

Impulse

Jake bounced down the dusty trail heading towards home. Through his helmet, he gazed up at the sea of glittering stars and one small blue and white marble. They were in the middle of a lunar night, so the sun wouldn't come back for another week.

While his parents were away at the main colony, it was up to him to maintain the solar panels for their remote home and research station. He loved this chore. It was quiet, peaceful, and beautiful.

He was startled by a brilliant blue-white streak low across the horizon, then a fan of moon dust and rock sprayed into the air. The ground started ringing through his boots.

Something had hit, but it hadn't hit near any settlements, so it was nothing to worry about. He turned back to the cave entrance that held their home, but stopped when he realized that the wave of dust and rock was heading towards him with a trailing glow. Whatever it was came in at a low trajectory, causing it to slide across the surface, and it looked like it was coming right at him.

Jake began to run towards home but it was gaining on him. He wasn't going to make it, but then the spray of debris just stopped. His legs shaking, he turned to see a bare spot on the ground with a bottle partially encased in a lump of ice, sizzling and smoking at the center. The last of the ice fell off, leaving the bottle slightly charred.

It was a kind of bottle he'd never seen before. It was clear like glass, but also tinted, as if metal had been mixed into the glass. There was something inside.

In the air lock, he took off his suit and examined the bottle. The bottom was wider than the mouth, but the glass flowed in waves towards the opening which was capped with a metal cover. There was an indentation on the top. Jake pressed his thumb into it. With a hiss, the cap loosened.

Inside, a silver sheet was coiled like a piece of paper. He tipped the bottle over and the sheet slid into his hand, exposing writing he'd never seen before. He placed it onto the imager and let the computer do its work. By the time he'd done maintenance on the oxygen scrubber, the code was broken.

“Greetings. My name is Pan. I have lived my whole life on a ship. We’re looking for a planet we can call home. Our world was destroyed by invaders. We left on a starship, but it’s been generations and we still haven’t found a home. I want to see the ocean and put my feet in the sand. I want to feel wind on my face. I want to taste rain. If you find this message, we’re listening on the Hydrogen Line. 1420.4 megahertz. If you have a place for us, please answer.”

There was an image below the message. It must have been embedded in code he couldn’t see on the metal sheet. It was a picture of a girl, about 16. She had caramel colored skin, large bright lilac eyes, a dazzling smile, and copper-colored hair. She was alien and stunning.

Jake wanted to meet this beautiful girl. He wanted to help her. She might have thrown this bottle out of her ship billions of miles away and thousands of years before, but he wanted to try. Environmental pressures had caused Earth’s population to collapse. New blood. New people. This might be just what was needed.

He punched the frequency into the computer and began to write his message back. “My name is Jake. I am from Earth. We need more people. We are two-thirds of the way out on the Orion Arm. Third planet from the star you’ll find at these pulsar cross-streets.” He pasted in the diagram scientists had long used to help locate the planet.

He saw “message ready” on the screen. His finger hovered over the enter button. Should he do it? His dad would say no. He’d say the adults... the council needed to decide. What if these weren’t the survivors, but the invaders, looking for another people to conquer? What if they brought disease. Death. He’d be dooming Earth. But what if they were exactly who she said they were. Hope. New Life.

His finger hovered... waiting on an electrical impulse to decide the future.