

STARS ARE STARS

You don't mind me talking to you? Only it's a while til I take off.

I saw you looking out the window. I don't blame you, I do it myself. I mean, not as much as I did. You get used to it, I guess. In my business.

It's funny. People look at the night sky and they pick out the constellations and they go, wow, aren't the stars amazing. I get it. The stars are amazing – suns blazing away billions of miles away with their planets and asteroids. It's pretty incredible.

I should know, I put most of them up there.

On my card it says GALAXY PRODUCER, and that pretty much sums up what I do. I put galaxies together. I started out on constellations – the Great Bear, that was one of mine, and Orion (which was known as The Hunter in some territories, for reasons which escape me now). I don't talk about the constellations so much, which is maybe false modesty, because some of them, people really love. The times I've impressed someone by saying, "Cassiopeia? I worked on that" is unbelievable. I mean, it's just a big W. Five stars, no big deal. But people go nuts over it. They even call it "The Big W" like it's some insider nickname. "Sharon! This guy worked on the Big W!" they shout. Their wives come over. "Oh my God! The Big W! I love that constellation!" It's almost embarrassing.

I suppose I also don't like to talk about working on constellations because I got my fingers burned. Take the Great Bear. You know it, your mom knows it, everybody knows it. Huge hit, simple concept, people ate it up. But then times change, the original production team move on and suddenly there's an announcement in the trades.

COMING SOON – THE LITTLE BEAR.

I ask you. "The Little Bear." Even in Latin it sounds dumb. Ursa Minor. Like the Great Bear only – well, you get the picture. Like someone said to me: "It's not that the universe expanded. It's just the constellations got smaller." Sure, the Little Bear did OK. But if you ask me – and don't, please, even lawyers have ears – it's just a pale imitation of something bigger and better.

So, constellations. Sure, they're cute. They're easy to pitch – "It's a hunter" – "It's a huge bear" – "It's a big W". And sometimes they have amazing stars attached to them (although try getting the Pole Star's people to commit to a project). But they're – simple. Basic. You seen one, you seen 'em all.

I got ambitious. That's all.

Galaxies are tough, don't let anyone tell you different. You think constellations are hard? Pfft. Seven, eight stars. Ten at most. But galaxies are a whole other game. Look at the Milky Way. It seems simple enough – the universe is full of them, how hard can they be – but the Milky Way is an order of complexity that almost breaks the human mind thinking about it. Just to fill one tiny corner of the night sky took – what? A hundred billion stars. One. Hundred. Billion. Yeah. Take that, Big W. And not just stars, either. Solar systems, planets, planetoids, asteroids, meteors... Galaxies are big. They're blockbusters. You want to make a galaxy, you need time and a big budget. A very big budget indeed. Doesn't matter if it's elliptical, spiral or irregular – big bucks. And don't go thinking that just because a galaxy worked before – Andromeda, the Milky Way, the Large Magellan Cloud – that it'll work as well the second time. The amount of spiral

galaxies I've seen that looked like the Milky Way, sounded like the Milky Way, and stunk the place out – they'd fill a galaxy on their own. A very bad galaxy that nobody liked.

Take the project I'm working on right now. It's got a catchy title – the Silver Lady Galaxy – because from some points of view, it resembles a woman made of silver. It sparkles, it glows, it does everything right. But when you get close – nothing. Just dead stars, floating rocks and - whatever. It doesn't matter. Just your standard sub-standard galaxy, the universe is full of the things. Everybody's making them. We're never going to have another Big Bang. Those days are gone.

But it doesn't matter. None of it matters.

OK, we cut corners. We pasted over the cracks with anti-matter when we should have used matter. We needed more time, so we broke relativity and we got more time. And if we put something at the centre of it all that didn't belong at the centre of anything, anywhere, ever – well, pardon me for breathing, but that's showbusiness. We got the job done, we reassured the investors, and if it turned out a little shoddy, Jeez, not everything is a hit. It's just a galaxy, for Chrissake. The universe is full of them.

I'm sorry, I'm a little nervous. Running at the mouth. I also hate to fly.

I'll be gone soon.

I hope you don't mind me bending your ear, but I have a few hours to kill before take-off and I just want to talk to someone.

The ship leaves tonight. It's the fastest there is, they say, and it's not coming back. Just heading out on a one-way flight. As far away from here as possible. I don't know what we're going to find when we get there: I don't even know what "there" is. The whole thing's a blank sheet of paper. But I'm going. I'm getting out of here, and I'd recommend that you do the same.

It's over. All of it. The entertainment industry is dying. Everything's dying. They don't make 'em like they used to: soon they won't make 'em at all.

Look out the window. Look out, and look up.

See? It's over. I told you.

One by one, the stars are being cancelled.