

Eric Seiley

The B Side of the Moon

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A Tomato in the Sun

“You sumbitches! You bug-terds!” Old Tom grumbled, shaking his fist at the coleopsis perched across every tree branch in his garden. “Every morning it’s the same thing! Y’all crap and I clean. Just crap everywhere and I gotta clean it. Iye-god, but one day I’m gonna turn my tomcats loose and let them hunt y’all down! Then not a one of y’all will ever poison my nice tomato plants again. I swear it’s enough to make a grown man cry.”

It was true, the Coleopsi, or *Trechus arribasi* -- which was the closest Earth’s biologists could classify this new alien species – downright despised organic earth tomatoes. Something about the acidity in the seeds messed with their internal digestive tracts, causing them to bloat and painfully expel gas more odorous than rotten eggs. Sometimes they even popped. Which could be nauseating.

“One day, you little shits,” Old Tom vowed shaking his fist. “*One day.*”

Occasionally, when the bloat did make them burst, like soda shaken in a bottle, Tom smiled as he cleaned up the little mess of fragmented shell and goo. “Serves y’all right.

If I had my way, I'd plant every square inch of Texas with *solanum lycopersicum* just to watch all y'all snap, crackle and pop. Hells bells, I'd even sell tickets so people could watch."

As it was, Tom was lucky to have even the one acre of the tomato plants he did. And that only because his farm was protected under historical preservation laws implemented by the Western Coalition of CanMexAmerica before the turn of the century. His being one of the last organic farms still in existence – and the only farm growing heirloom tomatoes in naturated organic soil. A protected status assured as long as his produce remained coveted by several highly influential families rich enough to keep him in the green. And keep his one acre farm safe from the new DEI government's attempts to shut him down.

"Them bastards up in Washington may love your crusty, shit spewing asses, but that don't mean I have to -- no matter how good they say y'all are for the Earth."

Turns out, *alien Trechus arribasi* -- whom Texans commonly called Cyclops due to their single insectoid eye mounted in the center of their shells - loved to dine on earth's abundant toxic waste and pollution. Not just dine, but effectively metabolize and nullify through digestion. Why, in the last four years since the Coleopsi' arrived on Earth, the Cyclops had successfully absorbed enough waste to turn the planet's standards of purity back more than a hundred years. And in a couple more, would effectively clean the land, air and sea till it was nearly as pristine as the day God created them. As long as organic tomatoes and other nightshade variants were kept limited to their exposure.

Which was why the recently installed DEI government of CanMexAmerica could give two shits about Old Tom and the legacy of his farm. Or the generations of his family who ground out a living, pouring their blood, sweat and tears into its sustainability. As

far the DEI were concerned, Tom and his kind were nothing more than anachronistic, ignorant field hands impeding the safe comfort of their benevolent guests and their invaluable gifts to humankind.

“Alright you little shitheels, enough gab. Time to get my work done.” Old Tom started removing the protective covering from each tomato plant section, slipping the soiled plastic squares into large basins of soap, vinegar, and water so he could later clean off the Cyclops’ crap coating. He worked diligently for the next few hours – careful so he didn’t damage the plastic – trying to finish up before the Texas sun reached its noon zenith and the heat of the day became unbearable. And as he worked, he whistled *God Bless the USA* and *America the Beautiful* and *This Land is My Land* while watering heirlooms, pulling new growth weeds, and picking up any dead leaves fallen to the ground. All while breathing in the richly fetid smell of bug excrement layered over dirt and vegetation filling the sweet morning air.

“Maybe I should bottle this crap,” Old Tom pondered, “then I can ship it around the solar system as a detoxifier. It’s certainly smells potent enough. And I’m sure those poor souls on Venus and Mercury would appreciate y’all’s bug crap more than I. I hear their air modifiers are having a damn difficult time filtering the planet’s carbon dioxide levels down to safely breathable levels – which leaves most of them poor, bedeviled Spaniards trapped beneath the surface choking on dirty air. Or so says the intergalactic news feed.”

Old Tom crossed through the west portcullis to check his new growth calabash, which he’d carefully planted last year. He could see the roots looked strong, but this season’s harvest was undersized. Maybe a few inches in diameter and nothing close to the twelve inch, deep red heirlooms he’d harvested before the Cyclops invasion. This season just wasn’t ripening with the same energy. Which, to an old green thumb like Tom, was both an indictment and insult.

“Don’t worry girls,” Tom soothed his plants, “I’ll figure a way out of this. I promise. I don’t know how yet, but I’ll find a way.”

Old Tom’s One Acre Farm would still fill it’s seasonal quota despite the underwhelming harvest approaching. It was a point of pride. Not to mention why his customers relied on him -- so they wouldn’t have to resort to Earth’s store of chemically produced, fruit-like substitutes. Which were edible, sure, but contained high levels of chemical preservatives that essentially countered what little nutrition the substitutes provided.

