

# Gold

Life has always fascinated me. I have spent many a millennium quietly observing the extraordinary energy that binds us all. I've seen many imposing spectacles, like the birth and destruction of galaxies, but I believed that the most remarkable ones came from some of the rocks a fraction of the size of the stars they orbited. They held beings of a stature that was nothing but a spec in the eyes of the Cosmos, with lifetimes that were but a blink in those of Time, yet I would say that the insignificance of their existence was what made it so glorious. It made every moment they spent together extra special. Though each planet's species was unique in appearance and culture, what remained constant was their connectivity.

There was nothing in the universe I wanted more than a planet of my own. I wandered the macrocosm for so long, growing with time and unable to be content with keeping all my knowledge to myself like many of the other stars I met. I wanted to share it. The stars with planets told me I was crazy.

*But what was the point in collecting all this information if there was no one to share it with?* My young self would think.

I refused to listen to them and continued to build my mass until one day I finally attracted a planet of my own. Compared to me, it was tiny but large enough to support the immense biodiversity I had always dreamed of. I named it Noxuul.

As it approached me, the layer of ice surrounding it melted into vast oceans with rocky areas in between. I then spent many years using my rays to carefully nurture the soil waiting patiently for the first signs of life, and they came. There were green spots – buds. Some died and the others were tiny in size, but the buds turned into flowers, trees and fruit. Soon, a lush green filled the plains that were once a dusty brown. It seemed miraculous and I was ecstatic, but not satisfied just yet.

Neither the forests nor the seas were able to understand me, so I had to wait a bit more before, finally, I was able to see the first versions of those who could.

They were microscopic, a bit pathetic but I still loved them. I stood and watched as they grew and evolved, becoming more advanced with every new species.

I wish I could say I loved all of them equally but truthfully there was always one I cared for more than the others, the Aredens.

I knew from the moment I first spoke to them that they were different from the rest. My rays caused the eyes of the other animals to widen in fear and confusion, yet the Aredens' held curiosity and wonderment.

I shared with them my knowledge. I taught them what plants to eat, how to craft tools, and even how to speak my language and just as I had named them, they named me.

Lux, they told me it meant 'light'. A fitting name for the celestial body in the sky.

For some time, Noxuul was a perfect paradise. My rays touched its whole surface allowing me to watch over my Aredens no matter what part of the planet they called home. I

saw how they didn't just cherish and worship me; they depended on me. It made my core swell with pride, and I latched onto that feeling. As long as they needed me, I didn't have to go back to roaming endlessly through the universe with the burdensome weight of loneliness. I refused to go back to that life and for a while that fate seemed impossible, until I met *her*.

She came from the first group of Aredens to seek shelter in the mountains. I thought it was quite foolish at the time. Why would they risk their lives in the unforgiving tundra when down below was an abundant forest? It seemed I underestimated the Aredens' invasiveness.

I had planned on convincing them to climb back down but then one of them ascended to the highest ledge she could securely sit on and held up to me a baby.

"Cressida," she had proclaimed proudly. "It means 'gold'. May she be as wise and as glorious as the heavenly body she was named after."

My rays caressed Cressida's face gently. I saw in her eyes not fear, but fascination. I knew then that I had found my most prized pupil. Her potential was limitless, the things she could do were incredible, borderline impossible as long as I could guide her.

But for me to guide her, I would first have to make sure she survived. So, I intensified the heat of my rays, just a bit, to clear some of the snow. I didn't melt the mountains dry, just made a space large enough for crops to grow. I knew hardship builds strength, which was something a person as remarkable as she would need. Fortunately, her strength came in abundance.

Sometimes it was difficult for Cressida to fully comprehend the secrets of the universe, but I knew she could do it. Everyone knew she was different from the rest.

I told Cressida about the different planets millions of lightyears away, how the creatures on the planets not only survived, but learned how to thrive.

Cressida heard this, looked at the world around her and said, “We could be doing so much better.”

“Then show them how to make this world better,” was my simple reply.

She seemed to have taken my words to heart. I noticed, overtime, that the Aredens began to learn and discover new things all by themselves, but Cressida surpassed that completely, she was innovative! Before reaching thirty she accomplished many amazing feats, like building shelters that could withstand the strongest of gales.

I was proud, of course, but also nervous because she started to become more knowledgeable than me. My knowledge was the main thing that upheld the bond between me and the Aredens so seeing their dependence on me wane destroyed me.

No. I destroyed myself.

I began to weaken. A Darkness started to grow on one side of Noxuul. Panic arose among the Aredens and who did they turn to for answers? Cressida.

My jealousy clouded my judgement. I told them horrendous tales of what lurked in the dark, despite not knowing what was there at all. This combined with the fact that they couldn’t possibly see in there made me feel sure they would stay in the light – with me.

And they did, they abandoned their huts and made camp wherever on the rotating Noxuul my light touched. They relied on me once again, but Cressida refused to give up the life she had always lived and spent weeks trying to find a way to see in the Darkness.

And she did. Fire, she called it. With its light, the Aredens would see in the Darkness and with its heat, they could fight off whatever lurked in the giant shadow.

On the day she discovered fire, she lit a branch and, in front of thousands, she slowly approached the Darkness. The crowd was eager to return to their regular lives while I was growing more anxious with every passing second.

If they entered the Darkness, they would either die or survive without me, either way they wouldn't need me anymore. I refused to let that happen, so I did something foolish.

As Cressida was about to make her first step into the Darkness, I shone down on her harder than ever before and I... I burnt her.

The look on her face was heartbreaking. Instead of the usual adoration all I saw was betrayal and on everyone else's was fear. My fondness towards Cressida was no secret so they knew that if I could hurt her, I could hurt them too.

Ashamed of myself, I became weaker than ever. My light could only reach half of Noxuul and the crowd was plunged into darkness.

I was terrified that they wouldn't survive. Thankfully, when I could finally see them, I saw that their lives seemed to have mostly returned to normal, so I spoke to them. They

didn't reply and I realized that they had renounced me. I was hurt, but understood. I had broken their trust after all.

I knew I had to let them go but before that I wanted to give them one last gift. The strength it required would take away my ability to talk, but I was alright with that.

I pulled from afar a rock even smaller than Noxuul and gave it some of my light. It was a nightlight in the sky, a source of light in the Darkness, serving as my apology and a sign I would always be there for them.

The day after, Cressida looked at me. I saw in her eyes forgiveness and my rays caressed her face once again.