

The gates to the colony were standard in size, in shape. They covered one of only three passages that led outside the dome and onto Planet Corinth's surface. He pounded on the gates. The sky was a soft hue of purple, and a cool breeze split the red-leaved trees. The grass underfoot was much like Earth grass. Maybe transplanted, maybe not. He did not know enough about the planet to be sure.

"The hell is it?" a voice grumbled. They'd seen him on their cameras, but he could not see them. They piped their sound out through a speaker.

"Please, I must speak to your leaders."

"The hell why?" the profane voice hollered.

"I am searching for my master, Dr. Young. He was last seen in this system. I have been doing a planet by planet search for him." The speaker was as quiet as a grave. The gates opened to an airlock, an antediluvian thing held over from when the colony had been experiencing some troubles with disease. He was led away from the front of the settlement, and in amongst the buildings. They were built in typical United Nations Colony Committee fashion. Compressed, two story buildings that appeared like cardboard boxes. Pack in people, pack in lives, and you are good to go! Brown and unassuming, they followed a clear layout, in cordoned sections that left equally spaced paved streets running from doorstep to doorstep. About fifteen feet across. No grass. Little decoration, and what there was seemed similarly unassuming. A potted flower, a set of wind chimes, a bicycle. All were covered in a dust; some saw this grime tangibly, others only in their mind's eye.

Two stocky men led him down, away from the door and toward the center of the colony. They bickered as they went, neither referring to him, though he knew that they meant him. This was the last UNCC colony left on Corinth. A rugged outpost deserted except for a handful of forsaken souls. Any stranger would have to come from the cities on the asteroid Thermopylae, nearly six hundred million miles away.

They entered the square, quite literally a square, framed by identically square buildings. In the center there was a small patch of space cleared with an obelisk rising from the center. Behind the stone tower was a slightly more oblong building that, though just as brown, could be identified as the meeting hall. He was told to drop any weapons he was carrying. He said he had none. He was brought down a hallway, took a right turn,

passed through a set of double doors, and waited as the Colony Council was called together.

“Why are you here, son? And don’t waste my time,” said an old one, once they were all assembled. All the Councilors were old, but he was probably the oldest. Decked in their identical black jumpsuits, they blended into one another like lines in a sketch.

“I have come looking for my master, Dr. Young. He was last seen in this system. Have you come in contact with him?”

“Master? Son, what is this?” chuckled the oldest. “The UN decries slavery!”

“Not for androids, sir.” The room went cold. This young fellow couldn’t be an android, could he? He wore the yellow jumpsuit of a mechanic. He had an even face, strong jaw, and sparkling green eyes. His blonde hair shined under the phosphorescent lights. There was nothing to betray him. No sign, no inclination.

“He’s dead,” another Councilor said dryly. “Went out to the forest to do research, and the Geomul got to him.”

“I’m sorry. I do not know what a Geomul is.”

“An alien native to this planet. Been here since we arrived. Funny, it’s sentient, but so hulking and so strong, that it practically runs the joint. It demands a maiden every seven years. Hibernates between periods.”

“But why?” He was generally curious. This seemed unreal.

“From what we can tell it wants the estrogen in ‘em.” The other Councilor still spoke. “Something with its biochemistry. Used to get it from the trees, but apparently humans are a much better source.”

“Why do you let such a monster terrorize you? Why not kill it?”

“We’ve tried. Lost fifty men the first go around, thirty the next. It’s got armored plating all over itself, and spits acid on top of it.”

“Well, talk to the UNCC then.”

“We’ve tried. Corinth is of no strategic importance, so they let us be. Everyone that had the money to leave did so when the freighter, *Columbia*, swung by about a year ago.” The men all had a look of despair on their faces. Some had seen the monster back when. Some had only heard tales. All knew that it was a threat to the colony’s safety and future.

The android thought on it. If Dr. Young had gone to seek out the monster, then maybe he was dead. Maybe. But there was also the chance that he was alive. He had to know for sure.

“If you would be so kind as to direct me toward the Geomul’s dwelling.”

“Oh, no I’m sorry.” The eldest Councilor shook his head. “But you are an automaton with no control. You’re rogue, and under the Treaty we must detain you.”

“The Treaty of 2089 does not prohibit interstellar travel by androids.”

“Yes, but you are amongst humans here, and we cannot take a chance that you’ll be hurt.”

“You can stay in the jailhouse until we figure out what to do with you.”

“Yes the jailhouse!” It was the other Councilor, the one who’d spoken with the insipid tone.

The android knew of prejudice. Dr. Young had made him read all sorts of that literature: Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Elie Wiesel. Yet never had the android experienced it himself. He’d been built off-Earth, in orbit around Mars. He had no part in the Android War, its beginnings or its outcome, though he’d been correct; the Treaty of 2089 that resolved the thing constricted only the belligerents of the war, not all androids.

