Welcome to the New Age

 “Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” the boy’s voice cried out.

 “Do you see the Glacial Nebula Park anywhere?” the grumpy man replied. It had been like this ever since the Black Hole Orphanage had set out on the field trip earlier that same morning. “I’ll tell you when we get there. Now go away.” The spaceship carried an orphanage run by the grumpy man and his sister, a mean woman who went by the name of Tzipi.

 Unlike her brother Yuk, who was short and, well, generously built, Tzipi was as tall as a teenage giraffe, with shoulder length brown hair, with the occasional gray hair. She and her brother had inherited the run-down spaceship after their parents died in a tragic space-horse gambling incident that no one liked to talk about.

 “How long ’till we get there?” the boy asked again.

 Yuk had had enough. “Listen, if you don’t go back there with the rest of the kids by the time I count to three, I will chuck you out of the spaceship and only let you back in after we get back. Understand?” he asked. The boy nodded his head vigorously. Even he knew he had crossed the line. He jumped down form the back of the chair and ran to the dorms.

 As Yuk finally began to concentrate on getting the orphanage to the park, Tzipi strolled in.

 “Did you see what that little twerp did to me?” she screeched in an unbearably high voice. “He drew on my favorite blouse!” she wailed. “I want them out! They are privileged to have us in their lives and this is what they do to repay us!”

 Yuk was used to having to calm Tzipi down after such events, and he began to say his normal response when the Black Hole Orphanage crashed into something. The whole spaceship rocked back and forth, knocking everything over. Tzipi went to hold on to a table when it slid out, resulting in her landing on her bum with a sizeable noise. From the dorm wing of the ship, they could hear the wailing of the kids.

 “Just a meteor,” Yuk grumbled. He put the ship in reverse, and slowly backed up away from the meteor. When he was happy with the distance he put between the ship and the meteor, he put the ship on the always unpredictable autopilot and went to the dorm wing to calm the children.

 He looked out the filthy windows of the ship as he walked down the hallway. Outside he could several large planets, and in the far distance, the Glacial Nebula Park. As he got closer to the wing of the ship, he could hear the quiet whispers of the kids. *Probably wondering what the ship hit*, he thought to himself. Unlike Tzipi, who obviously did not enjoy life at the orphanage, he adored the kids, and they liked him back. *It’s all a matter of respect*, he thought to himself. *Yes, the kids can sense if you like them, and when they do, they like you back*, he decided.

 Yuk entered the sleeping quarters. On his right, he could see the beds arranged against the walls, with tattered old sheets and faded pillowcases. There was a big window on the far side of the room, where the kids stored all of their clothes in a small closet underneath. In the middle of the room, arranged in a small circle, sat the twenty or so kids that made up the Black Hole Orphanage.

 “What was that noise?” asked one of the youngest kids at the orphanage, a five year old boy named Felipe.

 “We just hit a meteor. It’s no big deal.” Yuk said. “We’ll get to Glacial Nebula Park in about ten minutes, and then we’ll be collecting the ice samples for Mr. Calgulies.”

 Mr. Calgulies was the eighty-nine year old tutor that the orphanage had employed to teach the kids about everything from geography, to how to operate one of those ancient phones that were still required by law to be taught how to use. He was almost completely deaf, but he liked the kids and always gave them lollipops at the end of each lesson.

 “I don’t want to go,” mumbled Eliza, who was sitting alone near the back of the room, hidden from Yuk’s view by the shadow of a big closet. “What’s supposed to be fun about going to huge glaciers floating in the middle of nowhere, stopping for five minutes as we collect chunks of ice, and then going on the express starway back to society?”

 Yuk sighed. Eliza had been at the orphanage ever since her parents had died during a robbery when she was two. She had decided that since she had been at the orphanage the longest, and was already at “the ripe old age of thirteen” as she put it, she should be the leader of the other kids. Most kids followed her, especially the younger ones, but she could get too bossy and annoy everyone else.

 The rusty spaceship slowly reversed, parking itself in front of the Glacial Nebula Park Visitors’ Centre. As the arm of the landing dock extended out to touch the side of the spaceship, another orphanage pulled up beside them.

 The Miss Faukes’s School for Unfortunately Parentless Children gracefully soared into the landing dock. It was a sleek vessel, with the only part of the immaculate ship not completely black being the name of the orphanage written in cursive print. The door of the spaceship opened and two columns of six children each trooped out, walking in a rigid military pace. Clad in fine black britches and white leather jackets, they were led by a sour old woman, with her wispy white hair tied in a ponytail. Her black and white dress was covered with a thin gold shawl, and her puckered lips were as red as blood. Miss Faukes was a bitter woman, separated from her family during a storm that flooded her ship. She brought order and organization to everything she could, despite the misery and resentment it sometime caused.

 Miss Faukes twirled her diamond-encrusted silver baton, which served not only as a tool for leading the orphans, but also to punish them. She led them to the ticketing office, where she purchased tickets for the group. She led them to the theatre where the orientation film was being screened.

 Grumbling, Yuk and Tzipi followed the crowd with the kids. Felipe and Eliza walked in the front, chatting about the snobs at Miss Faukes’s orphanage. As they got seated, leaving a very visible divide between the two orphanages, the lights dimmed. A very skinny woman, with bright red hair and splotches of freckles on her face walked in and got on the small stage in front of the screen.

 “Hello,” she said in a hushed tone of voice. She sounded like a mouse that was trying to see if the cat was still outside its hole, trying to trick it. “I’m Kathleen. I’ll be your guide for the duration of your trip. Please relax and enjoy our orientation video. It was produced in part by-”

 “Just start the movie!” Eliza’s voice stopped the guide mid-sentence. “We don’t care about that, just start the movie already!”

