

This story was the winning submission in Furry Migration 2015's "Iron Pen" competition. The rules were to create the story in under 24-hours using the "ingredients" of a Minnesota-native animal species, a "migration" of some sort, and a secret ingredient to be revealed the day before the convention begins. The secret ingredient was "the shiny reward" or "the illuminating achievement/goal/discovery that fulfills the journey and drives what is to come". The world-setting, fictional landmarks within this story's context, "The Silver Hunt" and the characters of Cynosure and Prosper are owned by myself.

Final Migration

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Tremors echoed through the panicked corridors of *The Silver Hunt*. The angry sun flared: tendrils of plasma reaching to threaten everyone's future. They looked to Cynosure. Despite designing the space arks, how to escape the coming storm evaded her. On the bridge, the wolf tried to take it in stride.

"That was a bad one," Prosper panted.

Damage reports were heavy.

Five months from Terra and they still hadn't passed the Martian orbit. If they were going to escape the sun's fury, they would have to go faster.

"You have a knack for the obvious," she told the marten.

"That's what poets do," Prosper replied. "But it takes time to shroud the obvious in flowery language and force people to dig for meaning. I didn't have time to be suitably vague."

He sounded glib. Briefly, the grey lupine woman wished she hadn't voted to bring the marten on the Great Migration. But his scent was tinged in fear: his humor was a mask. The lupines and the martens were the last intelligent species from Terra. Ten of the eighty arks had fallen behind and three: destroyed. Many remained to be saved.

If they could be saved.

Over one-hundred-thirty-five million years, Terra had generated several intelligent species. But unlike the others, the lupines and martens weren't leaving at their leisure.

"You know, Cyno, it shows maturity that lupines brought us. Other post-humans conquering the evolutionary ladder may not have been so kind."

"Kindness has nothing to do with it. Humans knew others would rise. The First Cache says as much; both the orcas and kodiak added their words to it, in the wake of their ascension."

"But wolves didn't *have* to bring martens," he reminded her. "For centuries, your people hunted mine."

"The hunts are ancient history. We learned from the caches that any intelligence is to be cherished."

"And yet there was still a vote."

And in the end, she thought, it might resolve nothing. Humans had left caches around Terra: sealed, black stones which helped the descendant races understand their advancement. Their paths hadn't always been the same but all Terran intelligence moved in the same direction. The problem was that humans had been about a millennium beyond the lupines when they had departed Terra.

The solar impact of a white dwarf fragment had changed the timetable. A billion years of stellar evolution had accelerated into centuries. The sun was burning fuel at a mad pace, hastening its extinction.

So the lupines figured out how to make ships.

They built arks to take them into the void a millennium early.

But what few knew, what Cynosure understood, was that they couldn't make it. Their hope was that a cache was somewhere amongst the planets and asteroids to aide their escape. If not, they would die: too slow to survive migration. Claxons sounded. "Another solar eddy: incoming," she said.

It lasted for days. Another ark was destroyed and three more fell behind. Cynosure scanned space for any sign left by the humans, orca, or kodiak. She felt despair; felt her age.

Weeks passed into months. More flares erupted and their numbers dwindled.

Only Prosper, with his poetry, seemed undaunted.

"It's no use," she said at last. They had passed the asteroids towards Jupiter. "Space is too vast and our sensors too primitive."

"You think like a marten," Prosper said. "For years, if one of us grew too infirm, self-destruction was the tradition." He paused. "But, here, there is only life and death. Is it really a disadvantage to keep trying?"

Cynosure was silent.

An alert blinked. Ears forward, she peered at the screen.

And there it was: a cache.

Thirty-meters wide, a black dodecahedron floated in space. Unlike other caches, though, it bore no writing.

"What's that?" Prosper asked. He indicated a scroll of text on a comm screen. Initially, Cynosure had ignored it, thinking it to be from the other ships. But this message came from the void.

Trembling, she engaged audio translation.

"Welcome." The voice was human ... alien. "Our sensors indicate you do not seem to have discovered superluminal travel. Rest assured that once you have, you will be able to use this cache to reach our location. Our coordinates are inscribed on its interior but you will only be able to understand them and properly navigate the contained wormhole once you understand superluminal physics. We look forward to meeting you. When you are ready: come to us."

On the screens, the cache unfolded, opening like a black flower with a bright light shimmering at its center.

"What does that mean?" Prosper asked.

It meant they were dead. They weren't ready. The sun would catch them.

The writings on the cache's interior were arcane. At the center of it all, sustained by technologies no one understood, flickered the unnavigable entry to the wormhole: a random passage in space.

Cynosure conferred with the fleet. The sun turned red and continued expanding. Mercury was gone and Venus' atmosphere burned away. Inside a year: nothing would remain.

Despairing, Cynosure watched a single flare amongst millions traverse the sun's surface.

It winked, beckoning to the fleet. Her eyes widened; she saw it ... the answer.

Turning, she looked at the flickering wormhole. It was unnavigable, true, but it was still open.

"Contact the rest of the fleet," she said. "We're going through."

"What?"

Unanswering, she gave the computer coordinates. Engaging thrust, she maneuvered the ark towards the cache.

"But we won't be able to join the humans," Prosper said, "We can't navigate this phenomenon."

"Exactly," she said. "But that's the point: to show we can find our own way. Otherwise, why have the cache open? This is the way out ... *our* way out. We may never meet humans; instead we'll meet ... ourselves."

She punched the acceleration.

The others followed, passing the boundaries of space and time, and voyaged into the unknown.

Behind, the sun flared and expanded, consuming Terra.

Ahead, lay their future.

The End