There was a shuffle, there was a clank. A swoosh, and the door to the jailhouse opened. It was a small, old building. The locks were not very complex, as it seemed when a Councilor waltzed through the door. They hadn’t thought to put a guard on him. They had other patrols roaming the colony.

“Who are you?” was the first question asked, though not by the android.

“My number is GRE-118, but Dr. Young always called me George.”

“Well, nice to meet you, but we’ll have to move quick. I think that alarm’s disabled, but you can never tell with the damned things.” George the android peered through the old-fashioned wrought iron that separated him and the Councilor. His face was gray and long and troubled, like the others. Yet, there was something different. He had a strange sort of sadness in his eyes, a hollow kind, filled with selflessness. It was like looking through eyes of a man who no longer cared to see.

“There is something different about you.” George was surprised at his own receptiveness.

“Yes, I’m freeing your metal ass.” There was the metal-on-metal tone of a key turning, and George was free of his cell.

“There is a stipulation, isn’t there?”

He sighed, a long huff of air, blowing his lungs clean, and said, “My daughter. The Geomul took her, and I must be a fool to ask this, but can you save her?”

“She is not dead?”

“No, that’s the thing! There’s been expeditions up there, up to its cave, and they say that it keeps its prey alive for weeks, if not longer! It last came three days ago, and took her to its domain. God, can you save her?”

“And in exchange you will give me my freedom?” Again, George was shocked at how he could read this. The Councilor nodded, his ashen face bobbing like a waterfowl searching for food that was not there.

And this is where GRE-118, a.k.a George, was caught. All along he’d been following Dr. Young’s mandate. If the Doctor was not back in six months’ time, then George was to find him and return him to safety. That was the mission, and that had been George’s single-minded drive. Now, here was another, not commanding something of him, but *asking*. Dr. Young had never asked. Never requested, never even given pause to the thought that George had an opinion, a voice, a soul that he would like to share out loud. And now, here, he was being presented with the forbidden fruit. Or was he? For in the process of saving this girl, he might find Dr. Young and fulfill his mandate anyways.

The Councilor noticed the pause, and pushed back his silver hair. “Decide now. If you do not wish to re—”

“I will find your daughter, and in the process, find Dr. Young.” He stated it forcefully, as if he were trying to convince himself. Why did he need convincing? His neuron-interface had always fired at rapid speed before. He had never had to really *think* like he had just done.

The pair stole across the courtyard, and down one of the perfectly straight, perfectly lackluster streets. They were at a gate, and this time there were guards.

“The hell da ya’ think yer doin’?” he fired off. The pot-bellied sucker dropped as George swung his fists. His partner attempted to get off a shot, but George was too agile. Soon the airlock stood open, and the breezy night ruffled through, into the dome.

“Thank you. I will return with your daughter.”

“You will need a weapon.” The Councilor tossed the guard’s photon rifle. George caught it easily. “Best of luck.”

The cave was a filthy thing. Slime coated the walls, and the air was heavy with the smell of excrement. Bones ominously littered the floor, and George did his best not to crunch. Most were human, but there were a few horned animals that were unfamiliar to him. As he proceeded deeper into the cave, his internal lighting adjusted so that he could still see ahead of him.

He had progressed maybe eight hundred meters when he finally saw the thing. It was lounging lazily after ravishing something. It was hideous: the face of a Terran toad on the hulking body of a primate. George could see that it had plates running along its spine, as well as its extremely thick hide. It was grayish-blue in color, and had a tongue that lolled onto the floor of the cave, mingling with the slime and feces that resided there. It had one reddened eye open and one closed. It picked its teeth as it lay chest down, covering its belly. They had said it was sentient, but such a thing was hard to believe.

“Do I have another challengggggger,” it purred, its voice sweet and sing-song. George had no idea how it knew English. Perhaps it had learned from the colonists.

“My name is GRE-118. You have apprehended a maiden from the nearby colony, and they demand that you return her.”

“Ahhhhh, ha ha ha ha! Retttttturn is such an imbecilic opttttttion.” It stressed certain consonants in a primeval way. “Be gggggone, before I snap you up as well!”

“So she is dead already?”

“No, but soon. She is here!” It pointed skyward to a midnight sky devoid of stars. There hung a sack of some kind of bile, and inside a human form, curled in the fetus position. “She is mine, nottttt yours! Be gone!” George considered the rifle in his hand. He had not wanted to kill the thing, but it seemed he had no choice.

He fired three shots, quick and concise at its face. It growled, and reared up, standing bipedal like a man. It was no man. Just as fast, it came down on its front fists and waddled forward. A gorilla, George thought. He'd seen gorillas once, in a zoo on Mars. How fantastic to see something like this in a zoo?

