

THE LAST SUNRISE

The sun rose for the final time. Myron wasn't the only one who knew this. Other astronomers had worked it out, but few believed their calculations at first, and later, not wanting to parade near busy intersections with placards declaring, "The end is near," nor wishing to be rejected and laughed at by peers who edited science journals, they hid their proofs in the bottom drawers of desks and hoped they were wrong. They reasoned, "What can I do to prevent it in any case?" Others added some version of "Eat, drink and be merry," and had flown off to exotic settings with an assortment of beautiful partners. Others merely retreated into depression and perhaps left families, positions and possessions. Just walked away. A few tried prayer.

But no earthly or heavenly power was going to stop the internal thermal dynamics evidenced by many readings of esoteric metrics signaling the implosion of the sun followed by its rapid and premature expansion – today.

Where to go?

Myron had faced this dilemma six years ago when he had first convinced himself of the certainty of the end. He had made his plan and every six months rechecked the data to fix the date more exactly. Today was the day. After this, no more sun.

For the last five years, finally convinced he was right, after watching the increasing weirdness of his fellow astronomers and physicists – gambling, risking and losing lives in race cars, bungee jumping and various bizarre suicides, Myron borrowed as much money as possible and garnered millions in grants from various foundations. He then had the warning data and

much else - history, philosophy, poetry, cultural highlights of civilization - engraved on thin metal plates and stored them in small containers which he had been sending on intergalactic missions, ostensibly as minor experiments to test the atmosphere of any life supporting planets. He hoped they might benefit from his dying world's experiences.

Myron watched the last of his missiles rise into an already over-bright sky. He wondered if the sun's now obvious expansion would alter the trajectory of this last mission. It was aimed at a particularly promising set of planets of a star on the edge of a small galaxy at least seven hundred light years away.

"Oh well, what's the difference at this point," he thought. "That galaxy itself might have expired already, and we don't know. What we see is seven-hundred-year-old light. I hardly expect a thank you note." He smiled as he lowered the protective goggles over his optics before turning toward the sunlight getting brighter instead of setting.

"Truly lovely. Violent oranges and violet blues beginning. A spectacular solar event . . . "

His last words were muffled as Myron turned to ash and was immediately blown away in the first burst of solar wind.

The missile raced ahead of the massive holocaust, partially protected by the shield of the crumbling planet it was escaping.

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The container with its cryptic exterior markings blurred and blackened by the heat of atmospheric re-entry and scarred by grains of asteroid dust and pebbles had struck a sea obliquely. It skimmed and bounced atop the water, raising a trailing funnel of steam. It cooled off some and slowed before rolling end over end through some dunes of fine powdered sand, momentarily giving the container an additional thin glass coating. This shattered, producing prism-like rays of color reflecting the sun and filled the air around the final crash site.

Quinn spotted the sparkling dust swirling and settling on the small cylinder resting on a dune. He ran to it followed by his dog. When he touched the cylinder, it was quite warm. He waved his arms and yelled to the adult following him. "Over here, Dad! I found something."

Through his huffing and puffing from trying to keep up, Dad gasped, "Quinn, be careful. That could be a bomb or some part that fell from one of those planes circling from O'Hare."

"Hey, Dad, do you think I can use this in my science project at school?"

Quinn's father bent to look at the blurred designs on the cylinder. After a little study, he chuckled and said, "I think we may have material here for hundreds of master thesis and doctoral dissertations, not to mention government investigations – a Rosetta Stone jammed into Noah's ark beside the Dead Sea Scrolls wrapped in the double helix DNA."

"Sounds a little complicated for a science project."

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