

IN PEACE

Ozzy worked for a magazine. Actually, more of a tabloid. Well, more of a clickbait factory. It wasn't a nice company, but it paid him to do what he liked, which was talk about UFOs and cryptids to anyone who would listen.

He was genuine in his love for the paranormal, which chafed against his peers, who weren't genuine about anything.

Most of the work was online, which suited Ozzy just fine. He'd stay up to date on forums and local news outlets, stitching together threads of context into thoughtful speculation.

Every now and again, he was asked to take a road trip somewhere for field work, conducting interviews with witnesses and examining supposed sites of interest. Most were weekend affairs, but for his latest trip he was given two weeks to investigate Andromeda Springs, Colorado.

Ozzy had been waiting for this moment his entire adult life. Everyone knew about Roswell and Area 51, and some people knew about Point Pleasant, West Virginia and Aurora, Texas. But almost nobody had heard of Andromeda Springs, Colorado.

The scant reports that did exist claimed that close encounters of all kinds were extremely common, that something about the land or the forest or the atmosphere drew extrasolar beings to this backwater town, and that many people who went to investigate never came back.

The drive from Texas had been quite long indeed, but it did offer him many nights of quiet stargazing and time to formulate a detailed plan.

The magazine had a short list of things it wanted investigated, but Ozzy had added kits for taking soil samples, infrared video, and all manner of equipment meant to detect aliens or ghosts or bigfoots, none of which would probably work, but Ozzy already had them laying around.

When he saw the signage on the horizon he nearly couldn't contain his excitement. The sign itself was pitch-black and circular, with 'Welcome to Andromeda' and several twinkling stars added on in polished chrome.

As he drove past it, he saw a little mannequin modified to look like a bug-eyed grey alien peer from behind the sign.

The town itself didn't look particularly noteworthy in any way; whatever resource had made its money had long since dried up, leaving only the brittle shell of society for people to crawl over and consume like so many woodlice in a rotting log.

The streets weren't busy except for big gray buses built like tanks; Ozzy wasn't even sure they *were* buses until one stopped at a junction and let a crowd of commuters off.

Something about their geometry didn't click right with Ozzy, but he couldn't put words to his apprehension. Perhaps it was how new they looked; the rest of Andromeda Springs was well-worn, but the slate-gray buses looked spotless.

Ozzy's first stop was the hotel he had pre-booked, one of the only in Andromeda. It was a local chain, apparently, called MW. He couldn't find out what it stood for though, just MW.

There were less than ten cars in the little parking lot, and Ozzy was suddenly struck by the feeling that he was very alone in a very unfamiliar place. He pushed the feeling down, parked, and went inside.

The hotel also didn't look particularly special. The concierge was slouching in a desk chair much too small for his wide frame, fiddling with a laptop computer as Ozzy approached. Ozzy cleared his throat. The receptionist didn't move, but his dark eyes did

look up to meet Ozzy's. His bald head reflected enough of the screen to tell Ozzy he was watching something on YouTube instead of working.

"Can I help you, sir?" he asked, in a tone that suggested he really, really wanted the answer to be 'no'.

"Yes," Ozzy said, "I reserved a room here a few days ago. It's all pre-paid. Should be under Ozymandias S. The passcode was 1979, I believe."

"Ah, yes," the receptionist said, fishing out a paper notepad from a drawer. "I'll be honest, I thought that was a prank. Outsiders usually prefer one of the national chains." With a melodramatic flourish he fished out a keycard and passed it to Ozzy.

"You'll be in room five-one. The wi-fi password is '*Nostramo*'." He sighed like a man on death row, his words dripping with venom. "*Have a wonderful stay in the Milky Way.*"

"That's funny," Ozzy said. "Like area 51."

The receptionist narrowed his eyes and tilted his head slightly in confusion. "Like what?"

"Like, the military base in Nevada where they keep alien technology. 51, five-one." Ozzy laughed even though it wasn't funny.

The receptionist narrowed his eyes to slits. "I'll be honest, I have no fucking idea what you're talking about. I'm glad you find it amusing, though, I guess." He returned to staring at his laptop.