What the new DEI government didn’t understand was Old Tom had a mission too – which in his mind was much more important than their alien guest’s comfort. Old Tom had grown organic hot house fruits since a little boy. Learned at the knee of his Daddy -- and his Daddy’s Daddy and his Daddy’s Daddy’s Daddy. A legacy of cumulative experience dating back more than two centuries to their original farm in Ogallala.

Of course, that was before the Seven Continents War and its extensive damage. Before China abandoned Earth to colonize Jupiter. Before the United Kingdom built their expansive, no-soil hydro-silicone herbotic warehouses across the Tyco and Eimmert Craters of Mars so they could feed all the English, Irish, and Scotsmen who flocked there. And well before Africa took over Saturn and revolutionized the food supplementation industry by developing edible cotton – those little puffs of augmented nutrition that Old Tom knew tasted terrible, but staved off starvation for the millions inhabiting the outer rims.

Earth, by the end of the previous century, had been all but abandoned by most civilizations. Except for men and women like Old Tom -- the blue collar, western hemisphere working class -- who’d lived their entire lives working dirt farms and coal

mines and oil rigs. Who were hard scrabble and poor, but hardy enough to resist the extensive pollution that permeated the planet and threatened to choke it out.

"Maybe I can grind up all that brown sticky shit you motherfuckers keep cranking out, mix it with fertilizer and soap and make homemade glycerin. Turn the whole mess into a low grade dynamite and ship it off to them Estonians on Neptune who're trying to liberate themselves from Georgian rule. I could probably make a mint."

Spotting several fallen leaves under the south corner Jacaranda tree, Old Tom walked over to pick them up. And as he did, groaned with the effort. "Definitely getting old," he muttered putting a hand to his lower back as he gathered the leaves up with his other -- only to feel the gust of wings buzzing as a Cyclops beetle he'd uncovered took flight and bounced off his forehead. Then flew up to the nearest tree branch.

"Dammit, you unholy bastard!" Old Tom yelled, slapping the air in front of his face, "I'm just trying to tend my garden!" Tom could feel a murderous rage rising, but knew better than to act on it. Knowing if he did, and intentionally hurt any one of these little shitheels, the DEI government would come down on him like a hammer on a nail. He'd not only lose his farm, but surely be thrown into a deep dark jail cell for violating Earth's latest "foreign visitors" protection laws. Course, this particular Cyclops wasn't making it easier for Tom to resist the impulse. It was now sitting on the lowest tree branch, staring down at Old Tom with a look of contempt. How that one black eye could project such a thing, he didn't rightly know. But it did. And Tom didn't like it one bit. "You're a big fucker, ain't you, you little shitheel. Bigger than the others. I hope y'all aren't all growing bigger. It's bad enough with the normal sized ones we already got."

Tom hissed at the Cyclops through his teeth and spat on the ground.

"Don't hiss at me, *Farmer John*," the Cyclops spoke back. "I wasn't the one who interrupted your nap."

Tom stared up at the alien beetle and thought, *Did that big fucker just talk to me or am I overheating and hearing things?*

"You're not sick, Old Man. At least not by our standards. And, yes, I did speak to you."

"What the...I must be going daft."

"No you aren't. So stop questioning your reality. I'd like to have a word with you and I can't have you questioning your sanity while we do."

Tom agreed he had a choice here – accept the moment as reality or admit he'd gone round the bend and be shipped off to the looney bin. Either way, this sumbitch Cyclops **WAS** talking to him.

"Alright, I'll bite. What do y'all want? Don't y'all have someone else to bug?" Tom chuckled at his bon mot. "Get it? Bug?"

"Yes, Tom, I understand."

Now he knows my name? "You know my name?"

"I have ears to hear."

"Do you?"

"I do."

Tom was feeling dizzy, so walked back to the patio and sat in his favorite chair before lighting up a cigarette. Quickly followed by the Cyclops flying down and taking a seat on the table in front of him.

“As much as I enjoy the smell of cigarette smoke,” the Cyclops spoke, “and the other truly astounding smells of your kind -- smoking appears to be one of the most self-debasing habits you humans have invented. You’re essentially poisoning your own bodies from within by inhaling cancer into your breathing apparatus. Which will eventually kill you.”

“Y’all are one to talk. Don’t you and your kind eat toxic shit.”

“It’s not toxic to us. To us, that toxic waste are the fruits and vegetables of our nutritional needs. And believe me, of all the world’s we’ve visited, the buffet of nutrition on this planet has been exemplary. Almost a paradise – which is one of the reasons we came here. Did you know the aroma of your toxic waste and garbage can be detected from nearly two galaxies away? Out past the Magalona region. Which, ironically, is why most other intelligent civilizations stay away. They all think this place is one big galactic dump.”

