

This eBook is published by

Fictionwise Publications
www.fictionwise.com

Excellence in eBooks

Visit www.fictionwise.com to find more titles by this and other top authors in Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Mystery, and other genres.

Fictionwise
www.Fictionwise.com

Copyright ©2001 by Edward M. Lerner

First published in Artemis, December 2003

NOTICE: This work is copyrighted. It is licensed only for use by the original purchaser. Making copies of this work or distributing it to any unauthorized person by any means, including without limit email, floppy disk, file transfer, paper print out, or any other method constitutes a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines or imprisonment.

“...Eventually reducing projected annual auto emissions by perhaps as much as five percent. The senator also indicated that her bill would...”

Hugh Robinson angrily twisted the short-wave radio knob to OFF. Too little and far too late, thought the Greenshield activist. Piddling improvements in cars would not begin to compensate for toxic wastes, ozone depletion, topsoil erosion, Frankenfoods, fertilizer runoff, or—he paused to savor the lush foliage all around him—despoliation of the tropical rain forest.

That last problem, however, was one *hedid* know how to address.

* * * *

Gaea was slow to notice the eruption of humanity. Within a few tens of revolutions, a mere blink of the planetary sensorium, the primates had changed from scattered symbionts to a pandemic. In their teeming billions, no land seemed immune from them; their wastes choked the oceans and fouled the air.

Too bad, she thought: they had been off to a promising start. Perhaps a small environmental tweak would help.

In the bowels of the Earth, great currents of magma roiled. Several revolutions of effort would be needed to fully overcome inertia and viscosity, but then, as the flow of molten metal altered, the global

magnetic field would realign. The upper northern latitudes, site of the most nettlesome human infestations, would experience a major thinning of the ozone layer; far more ionizing radiation would reach the surface. Mortality, and perhaps mutation, would increase.

Committed to a course of action, Gaea experienced satisfaction. A die-off every now and then was good for a species.

* * * *

As the planets continued their stately dance, Aten pondered its slow, deep thoughts. Great masses of the solar consciousness welled up from its fluid depths, sometimes spreading sedately across the luminous surface, sometimes leaping with great joy far into the vacuum before falling back, spent.

Pale glimmers of information fell inward from the void, data often difficult to discern against the glorious background of its own nuclear fire. Over several sunspot cycles, a picture emerged. The third world outward once more showed disconcerting signs of degradation and instability.

Stellar thoughts turned dark. The second planet had gone this way, megacycles earlier. Perpetually shrouded, that world was now beyond even Aten's ability to fix. But not yet the third planet.... The sun still knew ways to influence events there.

Melancholy gave way to resolution. Flare after flare erupted, arching far into space. Volatiles boiled from the suddenly hot surface of a near-perihelion asteroid, slightly altering its eccentric orbit. Three more circuits, with a gravitational assist from the ringed sixth world, and the chosen asteroid would assume the desired trajectory.

A sunspot cycle or two with its atmosphere darkened by asteroid dust should cool down whatever was troubling the third world.

* * * *

From aeons and locations unimaginably distant, photons plunged into the maw of the galactic black hole.

Deep within the event horizon, the galactic sentience patiently assimilated the influx. From the flood of seemingly meaningless noise, #@%_^# gradually extracted the modulated quantum emissions of its peers. The fellowship of the galactic black holes was methodical but profound.

Almost three galactic rotations previously, #@%_^# had initiated an exchange with a neighbor. A burst of noise now obscured much of the long-awaited answer. The galactic sentience studied the interruption for regularities that might enable recovery of the message. The pattern, when it did emerge, was ugly.

The in-falling coruscations of light revealed the reemergence all around it of self-motivated stars and star clusters, all too many of them accompanied by planetary infections. The concept, though disgusting, was bearable—so long as the tiny creatures remained quiet. Their interruption of the cosmos-spanning dialogue, however, was beyond all endurance.

@%_^# contemplated slowly, as did all of its kind. A substantial fraction of a galactic rotation later, its ruminations completed, it acted. Expending a few millennia of mass-energy influx, it modulated a blast of quantum radiation, a galactic shout, at its event horizon. The expanding wave would trigger a chain reaction of supernova events to purify the nearest nebulae. The supernovae would, in turn, release a much amplified flood of cosmic rays, sterilizing planetary vermin throughout a much greater volume.

That should improve the neighborhood decorum.

* * * *

(...) paused in its deliberations, distracted by it knew not what. The distraction, whatever it was, defied immediate identification. It also refused to fade away.

Puzzled and annoyed, the creature scanned a progression of dimensionalities and continua, finally pinpointing the vexation as a series of annoying galactic perturbations within a low-order universe.

Localization did not make the interruptions any less bothersome. After the passage of something analogous to, if far more complex than, time, the megaverse creature decided to damp out the disturbance. Slightly and subtly realigning its corpus, (...) increased the fraction of dark matter that resided within the offending space-time continuum.

The situation addressed, (...) resumed its work. Serenity would return soon enough, as the newly augmented universe moved swiftly through the cleansing of a Big Gnab event.

* * * *

The tropical breeze gently ruffling his hair, Hugh Robinson eyed his hand-held radio transmitter. He would have only a few hours after releasing the tailored, aerosol-born Ebola virus to return safely to the airport. As for the unsuspecting local residents...

He took a moment to admire towering trees beneath an impossibly blue sky dotted with scudding clouds. Unseen birds sang magnificently—until a passing jetliner obliterated their calls and Hugh's lingering doubts. He pressed firmly the large red TRANSMIT button. *All* of this must be protected, whatever the cost.

After all, one had to keep one's eyes on The Big Picture.