Ozzy decided to leave before things got even more awkward. There were no caddies that he could find, so he had to take several trips to bring all of his luggage to his room. By the time he had brought up the fifth and final one, he was exhausted, and collapsed

onto the bed with a sigh. Despite how tired he felt, his mind was racing with excitement. He was here! Really here!

He made a mental list of everything he needed to do: soil samples and eyewitness accounts and newspaper clippings. Maybe he would drive out into the desert and stargaze.

Fifty-one feet below Ozzy (and ten feet due south), the receptionist picked up a call. It had come from the landline. He didn't say anything at first, simply listening.

"What? No. I'm not doing that."

...

"It'll take more than a cubic foot of..."

...

"Two, you say?"

...

"Fine."

Ozzy didn't realize that he had fallen asleep until he woke up. He checked his phone—how was it six already? He couldn't afford to waste any more time, is what he thought before his stomach growled.

He realized he hadn't eaten anything since the granola bars he had eaten for breakfast. Maybe a little more time could be wasted.

Ozzy plugged into the wi-fi and searched for somewhere nearby to eat. Thankfully there was a little diner within walking distance, cutely named Blue Moon. He stretched and made his way out of the hotel and down the street.

Andromeda Springs was situated right between the desert and low forest, and the woods flanked him. He wondered if there was anything worth checking out in there, but a pang of hunger forced him to abandon that train of thought.

Blue Moon was the most obviously strange thing he'd seen in Andromeda Springs, though it was still within the limits of small-town-quirky.

The neon sign depicted a ringed planet, not a moon, and in front of the entrance a statue of a three-eyed jellyfish held three plates like a waiter; one held a rock painted to look like a hamburger, one held a grilled thing-that-was-not-quite-a-fish with a side of sliced things-that-were-too-blue-to-be-lemons, also probably made of rock, and the third held a shiny bronze cube about six inches on each side.

One of the jellyfish's eyes was winking, or possibly just chipped off. Ozzy snapped a picture of the sculpture before entering.

The diner continued the theme of mundane weirdness on the inside; many diners had framed posters on every wall, but they were usually not all for schlocky black and white monster movies or the covers of pulp science fiction magazines older than Ozzy's parents.

In a rotating display sat cookies colored like planets and pies with galaxy-shaped crusts. A note hanging from the front desk said to seat yourself in English, Spanish, French, and what Ozzy suspected was Klingon.

Ozzy grabbed a laminated menu and sat down on a cushioned stool on the bar, which appeared to display the surface of the moon and glowed faintly. He waited for a few

minutes, and was about to ask if anyone was actually here when a large man in an apron bursted out of the kitchen, slammed into the bar, and fell halfway onto it. He groaned softly.

“Sorry for the holdup, the damn dishwasher was on a smoke break.” The waiter said in a familiarly dour voice. He stood back up, and as Ozzy suspected it was the concierge from the hotel again, though he now bore a nametag designating him ‘Basil’.

“It’s... fine.” Ozzy said. “Are you okay?”

“Hm?” Basil looked down at himself as if just noticing that he had taken such a tumble. “Oh, yeah, I’m fine. Happens all the time. Can I take your order?”

Ozzy decided not to ask why Basil was here and not at the hotel. “Do you have a vegetarian menu?”

Basil shrugged a bit. “Technically, no. But no animals were harmed in the process of making our burgers and steaks and shit.”

Ozzy cocked his head. “Like... lab-grown meat? All the way out here?”

“Sure, yeah. Lab-grown.” Basil looked away. “Anyways, tonight’s special does happen to be baked potato soup, if you’re that opposed to flesh.”

“I’ll take that, thanks.” Ozzy said. “And do you have iced tea? Can I get that half and half with lemonade?”

“I don’t see why not.” Basil said, then slunk back into the kitchen.

Ozzy waited in silence for a few minutes. Basil returned with a glass of what was presumably the Arnold Palmer and set it down on the counter.