"You will be sorry!" An odd gargling noise began from somewhere deep in its throat, and spit forward was a glob of a sizzling liquid. Acid. The featureless Councilor had said as much. George had to move. He fired another two shots, but they bounced harmlessly off the plating. He had to be conservative. Only another five shots. He flung himself out of the way as the beast hurtled down the ragged cave runway. Its momentum slowed, and it turned back to face George.

He fired another two shots, this time at its plated back. Worse than before. The Geomul did not even flinch. Instead it flung its lengthy tongue outward, this too dripping with acid. But George was swift enough. He rolled, and the tongue bounced harmlessly off the rocks where he'd been lying. The devil howled in rage. It had never met a foe so nippy, so precise. It never would again. Three shots left.

George fired two more, right toward its gaping mouth. The thing saw this, and snapped it shut, though its tongue was left exposed. The first shot deflected off the rock-hard lips. The second severed the muscle.

"Mm tong!" It screeched, blood burning in the back of its throat. Another stampede issued. George had only one shot. And then, he saw the white of its belly. Snow white, as if some rogue gale had flung itself on the beast without its knowing. It was clear of plating. The skin seemed soft. George kneeled and took aim. The Geomul had no idea that he'd noticed. George fired.

There was a plop, and the thing's chest was on fire. It reeled with all the grace its multi-ton body could muster. It tipped over, a turtle overturn. Yet, it was slowly making its way up, trying to roll onto its feet. George had only this chance. He was out of ammo. He scanned with all the speed that his artificial eyes could rally, and he saw a glint. A dagger, it would seem. He didn't know; he didn't care. He grabbed hold and sprinted at the Geomul.

“Pleeeeth!” it howled. George stopped, thought for the second time that day. This creature, no matter how cruel, was sentient. Killing it would be more than taking any old life. It would be murder.

George inspected his hands, and subsequently the dagger. He was shocked at it, and even more so when he saw whose it was. It was not really a dagger, but a letter opener. And on its handle read an inscription.

From Victoria, to Dr. Jonathan T. Young, Greatest Scientist, Greatest Lover. George had seen the tool and the inscription once before back on Mars. He glanced back to where he’d found it. A skeleton lay there, complete with a dirty but recognizable lab coat.

In rage, in such rage that he did not know existed, George flung himself upon the beast’s bleeding torso. There was a depression there where the blast had hit. George dug the letter opener in. He pulled it out, dripping with blood. He dug in again. Removed. He repeated until the Geomul had been stabbed twenty-three times. It was dead.

George had been a hero when they returned. The Councilor’s daughter had been slightly woozy, but after a quick nap, she was allegedly back to her old self. The Colony Council had no idea how George had escaped, but they did not care. They showered him with gifts. Food, gold, anything he wanted. They danced and lit fires when he showed them the blood-stained knife, his blood-stained clothes. They confirmed that the DNA matched the Geomul. They confirmed that it was dead. It was all very jovial and warm and happy.

George was not happy. Dr. Young had not always been perfect, though he didn’t think any human could be. Still, Young had been his creator, he who gave life. He had been the one who’d assembled and welded and bolted and programmed everything. He was the master. That is what he’d called him, wasn’t it? That had been oh so long ago. He had breathed dust to reality. How was he supposed to live with no master? George supposed he could be free. He supposed he could pursue his own goals. Politics, science, love. He could have any of it now. At least inside the colony’s walls. At least on Corinth’s crust. George was certain of that.

It would make no difference, though. He would not stay on Corinth, he knew. He couldn't. He would have to go out, sooner or later, and what then? Then there would be the same kind of bigotry against him as he had seen on Corinth before he slew the Geomul. The same kind of harassment, the same kind of horridness. What would he do then? He would not be allowed happiness. He would not be allowed peace and contentment. He would be subject to search, seizure, and likely imprisonment. He was a slave without a master. He was a luscious fruit, ripe for the taking.

George slipped away from the party later on. The Council did not notice. No one did. They were quite happy with their libations. They would find him later that night, with the weapon, still covered in alien blood, plunged through his CPU. They were shocked and outraged. Who would've done this? Who could've done this? But no, the forensics determined that only he could've angled the letter opener, the way it fit in his head. He'd left no note, but it was overtly apparent. Suicide.

They could've melted him for scrap. That was what was done to so many androids after the war. However, the colonists did not. They felt indebted to send off the hero properly. Prior to such a thing, the colonists had cremated all their dead, but they couldn't bring themselves to do that either. And so they buried him, right below the town square. They placed him at the foot of the obelisk, and transformed the skyscraper into a tombstone. They thought it fitting.

"But what shall it say?" they asked, referring to the inscription.

"Yes, did he even have a name?"

"He claimed the Doctor called him George," the rogue Councilor moaned, sick at the state of things.

"George is a fine name."

And so it read:

*Here lies Saint George
He slew a monster, and saved a damsel
Let the ages know his great feat*