

Vintage Space
By Nicki Startek

It's been the same view from the window for an hour straight, a void of blackness with speckles of distant stars. Twinkling, twirling and twining in the mass of nothing. Minh slouches in his seat, shoulder and temple pressed against the cool glass. He twiddles his thumbs and ponders. One of the many stars he can see right now may just be the one he had once called the sun. The probability of this would be ridiculously low. His eyes can only experience the view of a few thousand at a time. That doesn't amount to a visible fraction of the universe.

He's far away not just from earth but his entire galaxy of origin as well. Even though he's been aboard this ship for what his internal clock counts as one week and three days, he knows the speed at which it travels is incomprehensible from the inside.

Breaking the silence is a deep and guttural voice. It comes reverberating down the metal encased hallway. The call is a request for Minh's presence on the command deck.

Minh sits up straight feeling quite startled to be pulled from his headspace so abruptly. Nonetheless he gathers himself quickly as to not keep Korjic, the caller, waiting. He's very sure of what he will be asked to do once he's there. The question is, will he be able to meet the needs of the task? The automatic door of his room slides open with a skid. Minh peers his head out into the hallway and glimpses at the light path along the walls. The far wall's light strip is lit blue but only to the left and onward which means it's the indication of which way Minh should go.

His lips curl upwards knowing that Korjic and Aidlad are ensuring he won't get lost down one of the many winding hallways. He slips out of his room and places a finger upon the warm blue strip of light, tracing it all the way to his final location.

The command deck is one of Minh's favourite places on the ship. There's so much to look at. From the colourful, glowing buttons to the massive screens that display the fuel gage, system temperature and shows scans of their surroundings. Of course, there's more to the command deck, but this was all Minh was able to obtain from Aidlad. Compared to Korjic, Aidlad didn't have much they wanted to say. When they did choose to speak, Minh treated them like a teacher and became studious in the presence of their words.

The tapping of Minh's shoes against the polished gray floor reaches the ears of a figure sitting primly in the captain's chair. As Minh comes closer he can see the athletic build of the alien and he knows it's Aidlad.

The aliens are quite interesting when it comes down to their physical appearances. Both share the same purple scaled skin and murky pitch-black eyes. What stands them apart from each other is their facial structures. Aidlad has no nose bridge and their jaw comes down sharp and to one fine point at their chin. Korjic has a wide and protruding nose with a soft rounded

chin. Minh has also observed that there is no overt sign as to what sex the aliens are. He isn't even sure if there is a variation of that sort within their species.

Minh follows the steps up to the control platform. "Aidlad, Korjic has called for me?" Minh asks. He stands with a servant like posture, it comes about naturally when he's in the alien's presence.

Aidlad swivels the chair around, eyes squinting at the small human before them. "*Mhm* they did indeed. Wait at the observation table, Korjic wishes for you to examine a new object."

Minh nods curtly and motions to leave but is stopped in his tracks by the call of his name. He looks back up at Aidlad who is looking partly over their shoulder and half turned away in the chair.

"Do not forget, Korjic much appreciates it when you call them by their adopted human name." Aidlad says with a sharp tongue.

Minh nods again. "I will not forget Aidlad," he replies. He feels a slight gust as the alien whips the chair back around to continue looking on at the coordinate map in front of them.

Finally, free to wander, Minh makes his way over to the table. It's long, clean and white. He situates himself onto one of the matching stools while he waits for the day's new item.

One of the three doors leading to the command room opens with a whir. Attention is directed to the alien with their hands full. They stumble towards the table where they place the contents down.

Minh gets on his knees on the stool, so he can see the stuff more clearly. Today there are two things, a boombox and a little rectangular case with a picture of five young men on it. Minh looks back over at the alien who is huffing from overexertion. The boombox must be heavy especially if it was anything like the one Minh's mother had in the basement back home.

"Kor—I mean Gregory," Minh catches himself. The last thing he wants to do is offend the alien who has become so fond of their new name. "Are these what we're observing today?"

