

Don't Forget the Sun

by John Woodington

Of course I saw the stars last night. There're over a billion of them. Scientists have counted them for centuries, logging them in some huge list that exists somewhere, a starlist, if that's even a thing. It must be. They wouldn't keep counting them if they didn't know what they'd already counted. Things would get messed up. Polaris would undoubtedly get counted twice somewhere along the line. So would the sun. Then again, I get the feeling that the sun is one of those stars that's missed entirely when the starlist is updated. When the astronomers examine the starlist, they probably get that puzzled we're-missing-something-fundamental-here look about them. That's when the inconspicuous-until-now janitor saunters over, glances down at their starlist and mumbles, "Don't forget the sun," and the astronomers all slap their foreheads and smile.

The thing about astronomers is that they all have faces that in some way or another resemble Galileo, though they probably don't realize it. They lean in toward the mirror each morning and think, "You look strikingly familiar. Do I know you?" Even the women astronomers have Galileoesque ears and hairlines. It's an unspoken prerequisite at the University of Heavenly Bodies. Anyone resembling Ptolemy isn't even considered for admittance. Stuff just works that way. I'm a mathematician and I look strikingly like Leonhard Euler. I can recognize that in myself. It's very apparent when I look in the mirror.

Of course you never know you look like Leonhard Euler until some stogy algebra professor comes up to you when you're an undergraduate and says, "You know, you look just like Leonhard Euler." Then you go home and look up a picture of Leonhard Euler on the internet and, sure enough, you look like him. Same forehead, same nose, same quirked up lips. It's disheartening. The guy doesn't look good. I can imagine young women saying of an

attractive man, "What a Casanova." I cannot imagine them saying, "What a Leonhard Euler."

But then you read on about this guy, and you see that he made contributions to things other than mathematics. He branched out, as they say. Optics, mechanics, and sure enough, astronomy. Maybe he invented the starlist. After learning more about him, however, about how he grew up and about how meticulous he was, and about how he published so many papers in his lifetime (really, it would take a lifetime just to read all of them, much less write them), it becomes pretty clear that he didn't create the starlist. If he had created it, he wouldn't have forgotten the sun. He'd have put it right on the top of the list. Guys like us don't forget the sun.

