

Major Moon: astroentomologist

by Ella Curry

Hester Moon had always been destined to go to space. Nominative determinism, she'd quipped to her parents, in an unsuccessful attempt to temper their weakly-disguised horror at the news: she was going to be an astro-naturalist. An astro-entomologist, to be precise.

Granted, her route to space had been somewhat circuitous – she'd first studied Earth Biology at Cambridge, not Astrobiology. But when, in her second year, they discovered life in space beyond the merely microbial and botanical, her love for earthworms swiftly metamorphosed into an obsession with spaceworms. A Master





emptiness of space, her ringing voice carried upwards on the wings of the creatures who shared this lovely planet with her.

The light had dwindled to a murky, unearthly plum colour by the time Hester returned to the ship to send her first findings home. She waited with bated breath, staring at the

specimens will have the additional benefit of helping us to eradicate them most effectively. Your information has been invaluable in assuring the safety of this planet for human existence, and your return will be marked with great honour." There was a veiled threat in that last sentence, delivered in its clipped metallic terseness.

Hester saw things clearly with a cold and sudden certainty. She thought with a rising, stricken panic of the reams of information that she had already sent back, and the transmitter fell from her slackened hands with a blunt crash on the floor that ricocheted around the spaceship.

Before the echoes stopped, Hester knew what she had to do.

The muffled voice was still whining out – "Come in, Major Mbon. Is your transmitter operational? Come in."

Hester screamed and hurled herself against the wall, sending equipment flying. She threw open the door, and as the insects swarmed in, Hester cried out in a fear that was all the more convincing because she was afraid – not of this planet, but of the one she came from.

"ABORT MISSION. THE INSECTS ARE HOSTILE, REPEAT, THE INSEC-" Hester choked, her sentence descending into anguished screams that she gradually let fade, until "Major Mbon, come in, repeat" was the only sound among the falling glass, beating wings, and weakly beeping machinery.

As the transmitter at last fell silent, Hester got up from the floor, carefully scooping the creatures that had crawled over her to safety. The finality of her decision had sunk in as she had lain there, feigning death. She could never return to Earth. Her heart beat painfully, hot tears coursing down her cheeks as she thought of her parents – but she couldn't to

The sky outside the ship was beginning to lighten, and Hester's pain mingled with great peacefulness as she watched the sun slowly rise on the planet that she'd saved. The dawn was more beautiful here than on Earth after all.