"Yes!" Korjic puts their hands on their hips with a big smile plastered on their face. "I'm quite excited about this one Minh! Hopefully you know lots about it, since yesterday it took us forever to understand the rotisserie phone!"

"Rotary phone," Minh supplies. "And I'm excited too!" He exclaims, leaning forward to grasp the little case for closer examination. He hums in thought.

"Any idea of how it works?" Korjic asks, voice gruff and filled with curiosity.

Minh sighs. "I think it could be music. I know that big piece of plastic is called a boombox, my mom had one. It's what plays the music." Minh flips the case over and sees the listed tracks on the back. "It's definitely music, I just...don't know how it works." Minh puts the case on the table and slides it down to Korjic. The alien grabs it and looks it over carefully.

Minh hops down from the stool so he can be closer to the boombox. He climbs up on another stool, now able to see on top of the machine. There's a wide button that urges him to poke at it, so he does. It makes a loud click and a compartment pops open. It's the disc reader, that much Minh can tell. The sight paints a vivid picture and it's in this moment that Minh can here the popping in of CDs and the lull of his mother's favourite Vietnamese artists.

There's a loud clack alongside the sound of plastic sliding against the floor. An audible gasp, slightly delayed, falls from Korjic's mouth.

"Oh no." The alien mutters looking down at their feet where the plastic case is broken in two.

Minh peers over at the mess. "Kor—Gregory look!"

The alien looks puzzled. "What is it?"

Minh climbs off the stool and slides to his knees. In between the two broken pieces is a black rectangle with two holes through it. He flips it over and over in his hands trying to understand it.

"Minh look at this!" Korjic exclaims.

Minh pops up, the little black piece still in his hands. During Minh's studying Korjic has also discovered something new.

"I have pressed another button on this machine. It has opened another compartment like you had done before me!" Korjic points to the new opening on the front of the machine. The slot looks like a match to the shape of the little black piece.

Minh climbs up the stool once again. He looks to where Korjic is pointing.

"Do you think this is something of importance?" Korjic wonders.

Minh smiles as he looks back and forth between the plastic in his hands and the opened slot. "Gregory, I think your butter fingers might have just given us a good lead."

"Butter? Butter fingers? My fingers are not—

Korjic is cut off by Minh's actions. The little piece is placed within the slot, the holes fitting around the prongs inside. Minh pushes the popped-out piece back into place.

"Shall I plug this in?"

"Yes," Minh replies, anticipation filling his eyes to the brim.

Korjic maneuvers around the table, plug in hand, to find a socket.

Minh's finger hovers over the play button on the front of the machine. When he hears the plug push in he jams the play button down.

The machine squeaks, the two prongs inside begin to spin, with it something within the little object does as well. Then it stops and the play button clicks out. Minh frowns and jabs at the button again but all it does is pop back out once more. Frustrated, he continually pokes at, fighting with the machine until Korjic tuts and swats his hand.

Korjic looks down at Minh. "Let us try something more intelligent, shall we?"

Minh scratches the back of his neck, a weak smile creeping up on his face. "Sure!" He answers.

Korjic presses the button he had done so before and the compartment opens. They take the little object out, flip it over and put it back in. "Now press it." They whisper.

Minh does as he's told and presses play. The machine whirs and the prongs spin. After a moment of held breath music starts playing. It's loud and jars both Korjic and Minh. Minh looks frantically for the volume control. He finds it and taps it down to a much lower setting.

For a while they just sit and listen. Eventually even Aidlad comes over to join them. The three of them sit quietly enjoying the upbeat pop music coming from the boombox.

"I quite enjoy this music!" Korjic says while bopping their head to the beat. "We shall keep these items, I find them useful."

When the music stops they flip the object and are delighted by the entire new series of songs coming out from the speakers.

"Oh! Minh, Aidlad has picked the new item for us to observe tomorrow!" Korjic says over the melody.

Minh glances over at Aidlad who is now suddenly holding a cube like object. In front of them on the table is a handful of square shaped pictures. Minh squints at it all knowing full well tomorrow will be another day of trial and error.