“Crazy question, but you’re not, like, following me, are you?” He asked, a twinge of anxiety mixing into his unfazed facade. “Nothing personal, but this place attracts some real weirdos sometimes.”

Ozzy smiled reassuringly as he grabbed his drink. “I honestly didn’t know you would be here. Are you the only waiter right now? For the dinner rush?”

“You *are* the dinner rush, space cadet.” Basil replied. “But this place basically runs itself anyhow.”

“The hotel too?” Ozzy prompted, curiosity overpowering his need to be polite.

“It requires a bit more attention but basically, yeah. This place ain’t exactly a tourist trap.” Basil said.

“I’m surprised to hear that, with its reputation.” Ozzy quipped.

Basil’s expression darkened slightly. “Reputation ain’t everything, *space cadet*.”

There was the sound of a timer going off in the kitchen, and Basil turned towards where it had come from.

“That’ll be the special,” Basil said as he disappeared from view. His tone was a little less warm than before.

The baked potato soup was very generously portioned; the bowl barely fit on a dinner plate and was probably taller than some cups. Ozzy stared at it.

“It’s supposed to come with bacon but I left that out,” Basil said in a tone that suggested that this was a particularly notable thing for him to do. “You’re welcome.” Without another word he disappeared back into the kitchen.

Ozzy had to force himself to take his time; it was excellent and he was starving, but he didn’t want to tire himself out before he could get any actual work done. Still, before he knew it he had finished it and was again left alone with nothing to do.

“You can just go!” Basil shouted from somewhere in the kitchen. “I’m closing up anyway, so it’s whatever.”

Ozzy thought about objecting but decided not to pester this poor man any further. He only realized later that not only had he not paid, but the menu didn’t list any prices at all.

He simply let himself wander for a bit. The big buses were now nowhere to be found, but Ozzy still felt uncomfortably like he was being watched. He paused to check his phone and reorient himself. He decided he wanted to head to the edge of town and do a little stargazing.

The clear night sky on the edge of town glittered with endless stars. Ozzy thought about how many he could see, and how dull they were back in Lubbock.

Something caught his eye in the sea of light: a blue oval zigzagged across the sky. He watched as it darted around, turning and accelerating faster than anything airborne should. It paused for a moment, then shot off directly away from him, and Ozzy scrambled to keep it in his sight.

Despite its speed, the light was easy to follow. It seemed to only be keeping pace with him, as if luring him somewhere. Ozzy paused and considered the possibility that whatever was controlling the lure might be less like a firefly and more like an anglerfish.

The light circled around some kind of building in the distance that was itself faintly glowing in that same blue. As Ozzy approached it, he realized that it was a bar, which made him feel a bit more secure. Nothing would jump on him if he was surrounded by witnesses, right?

The sign called it 'Europa', and it looked much more modern than most of the other buildings in Andromeda Springs. It wasn't quite brutalist, but it was sheer and smooth with hard angles and a contrasting white and indigo palette that cut dramatically against the night.

It was also very crowded from what Ozzy could see from outside, and that gave him much more apprehension than the possibility of being abducted had. But something was telling him that this was right, and he kind of wanted to meet some locals in any case.

Ozzy sat down at the bar and drummed his fingers. He wasn't much for alcohol, but some instinct told him that Europa would be his best chance to talk to someone local.

He ordered a virgin Colorado sunrise and scanned the room for potential leads, wishing the music was less loud and the crowd was less dense. A middle-aged man in a dress shirt and a fluorescent tie sat down next to him with a cocky grin.

"I haven't seen you here before," he said in a buttery-smooth cadence, "I would have remembered those eyes."

Ozzy knew that was just a pickup line, but decided to play along. "I'm just passing through town. It sure is beautiful out there, you know. Stars as far as the eye can see."

"I can ensure you'll see plenty of stars if you want to ditch this place and enjoy each other's company a bit more privately." He offered, straightening his tie.

“I’m flattered, but—“ Ozzy was interrupted by a hand on his shoulder that was suddenly gripping very tightly.

“Sorry, but I’m borrowing your little mark,” came a familiarly acerbic voice, and Ozzy was yanked from his seat.

