

# ALÁMÁLÀ TO THE STARS

Osamudiamen Joe

The neon sign outside the space restaurant station currently in parking orbit around Orion Ìkejì was faulty. However, if Lawumi's mother had replaced the fried circuits like she'd been meaning to, the screen would be lit up in an array of the most breathtaking colours, all of them flashing on frequencies both visible and hidden from the unaided eye. The lights on the screen would catch the attention of potential customers from a thousand parsecs away, spelling out the name of the famous establishment.

'Alámálà to the stars'

'Alámálà to the stars'? The Dhamoran said to no one in particular. It depends on what you mean by 'said' of course. Out here in the far reaches of space, no species actually 'said' anything that the others immediately understood. To the Yanosiid, insectoid inhabitants of the planet Yanos, human screams were interpreted as whiny cries that could mean a million things; feelings of intense pleasure, whisperings expressing mild discontent or just something humans did whenever they wanted attention. That was just the way the Yanosiid were wired. Any and all sounds below 69,000 Hz were considered moot.

Wars had been fought due to the huge language barrier between the species and thousands of sad stories abound. One popular one had happened in the early days of interstellar voyage. During this time, diplomats had been sent to near and distant worlds in order to foster interplanetary relationships and establish some form of government. The diplomats were told to use any means necessary to make the intentions known.

One man from Florida called Dave Sanders had tried to break up with his Yanosiid lover without success. He'd forgotten to wear his voice amplifier and after yapping for about ten hours, during which the Yanosiid had fluttered her wings repeatedly (the equivalent of a human giving a helplessly ignorant person a look of abject pity), he concluded that his lover was being disrespectful on purpose. The solution had been to drive his ship deep into the heart of the planet, colliding with its core and shattering the poor souls to smithereens. The only Yanosiid that had survived had been those in diaspora, apparently. And now they dwelt in colonies on the least populated planets where brave scientists were ceaselessly working out how to develop technology to successfully integrate them back to society.

No one from Florida was ever allowed outside of Earth for the fifty long years that followed. Too many of them were not happy about this. A lot of them on their death beds had spent their final breaths cursing Dave Sanders and his maniacal ineptitude. Others were just sorry they couldn't get to go surfing on the psychedelic fluid seas of Betelgeuse Ikinni. The 'Dave Sanders Effect' got added to the dictionary, encyclopedias, travel guides, restaurant recipes and whatnot which all described it as 'the tendency to suddenly go berserk for no apparent reason whatsoever except in moments where you are trying to break up with your Yanosiid girlfriend without a voice amplifier, in which case, your actions while not being entirely justifiable would at least be somewhat understandable'.

'Alámálà to the stars'? the Dhamoran said again. Its hissing voice had more in common with the sound currently being made by steam escaping the huge pots of amala at the back of the restaurant than anything human.

It spun its large head around and looked to where its battle cruiser was parked. Was this what it had travelled about two thousand parsecs on an empty stomach and very little fuel for-- a dilapidated establishment that didn't even have a working sign outside? Other sentient species would simply have gotten to the door and let the motion sensors open them up. That thought however hadn't crossed the Dhamoran's mind. Their species was considered to be the most arrogant, most conceited bigheads in the entire galaxy so this much (or this little) was to be expected. Dhamorans weren't usually disagreeable without cause, at least not all the time; they just didn't see the point in being somewhere where they would not be treated like royalty.

They didn't consider material possessions a marker of status or wealth and their whole ego problem stemmed from their philosophy that life was a gift and as long as they were here, they would ensure they got the best quality in everything they did. It usually worked. They recorded the lowest number of people likely to commit suicide. But they also had the highest number of people who actually committed suicide. It was a weird, complicated thing, life.

This Dhamoran who was extremely hungry and tired and who at the same time, didn't want to enter the restaurant when they were clearly open for business, was currently slouching towards the hatch of his battle-cruiser starship thinking about whether life was worth it. And how cool it'd

feel to drive his ship headlong into the nearest boiling sun. It was going to have to find the biggest, hottest sun around too because Dhamorans didn't go through life making small choices and certainly, in death, everything had to be the stuff of better-than-perfection.

It's scaly hand held on to the hatch handle and was about to squeeze it open when a much smaller, much warmer hand held on to his. He turned to look at the human immediately wondering where she had come from.

"se'ris hak sil'sa dhe hak se'ris" the human said.

The Dhamoran was stunned. She had just given the customary Dhamoran greetings that very few people of other species knew.

"hak se'ris bhhe dhe" it replied. It wanted to see how much of the language she understood.

She smiled and apologized for the poor service and invited him to come in for a free meal.

The Dhamoran peered closer at her head. She wasn't wearing a translator. He was talking to a normal human girl who spoke the Dhamoran dialect fluently. This was one thing he didn't get to see every day.

He followed her back to the restaurant and just before the motion sensors detected two approaching lifeforms (one, dumbfounded, the other, an enigma of sorts) and slid the doors open, the Dhamoran asked her in the best English it could conjure. Most of it came out as a hiss anyway.

"Whattttt hissss your name?"

She turned and flashed a bright smile again that lit her eyes up and added an extra radiance to her perfect dark skin.

"My name is Lawumi." The smooth voice said. "My mother owns the place." And she disappeared into the sweet-smelling atmosphere of Alamala to the Stars.

Unbelievable. The Dhamoran thought. In English.

And quickly followed her inside.

## PATIENT ON BED 3 WRITES A POEM TO THE NURSE'S STATION

**Ogunkoya Samuel**

When I say I am dancing  
With my sister again  
What I meant is,  
It is four a.m.  
And  
The car brakes are failing  
When you find this poem  
Know I have always wanted to  
Be like the moon  
Glistening. For me and my sister.  
Who lived in an asylum  
Till clozapine became a compass to death  
She carried sad songs in her belly  
For a season and half  
For reasons we didn't know  
Till she told us of what she missed most  
The light that was before the call.  
That night she moaned a lot about shadows.  
And when I said I am dancing with my sister again  
What I meant is, some don't die.  
They walk into burning cities  
As though that's the only place to be free.  
This dawn, I am walking out of fire  
And I can hear the songs, faintly.

"And after the accident.  
One man would say to another  
Don't move her, she might be bleeding internally"

what they didn't say /cause they didn't know /is that the lifeless body /was a long-distance runner /and it preferred coffee to tea /read poems over scrambled eggs /never danced cause it thought it couldn't /skipped meals cause it thought it was growing fatter /refused to join the choir /was afraid of making new friends /kept old ones at arms length /planted wildflowers /was proclaimed barren /stabbed twice /by the same man it refused to divorce /and was on its way to tell him/ it has a body growing inside it.