“Oh joy. Aren’t we the lucky people.”

“Sarcasm is such a strange human response.”

“Fuck off, bug-boy. Why are you even talking to me? Don’t you have some uranium or whatever to go feast on?”

“Believe me, it wasn’t my choice to approach you. I thought there were better candidates. But the council, in their wisdom, decided you to be the best potential spokesperson.”

“Spokesperson for what? For who? Y’ALL?!”

“Yes. We’d like to engage you as our official liaison.”

“Get bent! There ain’t no way I’m gonna work for y’all. Plus, who would I even talk to?”

“The DEI government of your own country to start. But then the rest of the planet’s other reigning monarch’s. Those oligarchs you call presidents.”

“Ain’t no way! One, cause I’m a farmer, not no two bit politician carpetbagger. And two, cause I don’t like you. Don’t y’all realize I’m nowhere near your biggest fan. Just the opposite, in fact. I’d like to see y’all dead and gone.”

“I am aware. Which is why the elders wanted you. Their theory being if the most adversarial of humans relayed our message to his own people -- the very messenger who not only despises us, but wants us wiped out -- then your fellow humans would surely take notice. Not to mention, you own son – who is the current President of CanMexAmerica, is he not?”

“My son died the day he left the farm and turned into one of them liberal commie pinko assholes. I have no son.”

“That isn’t what your genetics suggest to us. We can plainly detect the DNA connection. Not to mention, your son appears to be very alive and well – living up in the neutral zone. Up in the territory you call Washington D.C.”

“Fuck you, my son is dead.”

“Ahh, sarcasm again. Well, regardless, we would like you to deliver a message to your son..err...your president. We’ve tried directly, but despite all your efforts, and as much as has been arranged, your government will not recognize us as anything more than a tool to be used. Nor participate in decisions affecting all of us. But we’ve learned, despite political tribes among humans being so dysfunctional – if you have a human attaché to intervene, then your kind tend to listen through paternal patterns of obedience.”

“Which means what?”

"Meaning if a father calls, is not that son required to answer? And when he does, you can deliver our message."

"Alright, I'll bite. What message?"

"We're running out of food and need more."

"What do you mean you're running out and need more?"

"That would appear to be obvious from the current status of your world's environments – which is more amenable to you in purity now than our species. Our food supply is running low. With projections that we will have consumed near 100% of what you call pollution and toxic waste within the next few years. We need to secure our future food supply for the future now."

"So go somewhere else. Just like y'all did when you came here."

"Yes, we could do that. But the results are not guaranteed. Many swarms in the past have died from such intergalactic transitory efforts. Not every planet or system has this rich a supply of food. Not to mention, our intel suggests you still have the ability to feed us for the next thousand years with your current, inactive supply."

"Inactive supply? What supply?"

"Your atomic based nuclear missiles. At last count, humans have around 5,500 projectiles housed in silos across this continent. Another 5,800 on the abandoned Russian continent. And a few thousand more in various other places. Those combined would be enough to feed us for a very long time. Conservatively decades, as I have indicated."

"You don't need my permission to go into those silos and dine away."

"We could, but that would be extremely wasteful of their potential and not as bountiful. One sedentary missile could feed us for a short while. But if those missiles were launched instead, and exploded over open terrain, the resulting food supply would quantifiably be more than a thousand-fold per individual missile use. And feed nearly the entire swarm for months, if not years, with the fallout."

"That's insane."

"No, it's science. More akin to your use of fertilizer over your repugnant tomatoes so you can increase their growth, yes? Well, for us, the plutonium acts as the fertilizer and the nuclear fallout the greater yield."

"Let me see if I have this straight. Y'all want me to call my son and ask him to set off nuclear missiles, one at a time, which would cause a nuclear winter across Earth, just so y'all can have more toxic munchies to dine on? And in the process, destroy what remains of the human race? Are you fucking nuts?!"

"We would not harm humans. And our efforts would be timed and controlled in seasons to achieve the best effect of potentiality in action, of course. Just like your Earth seasons of planting, growth and harvest. We'd concentrate each individual launch directly to locations not currently occupied by humans – namely the northern and southern poles of this planet. Which is where we would take up permanent occupancy while leaving the rest of the planet to your kind."

"The fallout would still kill us."

"No. Not if we eat up the aerial fallout first. Humans would be minimally affected as long as you take a few precautions and stay closer to lands nearest your planet's equator. We've purified those places already, so humans should be very comfortable and happy near the equator. You could even continue farming your repugnant fruit there."