Basil was wearing what appeared to be a tank top made out of fishnet, pastel jeans that had been roughly cropped until they were more revealing than Ozzy’s underwear, a pink leather collar with the letters A B Y S L U visible, an expression of incandescent fury, and absolutely nothing else. He pulled Ozzy again until he was struggling to keep up while maintaining his balance.

Once outside, Basil let go of his ward’s wrist and scowled down at him.

“Leave me the *fuck* alone, space cadet!” He half-roared. “I don’t know what your deal is and I don’t care, just fucking *leave*! Twice can be a coincidence, but you’ve been following me all day and I’m sick of it!”

Ozzy was nominally quite good under pressure. “I haven’t been following you,” he said desperately, “I didn’t even know you were here until you grabbed me.”

“Likely fucking story.” Basil chided in annoyance, poking Ozzy in the stomach. “The only kind of people who come through here are lost vacationers, horny truckers, and UFO wackjobs, and I saw your rather *prolific* collection of humorous bumper stickers when I clocked out.”

“I really didn’t know you worked at the diner or would be here tonight,” Ozzy tried again. “I was just chasing a... a light in the sky. Okay, well, that doesn’t sound very good when I put it like that, but...”

Ozzy realized that Basil was no longer looking at him, and was in fact looking up at the night sky. Ozzy joined him, and he had only a second to notice that there were a lot less stars than normal before everything went white.

He awoke to find himself falling, or, after a moment of panic, floating. His blurry vision could only make out pale blobs, but he felt no floor below him and nothing to grab hold of.

He was struck in the back of his head by something hard but rubbery, which bounced off of him and drifted away. Ozzy craned his neck to see Basil lining up another shot with his second shoe.

“Hey!” Ozzy tried to say as he deflected the improvised projectile with his shoulder. “I think we have bigger problems right this second.”

Basil groaned as he dropped the shoe. “*Christ* you’re dense. You just had to follow mysterious lights in the sky, huh? Let me tell you if we were in a movie they’d already be cutting us open or sticking chrome dildos up our asses, or both. So maybe next time be a bit more cautious.”

Ozzy blinked. “You seem to be taking this pretty well, all things considered.”

“A brilliant deduction,” Basil snarked. “The bald guy with pale skin and dark eyes that lives in a town called fucking *Andromeda Springs* ain’t that fazed by aliens. Do you want a certificate? A medal? Do you want your giant check in the mail?”

“You don’t have to make it so personal,” Ozzy said, sounding more than a little hurt. “I’m sorry, I didn’t want to drag you into this situation.”

Basil sighed. “It’s... fine. I needed to talk to the bosses anyway. I’m... sorry that I snapped.”

“Apology accepted. Now, are you going to explain what’s actually going on?” Ozzy asked. He raised his arms in frustration and spun slowly in the pale light of the tractor beam.

“In a minute! Jeez. The bosses are always fashionably late. I think they like being dramatic.” Basil responded, clasping his hands behind his head like a pillow.

The light shut off and Ozzy dropped a few inches, landing on and hurting his butt. Basil landed a bit more gracefully and then immediately fell over with a yelp.

“Who *are* the bosses?” Ozzy asked as he got to his feet. He took a moment to help Basil up.

Basil scoffed, then the rest of the lights went dark. For a moment there was pitch blackness, then lights began to glimmer all around the two of them. They spun lazily around and twirled into two separate auroras that pulsed with every color of the rainbow.

“Those,” Basil pointed at the constellations, “are the bosses.”

Ozzy blinked. The lights of the one he was directly looking at flashed blue and green.

“He says you’re a little less impressive in person.” Basil said. The other entity flashed gold. “And *he* apologizes for the other’s behavior.”

“You can understand them?” Ozzy asked, not turning.

“Kinda. It’s never perfect. Well, for you and I it’s not perfect. They seem to never have issues knowing what we think.” Basil admitted.

Both of the entities flashed electric blue.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m getting to that. Jeez, since when are you guys this impatient?” Basil snapped rhetorically. He turned to Ozzy. “Okay, so first: alien life does exist, it’s here on earth and in this room.”

