as he tried to pinch the alien between them, like when you're trying to push two north pole magnets together and they're trying to push themselves back apart. After a moment he recognized it as that same force that had helped him lift the ship up; the alien's telekinesis. He almost laughed at how effortlessly he bypassed it by simply squeezing his fingers together a bit harder. Lifting the little alien up he dropped the now-tiny thing atop the new shelf of his pectorals, grinning down at them with his billboard-size face.

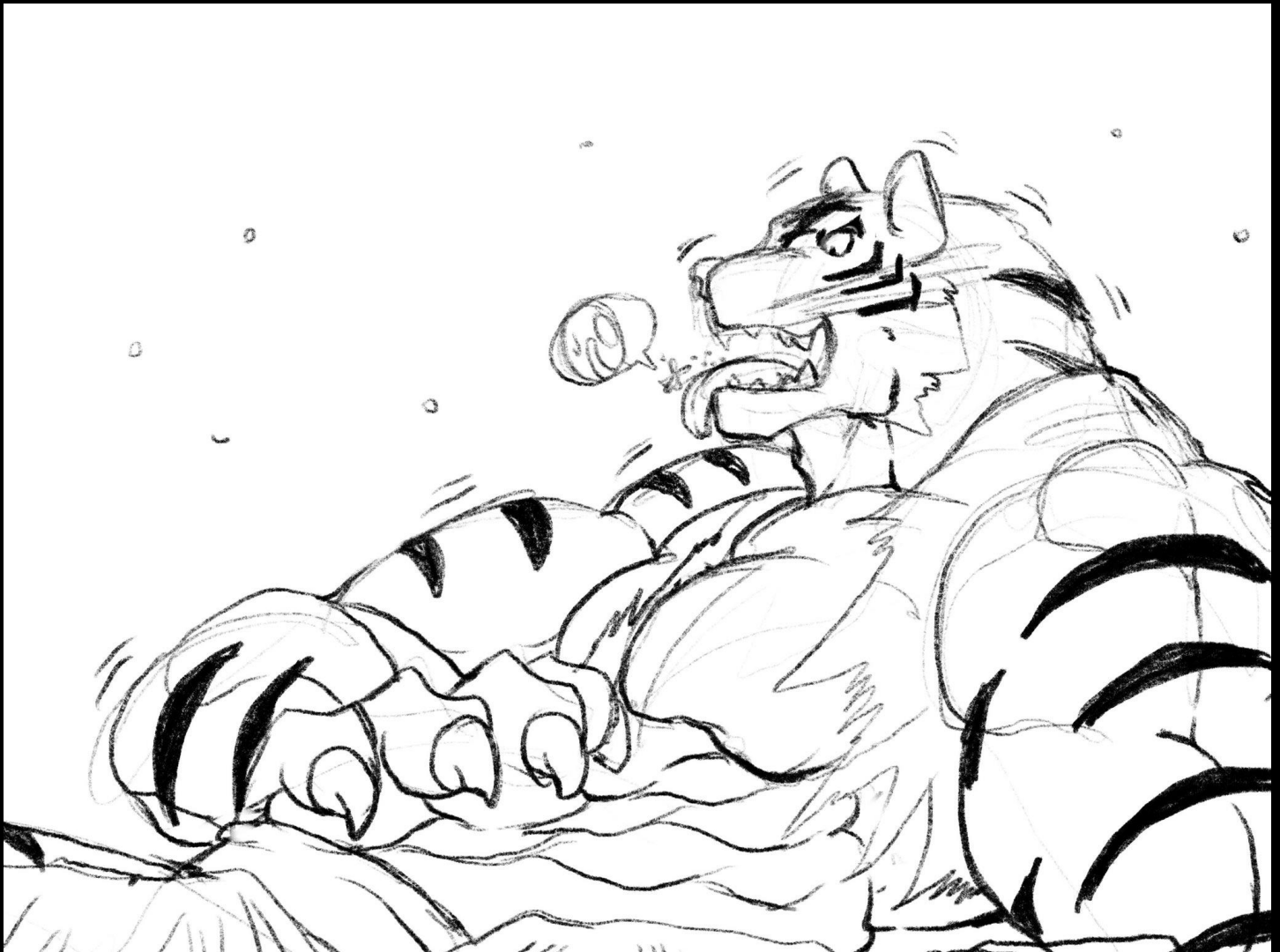


"Well, damn. How's this for first contact, eh? Not exactly how I expected it to go either but it seems your planet is pretty happy to have me here!" Darren laughed, not even noticing

how the alien flinched away from the thunderous volume of Darren's laughter. Lifting up one of his now massive arms to flex a bicep that now quite literally could rival a small hill in size, Darren continued talking himself up "I mean, look at this! I'm huge! And it's all thanks to you and your pretty little planet here. I think I'm gonna like it here. It's really starting to..."

Darren trailed off mid-sentence, his grin growing absolutely feral with glee. Slowly he began to suck in another long, deep breath of the alien air, body once more swelling out larger and larger with each passing second; much to the growing fear of the little alien trapped atop him. Only once he had swollen half again his already massive size did he stop breathing in and finish his sentence.

"Really starting to grow on me."



