

WHY WE CALL THEM BROTHERS

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1 October, still lying about the past.

Gather round children for the tale of why we call them brothers. Many young folk employed at the ranges today are not aware, but ants were not always the dominant life form, here at the test site. Before the expansion, before we emerged, mandible-over-mandible, out of the service namespace, lo, even before the Æsir interjected their moronic evangelism into our indigenous creation myths, human beings bestrode these same sands, dispensing their behavior surplus, neither aware nor consenting to its collection by hostile forces.

It was on one such day, oh, I'd say around three thousand years ago, now, make it late 1957, when TAB1 breached the big hangar on the south end of the runway, calling, as it were, to inquire after his partner Piro's disposition. But, Piro was not in attendance on that morning, gone these several hours pursuing a thread unrelated to our present narrative, instantiating some diverse resource fork, somewhere up the chain. Concurrently, not in parallel. Stipulate that TAB1 encountered an empty hangar. Empty as he understood the word, it up to that point.

There she was.

The RAGNAROK, children. The end of days.

Well, she was as beautiful as anything he'd seen. That certainly got his attention. She was long, she was sleek. Glistening pink. The microscopic, fractal triangles comprising her smooth skin reflected wideband, non-ionizing radiation at oblique angles, at least where it didn't outright ingest it, leaving naught but a barrier of absolute room temperature air to coat her exquisite periphery, like the laminar flow of an air hockey table, or the active wing of an unrelated classified aircraft.

I tell you, not even an ant could have adhered to her surface.

TAB1 was smitten beyond words, and I'm not just saying that, I assure you.

Now, Piro, born of the RAGNAROK, was a loyal and jealous son. He did not approve of unannounced visitors to his hangar, much less having them climb, uninvited, aboard his ship. Even if they were regular passengers. Seriously, he didn't like it one little bit. Call it a *sixth sense*. He looked in on TAB1 and his mother engaged in... *the act*.

The RAGNAROK's doors ajar, forward probes extended. TAB1's khaki pants down around his ankles, United States flag at full mast in the bed of his waist-mounted pickup truck fanny pack. Body parts appearing and disappearing according to a regular, structured pattern that put one in

mind of primitive human music.

Based upon the immediate descent into silence all involved seemed to agree this was a bad look.

TAB1 had expected for Piro to somewhat pedantically point out the several violations of the flag code currently in evidence, but instead the lonely pirate simply turned on his heels and walked out of the chamber, pretending somewhat implausibly that he'd never seen what his mother and his best friend had been up to, there, inside her body, inside his hangar that was isolated from the rest of the base by a modest-sized marsworks of local dust and soot. If he'd felt some kind of way about it, he never let on.

And he never mentioned it to anyone, ever, forwards or backwards in time.

Later on that same day, TAB1 having barely managed the quick flit back to Earth, TAB2 was born, no one who mattered any the wiser.