

Dark Matter

by Holo

For centuries, astronomers had been tracking a darkening of the skies. A specific patch of the night sky had slowly, over decades, been going black. The stars all went out, one after another, and without their light it was impossible to find the planets that once orbited them. They searched and studied across generations to try and find the cause of the odd pattern.

Technology advanced, and their telescopes could see farther and more clearly. At the same time, the trail of vanishing stars moved ever closer. They began to fear that their star was next. Dreading the potentiality, they poured all their efforts into piercing the darkness of the heavens.

Finally, they saw it. A mass of black, only barely distinguishable from the blackness of space that sat as its backdrop. It was a huge, undulating mass, bigger than the biggest star. Its only defining feature was a jaw, stretched open wide, sucking in anything and everything that got near. It was illuminated by the light of a star, which looked small as a grape compared to the cataclysmically large maw. The star faced the same fate as the hundreds, thousands of stars that had gone before it. This massive monster, this starlit sea of gluttony, was consuming the cosmos. Their star was next, and them along with it.

They began construction immediately, knowing they had maybe a few decades before the dark devourer finally reached them across the vastness of space. They watched it closely as they worked, observing how that unfathomable jaw closed over that neighboring star. What must have seemed an instant to the monster was years to those on the planet. Those swallowing jaws swept closed at hundreds of miles an hour, but being so big, it seemed slow and lazy. Fitting of its god-like obesity.

They watched as the star dimmed, its blazing light gradually being blocked by the closing of sharp teeth. The light shone jagged through fangs that could crush the iron cores of planets. In time it darkened entirely, the sphere of flames swallowed into that all-consuming blackness. Without the light, they lost sight of it, but they knew it was coming for them.

Uneventful decades passed, and their technology advanced even more. Space travel became safer, cheaper, more reliable. Populations began to be launched into space, to new and distant star systems where they might escape the creature's projected path. Most were forced to stay behind to support and guide the colonies as best they could, for as long as they could manage.

Aster fifty years they saw it again, looming on the edge of their starlight. Its closed jaws cracked open for the first time in half a century. Even at this great distance, it was massive enough that it began to affect and distort their fragile solar system. The planets' orbits twisted with the new gravity source, lengthening years and dragging planets away from their star. Their night sky vanished, the light of so many stars now hidden behind the galactic mass of sludgy black. Opening jaws were the only discernible feature amidst the bloated rolls, creeping ever closer and opening ever wider.

It was likely that this beast had no idea that the tiny planet was even in its path. It was a grain of sand beside the star that was its goal. The gravity field of the planet began to warp, and the planet lost its orbit, being dragged into that gullet as though it were a black hole. Most of the

rest of the population was evacuated now, very few staying behind to see the ships off. Some stayed by choice, others, by force. The sea was drawn up from its basin and siphoned into those uncaring jaws. Soft rock and loose earth was ripped from the ground. The planet began to crack and stretch, and magma poured out from the cracks. It crumbled from the intense gravity, ending what little life still remained.

As ships soared away, warp-drives warming up, their inhabitants watched as those massive jaws consumed their former home and made headway for their star. Most ships left then, firing deep, deep into space. A select few launched probes and telescopes to orbit the monster, to be able to monitor it always. As they fled into deep space, they watched it over years, consuming their once great star, extinguishing it in the night of its insides. It was slow, very slow. It was likely they could live a thousand lives before it ever made it to their new homes. But this solution was temporary, they knew. Eventually, all would be consumed.