Ozzy opened his mouth and Basil shushed him. “Second: they don’t want to hurt anybody. Just the opposite, in fact. These guys are like... conservationists for whole planets.”

“They never give a straight answer on if that’s all their species or whatever does or if it’s a career or if it’s just the two of them as a hobby.” Basil paused for breath. “Third: they want your help. Quite badly, apparently, which is why they picked us up. It’s, uh, a bit hard to explain.”

Basil turned towards an entity. “Do we still have the slideshow? Mmh, okay. What about the pamphlets I designed, did you ever...? Man. Okay. The extremely short version is that they want your help collecting DNA samples for their archives. I’m not privy to exactly why, but—“

Both entities lit up like crystals in a sunbeam.

“...that’s *it*? Couldn’t you guys just put out a... Fine, okay.” Basil huffed. “They say it’s because you’re a cocksucker. Not their exact word choice but something like that.”

Ozzy took his eyes off of the two aliens and looked at Basil in bewilderment. “I’m just the messenger!” Basil exclaimed. “Don’t look at me. If we had it my way you’d be in the woods putting wads of dirt in little bags and I would be extorting bicurious adulterers.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Okay, yes, sorry. They think you’re just the right combination of traits to make the perfect field agent. One of those is liking dick.

Apparently. They also value your interest in the paranormal and your tolerance for extended road trips. Apparently.”

“I don’t see how those are connected,” Ozzy said.

“Okay, backing up a bit: these guys are like the people who try to keep panda bears alive in captivity because they’re too stupid to take care of themselves. You are the pandas in this scenario.”

“They want you specifically to be, well...” Basil hummed. “There's no accurate word for this that ain't insulting but like a sperm bank. They want you to go around getting fucked by guys to record their genetic codes. You know, the analog way.” Basil sighed, then chuckled. “Analog... anal...” he stopped when he realized Ozzy was still watching him.

“How exactly are they harvesting this DNA?” Ozzy asked. “Or, I guess more pertinently, what would they do to me to allow them access to it? A teleporter?”

“No offense but a teleporter would not fit in your rectal cavity.” Basil quipped. “It’s basically a little chip that sequences DNA that it’s exposed to and beams the information here for recombination. The entire installation process takes about a minute for both ends total. As long as you drink the catalyst afterwards it’ll be totally painless and undetectable.”

“And you know this because...?” Ozzy prompted.

“You’re not the first cocksucker they’ve conscripted into their pet project.” Basil waved a hand dismissively. “You won’t be getting as extensive of a metamorphosis as me, if that’s your concern. For a complexion as pallid and sickly as mine you’d need a couple months in a moist cocoon. Worst summer break ever, by the way.”

Ozzy blinked. “I like your complexion,” he said quietly.

Basil looked away, red already creeping across his face. “Okay, so, are you in or out? They say if you’re not interested they’ll give you a little cube of weird metal for your troubles. No, I don’t know why they like cubes so much.”

“Can I ask a few questions?” Asked Ozzy.

Basil took a breath. “No, they ain’t the only aliens on earth; that’s what they need us for. Pandas are one thing, but someone’s gotta look out for the freshwater clams, too. Yes, you can get paid to fuck aliens. Have you ever heard of the Flatwoods Monster?”

“In passing,” said Ozzy, who had a tattoo of it on his left shoulder.

“No, no government knows these guys exist. No, they don’t actually probe people’s butts, except for me and I guess you if you want.”

“Yes, the chip keeps you safe from STDs. Yes, they do record DNA from every living thing they can, they just do it the old-fashioned way for animals and plants and shit. You’re billed by the hour, not on commission.”

Ozzy tried to ask something but was interrupted.

“There will be specific requests sometimes but unless they’re urgent you’re free to collect as many bonus samples as you want, even from humans. As far as I know they have no specific end goal or it’s far enough away from the present that it’s not meaningfully relevant. Oh, and your memories of the past few hours will be wiped if you decline but you can keep the cube. Anything else?”

