

A Quite Extraordinary Tale About Earth's History

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“Zyrek, are you nervous?”

“A bit”, I admitted.

It was our first day at Universe High, the best High School there is, at least, when you’re interested in Universology.

Which I am. Very.

I mean, can there be anything cooler than forging Universes? Galaxies? Planets?

“Here’s our classroom”, Zyphiris said, ripping me out of my thoughts.

We were standing in front of an elegant, white door.

She took a deep breath and pushed it open.

As I stepped inside, I was blown away.

Yes, I had seen pictures of universes like this, but now that I saw an actual one, I realized I had underestimated their beauty.

The classroom was quite large, with white tables circled around the middle.

And in the center of the classroom, floating above the floor, was a universe.

A black sphere, filled with countless galaxies.

It was undeniably the most wonderful thing I had ever seen.

“Ah, Zyrek and Zyphiris Duroth. Please, take a seat”, the teacher said.

I pulled my eyes away from the sphere and told myself to look at him.

“Thank you”, I answered, pushing my sister to an empty table.

She seemed just as stunned as I was.

A bit later, the lesson started.

The teacher gave a short introduction, before explaining what we were going to do.

“As it is your first semester at Universe High, your project will be to create a civilization. You have until the end of the semester, and the students with the best and furthest developed civilization will win the comet award.”

The comet award. A symbol only the best students carry, bringing honor and fame to the entire family.

“You can start by choosing a planet”, the teacher continued.

“On the screens in front of you, you can see – and control – what happens in this universe right now”, he said, pointing at the sphere.

“And you will work in pairs.”

“Yes!”, I breathed, looking at my sister.

Together, this was possible.

Choosing a planet was easy. We just zoomed into a random galaxy and quickly found a fitting one.

The star wasn’t too big, and the planet was the right size as well.

Yes, it was quite hot and covered with lava, but that was going to change.

As time went on, Zyphiris and I were struggling to terraform the planet.

We spent almost half the semester trying to make the place livable.

We sent water-loaded meteorites to cool the planet’s crust and create oceans.

We even made a moon, because – seriously – what is a planet without a floating rock following it around?

And a lot of hard work later, we decided it was finally time to populate the planet.

“But we need a name for it first”, Zyphiris insisted.

“What about... Lava? Or Stone?” I suggested.

She shook her head.

“It should be something soft. And friendly. What do you think of... Earth?”

“Perfect.”

We created microbes and watched them inhabit Earth.

But it took them *forever* to evolve into multicellular forms of life.

We waited and waited, and as the semester was starting to come to an end, it finally happened: intelligent life was beginning to form.

We called them dinosaurs.

They had potential to create the civilization we needed so badly, but we were disappointed.

They didn't seem to lift themselves up from the primitive animals they were, no, they even appeared to be a threat to other intelligent life.

So we had to make a tough decision.

We sent an asteroid at our beautiful planet and wiped out all of them.

Yes, it was brutal, but it was necessary.

Because now that the dinosaurs were gone, smaller species began to thrive.

And then, with only 300 000 Earth years left until the judging, the homo sapiens emerged.

It was incredible to watch:

first, they were only living in caves, then they were already building pyramids and soon skyscrapers!

And just as the humans were making progress in space travel and began to figure out AI, time... stopped.

The entire universe froze in place.

And that could only mean one thing: the semester was officially over.

It was time for the judging.

The door of the classroom swung open, and the judges walked inside.

They introduced themselves and told us students to leave the room, so they could look at the civilizations.

We walked outside, but of course, everyone pressed their ears against the wall and listened.

"Do you think Earth has a chance?", I whispered.

"I hope so. I really do."

After what felt like eternity, it was finally Earth's turn.

"Let's see. The next civilization is 'homo sapiens'", we could hear a judge say.

"Quite extraordinary species, as it seems. Apparently, they even made it to the moon."

"Yes, they built cities with a population of millions and yet working infrastructure. All kinds of languages and governments spread across the planet."

"Indeed. Also, they have lots of impressive technology and medicine. A fascinating history. Plus, they survived a worldwide pandemic recently."

I squeezed my sister's hand.

This was looking good.

"But – there is also war and self-destruction", one of the judges pointed out.

"The people are fighting each other brutally. And they are destroying their own planet by carelessly pumping CO2 into the atmosphere. Is this what a perfect civilization should look like?"

My heart sank.

But then, the judge seemed to notice something.

"What – what is that?"

The room grew silent.

They called me and Zyphiris inside.

The judges were gathered around a screen, where they had apparently zoomed in on a human house.

A girl was sitting at a desk, frozen in time, writing a story.

And not just any story.

It was *my* story.

Of how I went to Universe High and created life on Earth together with Zyphiris.

How was this possible?

How did she know?

We won the award.

And yet, I couldn't help but wonder: am I real? Or am I just part of a story?