

Bigger Fish

“Did ya know some people fish...fer fun? I never smiled a day on the job in my life. Can't imagine people likin' it.

Sure, most are fishin' in a quiet pond with a beer in one hand, and I'm filtering urine into drinking water, chafing myself in a space suit for a week. And they probably don't have to worry about their river swallowing 'em whole and trapping 'em in a time-bending nightmare. But we both use nets, so there's a lot o' parallels. Even so, it's not easy explaining what I do, or why it's so dangerous. Not sure why ya wanna know.

Well, years ago, when I first laid eyes on that swirlin' river of energy in the sky, they told me never to touch it, or I'd get lost inside. 'Time don't work the same within the river's tides,' they said. Didn't matter to me, long as I got paid, but some guys did get curious. They'd reach a hand in, maybe a foot, then we'd never see 'em again. Don't think too much about it after that. 'If they were dumb enough to get trapped, they can stay trapped' is what a lot of the other rivermen told me.

One time, a year or two into the job, I fished out one of them curious guys. Told me he touched it, just fer a sec, and got pulled inside. Couldn't remember what it was like inside though. He thought the year was 2678, so was pretty lucky. Only wrong by five years.

That was nothing compared to somethin' else I heard though. A buddy o' mine told me of this ship he pulled out once. Ship with a full crew of seven. They weren't so lucky.

Turned out, they were from a system practically on the other side of the Trine, nowhere near us. The pile of junk ship they had screamed it had never been to space before, which meant

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they'd probably been stuck for centuries. It musta been one of the first trips to the stars they ever took.

'I bet they left with wide eyes and big stomachs, ready for whatever the universe threw at them', he told me. 'Probably flew right into the River, not even realizing it. They're staring straight ahead, blink and then, bam, looking up to see my sorry face, not knowing a damn thing about where they are or what's going on'.

This was after a tough shift, and he was buying the drinks at a local station. Otherwise, I woulda ignored him. He told me that getting that crew out of the River made him think.

He said,

'You ever wonder what it's like to be the first to look at your world? Not in a picture, but to turn around and see how big *and* how small it is. Would you wonder: everything I've ever known is back there. *More* than I'll ever know is back there. So then what waits for us among the stars? What massive thing is waiting that we've never even imagined? Pretty powerful stuff, huh?'

'Oh yeah, sure is,' I said, just to be polite. Long as he was buying, least I could do. He was always thinkin', makin' big plans. I dunno what he was heading towards, but he worked harder than any o' us. Didn't know much else about him though, which is fine by me. Made me like him more, to be fair.

He then asked me: 'What do you think the crew was thinking when I pulled them out of their ship? To enter the stars, blink and then see an alien looking down at you?'

I thought for a second, and said: ‘I dunno, but I guess they got what they wanted. Saw somethin’ new.’

Back in its own time, that ship was probably priceless. Guess it still was, in a way. No one wanted the scrap, so it got chucked out of the airlock and back into the River. The crew, however, got my buddy a pretty good price selling ‘em to a Rotian slave trader. Enough to quit fishing the River fer good. Not sure where he’s at now.

Don’t think too much about him or that crew anymore. But can’t seem to shake the thought of people fishing fer fun. Sure, slave trading’s illegal, but it’s a living. Fishing seems an awful cruel thing to do just for the hell of it.

Anyway, buy me another round. You wanted to know about fishing the river and I can’t talk with a dry mouth can I...uh, what was your name again?”

“Detective Kabrang, of the Cosmic Bureau of Investigation. And speaking of names...what was your friend’s? I think he’s *exactly* who I’ve been looking for.”