“You’ve done this a lot, haven’t you?” Ozzy asked. Basil rolled his eyes but nodded.

“What are their names?”

Basil opened one eye. “Mhh? Oh, the zookeepers. Yeah technically they have names but they’re each a string of like a hundred atomic elements in a line and it’s a different order depending on some bullshit calendar or schedule or something. They’re basically the same anyways so I don’t bother keeping track.”

“I’d feel better if they had at least nicknames.” Ozzy said.

“Fine, any suggestions?” Basil asked halfheartedly.

“Archimedes and Prometheus.” Ozzy said.

“Lame. Pass. Nicknames are supposed to be short.” Basil replied.

“Uh, Mario and Luigi?” Ozzy attempted.

“Still lame. I’m also pretty sure they have a different relationship with each other than siblings.” Basil countered.

“Fine. Bert and Ernie?” Ozzy tried desperately.

The two aliens flashed lavender. Basil pressed a hand to his face and sighed.

“Fine, sure.” He said after a moment. “But only because I’m tired of discussing it.”

Bert, or possibly Ernie, flashed red and white like a target.

“Right, yeah,” Basil said quickly. “Are you in or are you out?”

Ozzy didn’t need to think about it, but he forced himself to anyway. This was in many ways a dream come true, but it was also so sudden and nothing like what he imagined.

Was he really going to give up everything to become a sample collector for alien biologists?

“Yeah, I’m in.” Ozzy said, smiling. “Where do we go from here?”

A few minutes later, Ozzy was standing in a gas station bathroom stall holding two pill-sized egg-shaped objects. Basil was standing in front of him, rattling off a list of disclaimers.

“The left one you swallow and the right one goes up the other end. Then, in twenty minutes I’ll give you the catalyst and that’ll be it. Remember: do *not* mix them up. Trust me, it’s better to let that hypothetical remain as far away from reality as possible.”

Ozzy nodded, inspecting the pill designed for swallowing. “And you’re going to be doing what exactly while this is going on?”

“I’m not your babysitter,” Basil scoffed. “I’ll be in the store shoplifting candy bars if you need me but it’s incredibly hard to screw up as long as you use the right pill for each end.”

Basil absconded before Ozzy could say anything else. He eyed the two little pills. He could swear one of them slightly shuddered. Which one did he have to swallow, again?

Basil was stuffing packs of sour gummy worms into a jacket pocket that never seemed to grow full when Ozzy came up to him slightly unsteadily.

“When you said that they were chips I thought that would mean something mechanical,” Ozzy said. He rubbed his butt with one hand and hissed in discomfort. “That felt more insectoid than things meant to be ingested should.”

“I’ll be sure to put that into the suggestion box.” Basil intoned. “Anyways I want to get out of here before that cashier recognizes me from the adult bookstore I get fucked at every other Sunday.”

“You’re very open about that sort of thing,” Ozzy said. “I like it. Feels exciting.”

Basil laughed just a little bit bashfully as they walked out into the night. “It’s not actually that exciting. I just like being a slut cause at work and when I lived with my family I never got to express myself and I always felt basically invisible. I guess that’s what got me into this kind of stuff anyways. But, uh, my life story ain’t why we’re here.”

Basil stopped by a gray bus that was alone in what was probably at one point the parking lot of an arcade.

Although it had the same bricklike look as the others, it had the logo and alien mascot of the Blue Moon diner painted on one side. Basil fished out a key and unlocked the vehicle. Ozzy cocked his head at it quizzically.

“After you,” he said, opening the door and letting Ozzy pass. The inside was bigger than what should naturally fit in such an exterior; it was at least apartment-sized, with a small kitchen, a sitting area, and a king-size bed in one corner.

“This is impossible,” Ozzy said quietly.

Basil scoffed. “Just today you’ve been abducted by aliens, had a psychic centipede crawl up your asshole, and got a full-time job directly following an unscheduled interview, but a particularly wide vehicle is too much for your suspension of disbelief?”

“Fair point,” Ozzy admitted. “Do you know how it works?”

