

Beta Universe

“*That* was the most exciting run yet!” Rodek exclaimed to himself. The last of the stars were exploding in a visually stunning fashion, but Rodek had instead been focusing on one of the smaller stars that had gradually grown dimmer, before finally going out.

He never grew tired of watching the end of another test run. Not only was it beautiful to behold, but it also signaled the start of his favorite task: analyzing the data.

Previous test runs had produced various, and numerous, forms of life on more than one planet. Many had had billions of stars, and to some, but not Rodek, that was the only real measure of a good universe. However, the current test had been the first to create a life form that had the potential to reach true awareness.

Rodek poured over the numbers on the display area in front of him to fill in the gaps on exactly what these creatures had accomplished. Too much happened too quickly for Rodek to not need the data, even though he had spent much of his time watching the bipedal wonders go about their business.

Before they had developed on their home planet, the dominant force had been a large and plentiful group of unsightly beasts. Although some of those species showed remarkable intelligence within their environment, none looked like they would ever test the boundaries of their universe. So, after waiting patiently for some time, Rodek risked the repercussions to help things along. He was sure he had created the right mixture to produce advanced life forms, but apparently they were not going to evolve until the much larger brutes were removed. He tried spreading various contaminants that would only affect the unwanted creature’s biology, but that only reduced populations by an insignificant amount. Then, when no one else was around, he took control of a large piece of rock and changed its course to impact the planet that had captured his attention. He hadn’t been sure that it was large enough for the job, but after the entire surface became enshrouded in a dust cloud he almost panicked. The others eventually noticed him watching this planet and he was forced to misdirect their attention to some other matter after explaining that it was a typical case of debris impact.

For the next little while he had had to rely on the streaming data to see what was happening on the dust-covered planet, and he had been pleased to find that he hadn’t wiped out all life with his intrusion. The debris soon cleared and he learned that he had indeed succeeded in wiping out the mediocre creatures, as well as the unfortunate matter of destroying more than half of the other life forms on the planet.

Oops.

He had been extremely relieved when, after a short period of time, a curious species began to dominate the landscape. They had four limbs, two to walk on and two to use for anything they needed to control or manipulate, with a spherical top where their rudimentary senses of sight, smell, taste and hearing were controlled. Rodek had confirmed that they were limited to a total of five senses, however he didn’t think that five out of thirty-four was too bad.

They quickly gained control of the resources on their planet and even began to travel through their space to other nearby planets, and through it all they fought. They fought with each other for every reason imaginable, including even slight differences in

appearance. Rodek found this particularly amusing given the variety of life forms that *actually* existed and lived peacefully together.

Rodek studied the data closely and found that they called themselves “human”. They tried to explain their existence in many different ways. Rodek was flattered that one of the common explanations was that there was a single, all-powerful creature that oversaw all they did. Rodek thought it almost eerie that they were so close to the truth, until he heard them describe the being as a deceased human.

“Now *that* is humorous!” Rodek bellowed. His companion Jelto materialized to discover what Rodek had found funny, and he too soon experienced mirth when he learned of the creativity that the humans were capable of.

It was a happy occasion for Rodek since he had spent much time trying to perfect a bio-mixture that would produce a form of life such as this. However, the sizeable shortcomings were also undeniable, and it meant that much more work was still required. They reproduced at acceptable rates, but through their health advancements the life forms lived longer and longer, and this created problems with an oversized population.

Then there was the predisposition for aggression that seemed to afflict them. It was true that it led to advances in their level of technology, but usually those advancements were limited to the realm of destruction. This would have all been very discouraging if Rodek was only interested in his goal, and not the process as well.

Rodek was trying to create the one thing that the others in his group wanted to prevent: a life form that could become aware of what they were, and who might even be able to live beyond their manufactured universe. He would eventually have to present all his findings to them. But when they saw how difficult it had been to do the unthinkable, and how many test trials it had taken, he was sure they would see the value in his work. If anything, it would prove that their novelties were safe for the other groups to enjoy, knowing that the odds of the creatures discovering what they were was low enough that even the most conservative would desire the universe device.

As he studied the information on humans he became fascinated with the intricacies of their social architecture, specifically the way in which their economic system developed. Items were exchanged for currency in almost every group on the planet. Rodek thought it primitive, but it was interesting nonetheless. However, there were a few groups who had similar methods to the actual one in existence. Different people in those groups had different roles to fill and items were shared or exchanged for other things that they needed or wanted. Rodek and the small group that he was a part of created items of entertainment for the others, and he was quite content in his work.

