

STARGAZING ALL ALONE BY MYSELF

- to Belén Alemán, for the inspiration -

Got out of the hibernation chamber some 10 minutes ago. Systems still kicking in. The supernova will commence in 20 minutes. I check my bio status on the ship's computer. Not so bad for somebody who just woke up from a 150 years of sleep. Poured myself a Turkish coffee made from ground beans, courtesy of the replicator.

I'm a *stargazer*. I witness fantastic stellar phenomena as they happen. I live alone. Most of the people I know have passed away while I was in the hibernation chamber and the rest will wake up most likely after I'm dead. We live alone, we die alone. Although we make many acquaintances, we never make friends.

Except for the hibernation chamber, humankind didn't make much of a progress in the last 15 millennia – believe me, I can vouch for at least the last 2000 years, I was there. Life expectancy is still 100 years, give or take, but with hibernation, you get to decide **when** you spend it. Thus rose our faction. We strived for distant stars and we were there. I am 35 years old and I have watched as stars were born and faded away – from a safe distance of course, but as close as *humanely possible*.

It's hard to keep in touch when in the blink of an eye you skip decades while the other party will have chosen a different *jump* or simply won't bother at all. It's customary to submit your destination and wake-up trigger to the net before you start hibernation so people can know where you are and what you are doing but in reality, the chances of having your schedules coinciding is one in a million and that's figuratively speaking. I had met two stargazers who were lovers sharing the same hibernation chamber since they first got together so that they would never get apart. One day, there was a dispute over a stupid equation. That night, they slept in different chambers and never saw each other again. In our lives, one lapse is more than enough to get you on different tracks. It's not a coincidence we tend to be loners.

Sometimes when I'm in a certain mood, I post messages to Belen - a fellow stargazer whom I had met during a supernova. With the other stargazers also attracted to the supernova site like us, we had decided to camp there and share stories for a duration of 5 months (being my longest break ever from stargazing). Now, this is a unique kind of an experience: people from all over the known space, spanning millennia of origin come together and live like they have known each other for a lifetime. They do research together, eat together and sing their stories together. We gazed together. But the truth is, inside, everybody knows that this is only temporary. Almost certainly, nobody will see the other again. And thus, the nice feelings grow a bit sour, stained, keeping you from cherishing it completely. After our parting from the scene, Belen set course for far into the uncharted lands. She's a long skipper – when she gets out of hibernation, she settles down for some long duration: some 5 years at the very least before she enters the chamber again to wake up millennia later as opposed to my 'type' where I prefer short bursts of living over short bursts of skipping. Last time I checked, she was still in hibernation and most likely, I'll be long dead before she emerges out and finds my posts sent from different ages of my life all piled up, waiting for her.

Ah, the indicator buzzes as the enhanced view of the star filling my panel screens starts going supernova. I must admit I'm a sucker for supernovas, although it would definitely be more fun sharing it with a friend, and that's the truth...

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