Basil shrugged. "Something about quantum tunneling and dark matter I think. Or maybe it's just magic."

Ozzy experimentally turned on a faucet and watched the water intently.

"No, I don't know where it comes from and I don't know where it goes. Same with the trash." Basil interjected before Ozzy could ask. "They don't cover food or disposable shit though, so if you want coffee or something, stock up while you still have the chance."

Ozzy turned. "You want me to live here? I assumed this was just your home."

"I have no opinion on the matter," Basil paused, "but, urgh, *Bert and Ernie* need someone to show you the ropes more than they need someone pretending to flip burgers and manage hotels, so they want me to tag along for the foreseeable future. I also got the impression that they thought we'd work well together, because they hate me and want me to suffer."

"Sorry to impose," Ozzy said tersely. "Maybe there's something else we could figure out?"

"Don't take it personal, space cadet." Basil soothed. "I'm just not much of a team player. Just... you stay outta my way and I'll stay outta yours. Shouldn't be the end of the world."

Ozzy nodded. "Is there anything else? Any plans, any directions, any priority targets?"

"Fuck, the catalyst. Right." Basil shoved past Ozzy in the kitchen, grabbing a little packet of powder rather like the kind sugar substitutes came in. He also grabbed a glass, filled it, and dumped the packet in, mixing it up. The liquid became an intense blue color.

Basil handed the glass to Ozzy and looked at him expectantly. Ozzy considered it.

“If you want to get cold feet, do it before the psychic centipede fuses with your prostate.”

“Right, sorry.” Ozzy said, taking the glass. “Thank you for this. For everything, really.”

Basil began staring intently at the microwave. “You’re welcome, space cadet.”

Ozzy drank half the cup in one gulp and set it down. “Huh, not what I expected.”

“I don’t think the flavor profile is their biggest concern with DNA-rewiring juice,” Basil said jokingly. Ozzy noted that his sarcasm was biting less now.

“It’s bitter, yeah, but sweet, too. Just a bit, like very dark chocolate.”

Ozzy swallowed the rest, filled the cup with fresh water, and drank that too.

“Oh, yeah, let me know if you feel dizzy or lightheaded. That catalyst is going to be doing a number on your digestive system.” Basil said, moving away.

“And you didn’t tell me this beforehand?” Ozzy asked.

“I was busy!” Basil said, blushing. He cooled off as Ozzy cackled.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Thank you for telling me. Anything else?”

“You might gain some weight.” Basil said, then added “Sorry.”

“Do you like fat guys?” Ozzy asked.

“Pardon?”

“Do you like fat guys?” Ozzy asked again, slightly more slowly.

“Uh, yeah.” Basil said after a moment of thought. “Yeah, I like fat guys.”

“Then I look forward to it.”

There was a moment of silence.

“That’s so *fucking* corny, space cadet. Jesus!” Basil said, putting a hand to his head and laughing.

Ozzy followed suit. “I knew you had a sense of humor somewhere!”

“*Fuck* you!”

The two of them laughed together for a little while longer.

“Look, Basil,” Ozzy said, suddenly a little somber. “I don’t want to be holding you down. If you’d rather we just... stay out of each other’s way, that’s okay, but I’d rather we get along.”

Basil cocked his head slightly. “Does getting along include sex?”

“If you like.”

“Yeah,” Basil said, smiling, “I would like that, I think.”

Ozzy helped Basil’s shirt off, and Basil returned the favor as he led him to the bed. Ozzy sat down on the edge and began stripping further, giving an appreciative whistle as Basil removed his shorts.

“Don’t stare at it like that!” Basil said defensively, though he didn’t move to cover himself.

“Why not?” Ozzy asked. “It’s... interesting. I’m interested.”

Basil flushed. “Yeah, I’ve got a freaky alien dick, I’ve heard it a million times. Don’t make it weird.”

“So,” Ozzy said, moving closer. “Should I not investigate?”

“I, uh, didn’t say that,” Basil said meekly.

“Maybe I just need some hands-on experience.”

“God, shut the fuck up!” Basil said, which was when Ozzy started kissing him.