"No. No matter how reasonable y'all try to make it sound, its bullshit. Not to mention, this was our world first before you shitheels showed up. Why would I help you destroy it in any way? For all I know, this is just a ploy so y'all can effectively eliminate the human race, not to mention my livelihood."

"Your Earth wasn't doing well before we got here, lest you forget, and was already on a doomed trajectory -- choking itself out from all its own pollution and garbage. Till we came along. In fact, it could easily be said, and it has among your politicians, that we are saving humankind simply because we feed on human waste. Which, in turn, purifies your planet. One man's garbage and all. It's symbiotic. Is that not worthy of us staying? And you helping us? Besides, the alternative would be...unfortunate."

"The alternative?"

"Have you not considered what happens when we run out of food here on your planet?"

"Sure, you leave."

"No. Not while there is still nourishment to be had."

"Which means what?"

"The only other nourishment, at least the kind we require for sustenance, can also be found within the human body. Your kind has spent decades, even centuries, poisoning yourself with self-administered chemicals -- smoking, drinking, and all your chemically enhanced foods and products. Just look at the labels you put on your packaging – a laundry list of poisonous chemicals to preserve by. Which, ironically, has permeated your bodies, but does not preserve them."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Well, up till now, the swarm has had enough nourishment from the external world. But if our food supply grows scarce, I cannot account for what my brothers and sisters will do to avoid starvation."

"Y'all are saying, if we don't get you more food, y'all will eat us humans?"

"Not so much your bodies, but more those areas saturated with chemicals toxins – lungs, liver, pancreas. Internal organs. Course, biologically speaking, none of you could survive such a thing. And, unfortunately, since fresh is best, you'd be alive when we started dining."

"Son of a bitch! You cock sucking bugs!"

"I do not, in any way, wish to see such an event come to pass. Neither do my brothers and sisters. Your kind produces such wonderful product on an external basis, we'd hate to give it up. And would regret having to feed on you directly to acquire it. Thus why our council of elders have asked me to approach you and get you invested in helping. I believe our plan is a win-win scenario for both our species – an excellent symbiotic trade. So you should take us up on our offer and call your son right away. Time is growing short. And, hey, who knows, in the long run, you'll be seen as a hero for helping the human race flourish again."

"That's all bullshit. You fuckers invaded us and now you want to be shown special treatment? Allowed to take everything we've worked for? Well, we were doing fine before you and we'll do well after y'all leave. Even if we have to stomp each and every one of you motherfuckers. I'll make sure we end y'all before you can say, 'damn right!'"

"You won't be able. Humans aren't strong enough or smart enough to resist us. In fact, to us, you're nothing more than pets -- domesticated animals who provide a small purpose. Not unlike your earth cows and sheep and goats. And, as a rule, we don't like to eat our pets when they serve a better purpose alive. Unless it's necessary to hold

off starvation for the millions of my brothers and sisters till we make other arrangements."

Tom's anger finally boiled over. "Well, y'all got it all figured out then, don't you, ya' little fucker. The swarm as overlord, huh. But you forgot one thing. We Texans don't take shit off no one. Not even alien locust motherfuckers who think they're doing us a favor!" And with that, Tom stood quickly, removing a tomato from his pocket -- the one he'd been saving for a mid-morning snack -- and smashed it down hard on the alien locust shell. Feeling the satisfying crunch as the Cyclops began shrieking in pain.

"Oh, you bastard!" the Cyclops whined. "That hurt! Oh, you human turd! You've done it now. Do you think you've stopped us?! We will not be denied even if I die! Oh you pigheaded human piece of Texas shit! You can die too for all I care!"

"Viva Texas, you Cyclops motherfucker!" Tom yelled again bringing his open palm, coated with tomato juice, back down on the coleopsi, crushing the shell completely and sending goo squirting everywhere. It felt damn good. Something he'd been wanting to do for a long time.

Old Tom sat back in his chair to light up another smoke and calm his nerves. Gazing with satisfaction over what he'd done and realizing punishment wasn't on his mind anymore. His thoughts had turned to his one acre farm – seeing it expand again, thriving once more under the hot Texas sun, till the entire horizon, point to point, was cultivated with his fruit. And he felt, once again, the prestige of being a successful farmer who worked the land and was the master of all he surveyed.

Tom was deep into his daydream when he heard the swarm rising up. Buzzing low and long at first, echoing off the nearby hills, but growing in pitch till the piercing sound cut through his reverie. Then, in the distance, the hive rising into the air -- a

dense black cloud of Cyclops, swarming across the sky, blacking out his one acre farm as millions of alien bugs came in mass.

"Well, shit," Old Tom mumbled, standing quickly. "I think I better mosey on back to the house now and make that call to my son."

The End.