Yuk moaned. *It’s starting*, he thought to himself. Eliza could be the most insufferable girl when she tried. She had no filter on her mouth, and thoughts turned to words without a moment’s pause to consider the effects.

 “Excuse me, but we ask you do not interrupt the movie. Now, as I was saying, the movie was directed by-”

 Kathleen was interrupted yet again, but this time by Felipe. He blew the loudest raspberry Yuk had ever heard. “Tzipi!” he exclaimed. “Don’t you know it’s rude to fart in public?”

 Tzipi was livid as Miss Faukes looked at her with a disapproving face. “Really,” she said, in a scratchy voice. “Is that what you teach the children?”

 “Hush!” Kathleen tried to regain control of the crowd. She cowered as Tzipi swung her murderous glare toward her. “Everybody, please redirect your attention to the movie.”

 The movie started playing. A man’s voice sounded from the speakers that lined the walls of the dark cinema. “Ages before man discovered space, when mankind was a baby rocking in a stroller, glaciers travelled through space. Glaciers travelled through what is now Glacial Nebula Park.” A title popped up on the screen: *The Coolest Glaciers*. “These glaciers, formed from astral ice, a remnant of the Big Bang, are a valuable commodity, and were mined to extinction shortly after Nell Urmstromm became the first person to land on one of these glaciers. Only here, in the Glacial Nebula Systemic Park do we have Nebular Glaciers, which we keep and breed for scientific purposes. The breeding process or these Nebular Glaciers is quite a peculiar process. We keep them in freezing cold conditions, and give them regular showers. We have discovered, thanks to the amazing work of Dr. Lisa Cudgles, that the glaciers will not reproduce unless they are clean. We hope you have a wonderful visit and ask you at this time to declare any anti-freeze or lighters that you may have. Failure to do so will result in a lifetime ban from the park and a fine. Jailing is also a valid option, depending on the severity of the offense. Thank you.”

 The lights turned back on. Kathleen led the group, which had been significantly shrunk by the fact that all the kids in the orphanage but Eliza and Felipe had attempted to smuggle anti-freeze. They said they had wanted to grow their own glaciers. As such, Eliza and Felipe were escorted by Yuk while the rest were taken back to the spaceship with Tzipi.

 The remaining children, Miss Faukes, Yuk, and Kathleen boarded a small shuttle spaceship. Its paint was peeling, and the Glacial Nebula Park logo was barely visible. The shuttle began to move, and Kathleen’s voice, connected to a microphone and now talking through the speakers on the walls began to sound.

 “If you look on your right,” she said, while keeping her eyes on the windshield in front of her. “You can see our memorial sculpture of Lisa Cudgles.”

 “Why does she look like a man?” Eliza asked. “She’s not very pretty. Why is her name Cudgles? She sounds like a stuffed animal. When are we going to get the ice samples? I want to go already. Why do we have to get the ice samples? I don’t even like Mr. Calgulies.”

 Eliza would have kept talking, but she was interrupted by Kathleen. Kathleen had started crying, standing in the corner of the shuttle with her face in both hands. She raised her head, and the tear tracks were clearly visible on her face.

 “Please,” she said. “Be quiet. Why won’t you listen to me? I drive two-and-a-half hours to get here every day. I have two small children at home and all they do is cry. Why won’t you listen?” An accent started to sound while she was crying. It was a peculiar mix of French, English, and German.

 Yuk was mad. There would clearly not be any more field trips for the kids. Every time they made someone cry. At least it was better than the time they went to the chocolate factory.

 “Listen, you old fart,” Felipe yelled, encouraged by Eliza’s rebellion. “We don’t care what you have to say. Just get us out of here!”

 Kathleen started crying even harder, but at last they arrived at the glacier. “Everybody, follow me and make sure not to take too much ice.”

 As the children started to collect their ice samples, Miss Faukes approached Yuk.

 “You have no control over your children, my dear Yuk. You better take good care of them or I will call the social services on you.”

 Yuk was already having a bad day, and it clearly wasn’t going to get any better. “My dear Miss Faukes,” he said, with the fakest smile the galaxy had ever seen. “I know your nose is big, and it must be hard for you, but please keep your nose out of everyone else’s business.”

 Miss Faukes’s smile disappeared instantly. “I’m warning you.”

As Yuk finally turned his attention back to Felipe and Eliza, he heard a shriek. It was Miss Faukes. Confused, he turned around and noticed they were the only kids on the glacier. Next to them, however, was a large mound of ice, bigger than an igloo, maybe even three. Muffled voices and faint thumping noises could be heard. Yuk, with a monotone voice, marched over to them, and said in a deadpan voice. “Is that-”

 “Yes,” Felipe and Eliza said together.

 “We’re going,” Yuk decided. The three boarded the shuttle bus, leaving a distraught Miss Faukes trying to dig out her students.

Kathleen’s voice was more audible now, shrieking, “I have two small children! Two-and-a-half hours! Why won’t you listen to me?”

Felipe was walking back to the spaceship when one of his samples slipped out of his hand. It tumbled on the smooth snow and slipped on the ice, until it went over the edge of the glacier. Getting dangerously close to the edge of the glacier, he saw the sample falling down, down, down, and into a strange blue and green planet’s atmosphere. He saw nothing for a few seconds, until a huge sheet of ice, like a white blanket, began expanding, until it was completely covered.

“Oops.” he said. “Sorry Yuk.”

“Don’t worry,” Yuk sighed. “There’s only dinosaurs on that planet.”

They boarded the ship and left.

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