

Appeal

Dana William Paxson

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I CLING TO A STEEL RIB with my two human hands and gape at these balls of radiating rubber sticks, the Ko Duessinach Marseein, aliens each two meters across, the two hundred arms of each one whipping in a nonexistent breeze to a music of light that comes from nowhere.

How do they dance here, without gravity's anchor? The walls turn thin and sun blooms into our Lagrange bubble, where we welcome these refugees from what they called the Kaliari Expansions in the galactic interior. Here and there officials from Earth, most of them space-sick, hang by strapholds.

"We will dance for you," the Marseein promised five years ago, as their interstellar trash-heap decelerated toward us.

"Ridiculous," I said to Jedediah K. We laughed, remembering the telecasts of their forms.

Now they shrink together into a quivering heap of flaccid limbs. Jedediah, clinging at my side, elbows me.

The light flashes purple; the heap blows apart. Each of the Marseein flattens to a disk, spinning, sailing out at the bubble walls. They rebound as one, becoming balls of limbs again. A giddy weaving begins. My head aches; I see in my mind a child skewered on a bayonet. I shout "No!"

The Marseein spin and explode, bounce and grip, not once touching anything but minds. Beside me Jedediah curls into a ball; his vomit floats before him. I shut my eyes. A burning man beats at his own blackening clothes. A machine seizes him and gnaws away his limbs.

The bubble's light shifts and leaps. My inner eye sees ocean; laughing mer-creatures skip on the sea-spume. Peace: my heart slows once more. From the dancers come soft undulating waves, urging. Hope. I catch a strut of the bubble wall. They have come to us for hope. For help.

I stare at Jedediah. "What can we do for them?"

He shrugs. "Got to do something, I guess."

The Marseein float, waiting, to the bubble wall opposite the sun. Officials mutter in floating clusters. The bubble's brain dims the sunside protectively. Nightside, the stars lie stubbornly in blackness.