



An Interview with Mr. Sol

By **Robert J. Nemiroff**
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Mornings just wouldn't be the same without him. He really does light up our life. But did we ever thank him, even once? No, never. We should consider ourselves lucky that he doesn't get overheated. *Astronomy Magazine* thus decided to thank that wonderful star of ours, Sol, for all those billions of years of free sunlight; **tax free** sunlight. We also thanked him for that really great gravitational field of his that keeps us from cavorting around the galaxy. To our surprise he granted us an exclusive interview. We found out that being a star isn't always sunshine.

Astronomy Magazine: Mr. Sun, how did you become a star?

Sol, our Sun: Please, call me Sol. I answered an ad. "Galaxy Now Forming, Stars Needed." The ad made it look real easy. Just sit around, make hydrogen into helium. Have everyone look up to you. Have a career where you can really shine. And I always thought I had what it took to be a star, you know. I was young, I had great big clouds of hydrogen.

The actual triggering event was the tragic death of a star right in our own neighborhood. This shocked me and a lot of other large young gas regions into several new stages of development. It totally changed our future. Ironically, many of us eventually decided we wanted to become stars ourselves.

AM: Your future must be very bright.

Sol: Well it's not so easy being a star. First of all, you have to be made of the right stuff. And not only spunk and perseverance, also 75% hydrogen and 25% helium. But I have all that. It's the work schedule that's really impossible. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, you really can't take a day off without people getting annoyed.

AM: Is there any special class you had to be part of?

Sol: Yes, luminosity class. Of course, I wanted to be in the first class, but it turned out that was only for the brightest super-stars: the industry giants. It turns out I was put at the bottom. Class five. The other classes all made fun of us. "Dwarf stars" they would call us.

AM: How did you do in your spectral studies?

Sol: Not very well. I wasn't in the hottest class there either. I thought I had "A" potential, but after a while I was afraid they would give me an "F". But it even got worse: "F" wasn't low enough for me. I got a "G". Oh, I felt bad for a while, I went through a real solar minimum. But soon I found out lots of stars get "G's"; or even lower. Turns out "G's" out-number "A's" 30 to 1.

AM: Are you happy with your home galaxy: the Milky Way?

Sol: Well, when I signed on, I thought we were going places. I thought we would take on the universe, as a team. Adventure, action, 100 billion stars, all together in one galactic union. Now *that*, I thought, was power. But all we ever do is go in circles. I've been around the center 60 times or so, it's no big deal. Spiral arms - one millennium you're in them - the next you're out - they're fickle. The Andromeda galaxy is really no better; it's the same story there. Now the Virgo Cluster - that's where all the local action turned out to be.

I mean the Milky Way is OK and everything. It's a little dusty, I guess, but at least it's stable. We haven't been disrupted by any other galaxies or anything. We even have our little groupies: the Magellanic Clouds, galaxies like that. It's home.

AM: When did you decide to have planets?

Sol: Very early in life, although I'm not exactly sure when - that part of my life was very nebulous. I didn't really plan to have planets because I never had a steady companion. They just sort of spun off of my care-free early life style.

AM: Do you have trouble keeping the planets in line?

Sol: I'll say. I thought it would be easy - I'm hundreds of times bigger than they are. Have some planets, they said, they won't perturb you much. But they're running rings around me. Mercury won't keep to a Newtonian orbit - the darn thing's precessing all over the place. Uranus fell over. Jupiter's getting all spotty. Saturn has ring-around-the-collar. And Earth: please turn down your radio; the emission is much too loud, the other planets are complaining.

AM: Do you have any complaints?

Sol: Well, there is one: privacy. I know that when you become a star you give up a lot of personal privacy. But what happened was ridiculous. There are people looking at me at all times of the day. And they're not just looking, they're using telescopes. Big telescopes. They look at my back, my front; no place is sacred. Privacy is really a problem.

And sometimes I break out in those unsightly sunspots. You know, those dark magnetic depressions. You would

hope they would look the other way, save me some embarrassment. No way. They take pictures. It's incredible. I break out in sunspots and next thing I know I'm on the cover of Astronomy Magazine or something.

And you know what really gets me? Sometimes I can't help myself. Sometimes I accidentally let go of a little gas. It's natural, it happens to everybody. "Solar Flares" [actually, "coronal mass ejections"] they call them. They make movies of them. They tell their friends. Soon everyone is watching. I'm so embarrassed.

AM: This bothers you?

Sol: Oh yeah. Sometimes I get little mad. I think of implementing a little photon tax. Not much, just a penny or two per photon, or something like that. Just to let you know I'm here. Get a little respect once in a while. I could go on strike, you know. A few months without sunshine and you people would ante-up.

AM: How do you get along with the other stars in the solar neighborhood?

Sol: Pretty well. I don't interact with them as much as I used to. Sometimes we joke around, throw some snowballs at each other. But I'll tell you though, they're not happy with the privacy situation either. They claim that when you guys aren't looking at me during the day, you're looking at them at night. And with even bigger telescopes. Don't you ever stop?

AM: What's in the future for you?

Sol: Well, I'm not really so unhappy with my present job. It's a steady gig. Maybe in a few billion years I'll apply for Red Giant status. I don't have the helium yet. That's the key to being a good Red Giant - helium. But I'm saving up what I have. I'll get there. After that I'll probably just retire. Fade away slowly. Nothing like Brutus - he was crazy.

AM: We would like to thank you for all those years of warmth and sunlight. I think I speak for the whole planet when I say we're really grateful. Is there anything you wish to request of the people of earth?

Sol: Yes. Batteries. This fusion stuff is not going to last forever. Please send me 200 billion batteries. Didn't you people read the instruction manual? Size "Double D". And not those cheapies you find on sale.

Also a neutrino generator. One of mine seems to be on the blink.

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