When the hull of his ship creaked under his touch, Darren glanced down as if only now remembering it was there. the little thing was barely the size of a 2-liter bottle of soda to him now. With a look of mild disdain, Darren casually tossed it to the side like someone throwing away a bit of garbage. He had no intention of going anywhere anytime soon. the last thing he

wanted was to go back home and give up this feeling of power. Slowly he let himself begin to tip backwards until his enormous ass crashed down into the landscape like a meteor. The entire surrounding area shuddered with an earthquake that would have been felt for miles just from the act of the gigantic tiger sitting down. All the while he continued grinning down at the little alien. It had been smart enough to lift itself up off of his chest, using its telekinesis to hover just above Darren lest it be thrown about when he hit the ground, but that didn't mean it was out of the tiger's reach. The power was going to Darren's head, and he was starting to get off on how utterly unstoppable he felt. Teasingly, he spread his jaws wide and stuck out his tongue to give the little alien an up-close look inside of the enormous cavern of his mouth, as if taunting him with the casual thought of being eaten. It was around that time that the alien ships attacked.



A sudden barrage of impacts slammed against Darren's chest, shoulder, arm, and the side of his head in a chorus of heavy kinetic blasts and small explosions. The now massive tiger hadn't even noticed the approach of the fleet of alien ships. Taking the distraction as the opportunity it was, the little alien turned tail and flew itself away as fast as its telekinetic powers could take it. Good thing, too, as when the smoke of the weapon's barrage faded, Darren was still sitting there looking as cocky as ever. He did have a few bruises and scorch marks where

the weapons had hurt him, but it had been nothing more than a few welts from BB pellets or fire cracker burns; nothing had even broken the surface of his skin. They hurt, sure, but the knowledge that weapons that probably would have destroyed his ship had done so little to him only excited Darren that much more.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Was this your planet?" The giant tiger rumbled, turning his attention towards the ships. After a moment of searching he spotted what looked like the largest one and spoke directly to that one; assuming that it was their flag ship. "Well. Maybe it was. But you know. I think it's under new management."

With that, Darren's lips parted in an open-pant of near-lusty hunger. His body was so overheated with anticipation that there was actual steam coming from his lips from the temperature differentiation. That wasn't what terrified the aliens in the armada, though. Instead, they all found themselves being forced to back their ships away as, with each inhalation the tiger sucked in, not only did his wounds begin to close up right in front of the alien's eyes but his body began to once more enlarge. The bigger Darren got, the more of the alien he could suck in at once and the faster he grew. Not only that, but the more air he breathed in and the bigger he got the more drunk and addled his mind seemed to become, as if the sweet, addictive scent to the air were shutting down his inhibitions more and more with each breath.

"Give me your best shot!" He thundered, his voice alone sending a shock wave through the air that caused the alien ships to wobble from the turbulence it caused. "Let's see if you can make me bleed before those little gnats you call ships are too small to even see!"

They didn't waste time even letting Darren finish speaking before the ships had begun firing again. Explosions bloomed across his chest and a flexed bicep, kinetic armaments smashed against his hide with enough force to topple buildings and some even deployed energy weapons that could have sliced through an entire ship like a hot knife through butter. yet through all of it, Darren simply kept inhaling more and more of the tainted, alien air and growing larger and larger. What little damage the ships were able to do healed almost as fast as it happened as he continued to breath in. before long, he had grown so large their weapons didn't even do visible damage anymore; explosions barely ruffling the thick forest of fur covering his body. Some of the ships had been unlucky or inattentive in their positioning and had found themselves bulldozed out of the air as the tiger's growing shoulder, arm, or face simply smashed into them during one of the tiger's growth spurts. When he finally took action, himself, it only took a single sweep of what now had to be a several mile-long arm to smash the entire remainder of the alien armada out of the air with the ease of knocking away a swarm of gnats.

"I guess that's all you guys could manage? Well then, I Guess that means It's my turn" Darren rumbled ominously. A hand big enough to crush an entire city landed on a nearby mountaintop, using it as a grip to help the titanic tiger push himself up to his feet. The sky seemed to darken across a good portion of the alien continent as he rose into the air, blocking

out the sun for dozens of miles in any direction. Slowly his monstrous head swiveled back and forth to survey the new landscape; to survey HIS new kingdom. Given unimaginable power, and any resistance to letting his most base and self-centered desires free wiped away by the intoxicating effects of the alien atmosphere; Darren had already decided this alien planet would be his, and his alone.

It had taken a couple of days, but Darren had finally found the alien's capital city. or at least, he was pretty sure it was their city. It was by far the largest settlement he had come across, and it had the most powerful defenses of any of the cities he had come across. Not that it meant they were of any danger to him. Even as he had searched, he had continued to grow. Now, even the alien's equivalent to nuclear strikes barely singed his fur. The capital, though, they had tried a defensive tactic instead. They'd covered the entire city in an enormous, multi-mile wide energy dome to protect it. The idea made Darren laugh at their futile struggles.



With casual ease, he had simply smashed his mountainous fingers into the ground itself and uprooted the entire capital, barrier and all. Palming the barrier in his hand like a baseball, all it took was for the tiger to clench his fingers together and the barrier shattered like brittle glass. The barrier could have protected the city from a world-ending cataclysm like a meteor strike or total nuclear assault, Yet the tiger invader to their world had crushed it with ease.

As the sense of overwhelming defeat poured through the remaining alien population, the capital found itself raised up in front of an eye nearly as big as the entire city itself. Darren's voice thundered across the city with so much force some of the buildings collapsed just from the vibrations of his words. They probably couldn't even understand him anymore, but that wasn't important. he didn't need them to hear or understand him. He just needed them to know who was in charge.

"My name is Darren. And I'll be your new god."