



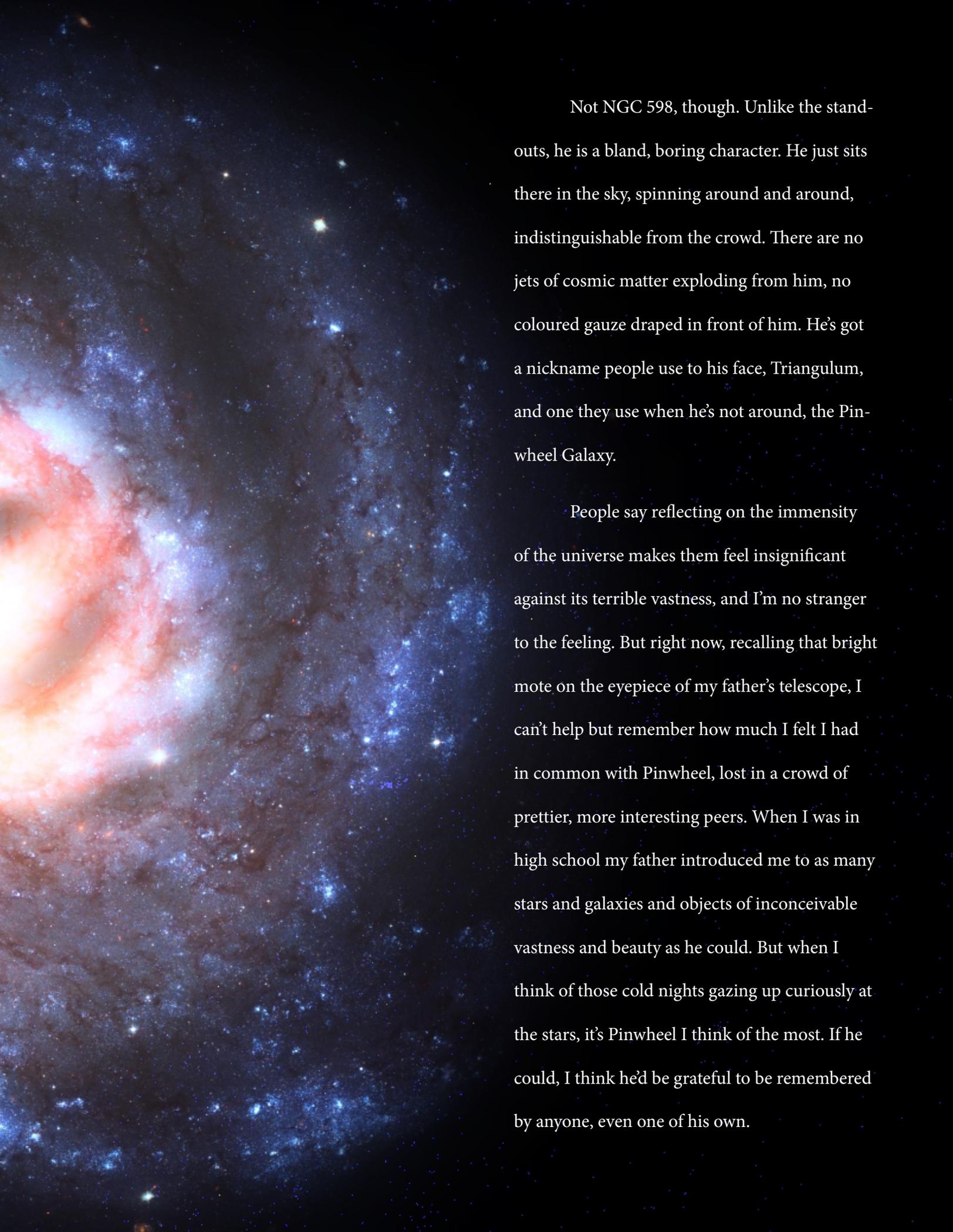
Pinwheel

By David Campbell

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NGC 598 is a spinning mass of stars 2.7 million light years away. It turns slowly, imperceptibly, as it hurtles at unimaginable speed through the frigid night air. As far as celestial objects go it is fairly uninteresting. When you think of space, you usually think of angry red stars spewing volcanic plumes through the heavens, or beautiful swathes of blue and green nebulae dusted across a sparkling black canvas. Maybe an angry, galaxy-devouring black hole springs to mind, ringed in a dangerously violet corona of inconceivable destruction with no care for the matter it consumes or the laws of physics being warped inside its insatiable belly.

Even other galaxies, the cosmic communities in which these objects congregate, are more interesting than NGC 598. Oh sure, they're all galaxies. They all conform to a certain code of general galactic conduct, universally having a bright core with tendrils of curving arms sweeping across space. But M104, for example, has put on a little weight and bulges at the edges. Hoag's Object's spiral arms have pulled away from its bright core and condensed into a ring, a halo of white encircling a brilliant core, the eye of God staring down on the firmament. And while NGC 7635 is also a simple spiral, the sultry she-devil peeks at us playfully from behind the flimsy red satin of a nearby nebula clouding the finer details of her celestial body.



Not NGC 598, though. Unlike the stand-outs, he is a bland, boring character. He just sits there in the sky, spinning around and around, indistinguishable from the crowd. There are no jets of cosmic matter exploding from him, no coloured gauze draped in front of him. He's got a nickname people use to his face, Triangulum, and one they use when he's not around, the Pinwheel Galaxy.

People say reflecting on the immensity of the universe makes them feel insignificant against its terrible vastness, and I'm no stranger to the feeling. But right now, recalling that bright mote on the eyepiece of my father's telescope, I can't help but remember how much I felt I had in common with Pinwheel, lost in a crowd of prettier, more interesting peers. When I was in high school my father introduced me to as many stars and galaxies and objects of inconceivable vastness and beauty as he could. But when I think of those cold nights gazing up curiously at the stars, it's Pinwheel I think of the most. If he could, I think he'd be grateful to be remembered by anyone, even one of his own.