The distinct hierarchies that developed were another difference that he found most interesting. Instead of the good of the group being tantamount, certain individuals often rose to be leaders of the different groups of humans and decided on the priorities for everyone. Then, inevitably, problems arose from their propensity to be corrupted by power.

Wealth, in the form of currency, was accumulated by some while the rest were deprived of it. In glaring contrast, the system that Rodek lived in had no wealthy or poor individuals. All of the different looking creatures that he lived among were equals within the group, because they all filled important roles that kept things operating. Comparing the different ways that life could flourish was very fascinating to Rodek.

One of the guidelines for this testing job was that he wasn't to interact with the universes while they were in progress, since this would be prevented when they were given out to the others. However, seeing as Rodek had already influenced this one, he thought it might be interesting to present himself to a human to see what would happen. He waited until he was alone with the universe and then picked the lucky human that would behold him. Using the universe view accessory, Rodek was able to zoom in and find a human who was watching the stars with a basic magnifying device. Rodek used his remote image sense to present himself in the stars where the human was looking.

He wasn't sure what happened to the human except that he appeared to become prone on the ground. The information contained in the data told Rodek that the human had passed out unconscious at the sight of a "big blue blob with tentacles," as he had put it. The human never made it back to see more of the stars after that and Rodek located him in some sort of a medical facility soon afterwards, continuing to tell other humans what he had seen. Luckily for Rodek, no one seemed to believe him. Rodek did a visual scan of himself, and concluded that what the human had said was not very accurate. Perhaps his coloring was what humans considered the color blue, but he was no blob! Indeed, dozens of sense rings encircled his form and managed to somehow hold his gelatinous mass together, thereby avoiding any sort of "blob-like" similarities. He added to his notes on humans that their vision sense was not fully developed.

It was amazing to Rodek how interesting this universe had been for him, even considering that overall it had been a disappointment in comparison with many of the others he had tested. Humans were the only advanced life in their entire universe save for some simple life forms that showed promise on a few other planets, but the human's diverse behavior had made it his favorite trial thus far.

Humans had done more than most other life in other universes had done, but what really interested Rodek were their remaining flaws. Those were what he would focus on trying to remove in his efforts to create a truly aware species.

The humans had only managed to travel to a few of the surrounding planets before time ran out on them and their sun faded. They had such amazing potential, but they always seemed to end up getting distracted from using it properly. Through their literature, dreams, and visual art, Rodek learned that many of these creatures knew the importance of learning all they could about their universe, but those good intentions were difficult to mobilize into action among so many who were only concerned with their individual well being.

Sometimes chance entered into the experiments and a lot came from nothing, and sometimes Rodek thought he had made the perfect mixture and nothing developed. He began to adjust the formula that had created the humans, hoping it would bring things another step towards creating an advanced creature. With a little good fortune, the universe containing the first life forms to discover just what they were would be created.

While he was busy with this task, Kurik the Wise materialized to discuss Rodek's latest findings. Kurik was the one being in the group that knew what Rodek was up to. When he had first realized what was going on he had decided not to intervene, but instead made it clear to Rodek that he would be watching his work closely. Rodek reluctantly presented him the summary of the last trial, as well as what changes were planned for the next test. Kurik moved in agreement but quickly stopped his wiggling to send a firm message.

“Be wary Rodek, for if a creature such as *these* were to ever escape their universe it would be a difficult infection to remove. Imagine one of the tiny little human things crawling all over you!” Kurik shuddered in discomfort before continuing, “and imagine what our group would do if we could no longer create these types of gifts for the others. We might end up creating cleaning devices to fix the problem you made, or worse!”

Kurik dispersed before Rodek could respond, leaving him to his work once again. He had considered the point Kurik had made before, and in his opinion, it wouldn't be as bad as Kurik thought. He felt that the organisms that he created were harmless, and that they should have an opportunity to last.

Rodek carefully drained a newly concocted bio-mixture into the awaiting rock, then suspended the rock in a fresh container. The next run would be very similar to the last, excepting of course for chance. In addition to a few minor chemical changes, Rodek had some ideas to help encourage the creatures to make a hastened leap to space travel. Once the life forms were advanced enough, he would start by having them witness foreign spacecraft from time to time to pique their curiosity. If that didn't work, he'd perhaps have to resort to more creative alternatives.

Rodek readied himself to once again witness one of his favorite portions of the tests, when nearly anything might follow. He sealed the container and triggered the launch. The loud explosion always prompted the others to gather with Rodek, and watch another new beginning.

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