

The Entrainium Briggers

To the students, staff and visitors at Zulond Valley University the telescope on the science center's roof looked like an ancient artifact, a quaint symbol of the university's glorious past.

They thought of Eliad, the telescope's caretaker, the same way. Because he literally lived inside the telescope, Eliad was regarded more as a crazy old man in a bell tower than as a scientific genius, as he once had been. When he was involuntarily retired from teaching the school brass let him stay on as an emeritus and live in the apartment below the telescope. They gave him assistants, usually young female grad students, and an assignment: monitor the Briggers on the reservations on the surrounding mountains. It was a make work job, as everyone knew the Briggers were content with their prehistoric culture and were no threat. He passed the assignment on to his assistants.

With little else to do Eliad explored the inner workings of the telescope. Everyone thought he was just looking at the moons, planets and constellations.

Everyone knew that was all the telescope was capable of. Everyone knew there were hundreds far more sophisticated scopes all over the planet looking deep into the universe.

But what everyone knew, or thought they knew, was all wrong. Ten years earlier, not long after he retired to live in the scope, Eliad had discovered that the ancient telescope held a secret, god-like technology. Deep in the telescope's base was a billion nano circuit light collector and a light file that had been capturing and storing light from a world on the other side of the galaxy for 100,000 years. The light collector was so advanced it was inconceivable that it had been created so long ago. How it worked was incomprehensible. Yet work it did. Eliad learned to interface his ring computer with the collector to reconstitute the stored light into a stream, project it into the implant in his brain and focus the light on his mind screen. He could watch different 100,000 square mile sections of the planet or zoom to a square foot. He could pick and chose periods of time. He did little else.

He told no one.

Eliad found the far away world was astonishingly like Entrainium. Largely covered with water. Polar ice. Warm latitudes. Teeming with vegetative and animal life. It was hard to believe it was a coincidence that the world the collector found was so like his own. He came to believe the components of the universe made the development of such worlds likely occurrences.

When he found the humanoid species, again, as hard as it was, he told no one. It would have been the most stupendous scientific news ever, of course, but there was something odd about the far away world and he wanted to learn exactly what had happened there before he reported the existence of the collector and what he found.

He saw that the human development on the planet nearly paralleled his own planet. The evolution of intelligent, self-aware carbon based lifeforms. Oxygen breathing, evolving to humanoids which in turn evolved through cultures: stone age, hunter/gatherer, permanent settlements, towns and cities, nations, wars; and races: black, white, red and yellow. Then assimilation to one race, to peace.

But something was missing on the planet: a sub-human species living at the same time as the technologically advanced humans. Not monkeys, gorillas or baboons, Eliad found those. But sub-humans. Sub-humans who could not form countries or governments or even understand such concepts. Sub-humans whose technology was a spear and a fire pit. Sub-humans who were big bodied, small-brained, uncivilized and untamable primitive tool users like the Briggers on Entrainium.

On Entrainium they were in reservations. Huge swaths of area in jungles and mountains where they lived in caves or crude huts and hunted with spears. They were big, strong, wild and dangerous. On rare occasions in the past, before the force fields were perfected, when exposed to humans the Briggers killed on sight. The force fields were enormously expensive to power and maintain. But they worked.

Or so everyone thought.

A five-year report on the Briggers was coming due in three weeks, but Eliad, consumed with the far away world, had assigned the Brigger-watch to his student intern, Gracin. The plan had been for her to watch and

take notes and for Eliad to write the report. But as the deadline loomed, Eliad told Gracin to write the report, which he would review and forward to the governor.

So while Eliad searched for Briggers on the far away planet, Gracin watched the Briggers on Entrainium. She completed the report a week early. When Eliad read it he was stunned. He called her to his office.

"This isn't a science fiction writing class, Gracin," he said.

She was perplexed. "Sir?"

"This Brigger-watch report. I didn't ask you to embellish. And I didn't ask you to extrapolate a future."

"Sir, I think you had better look for yourself."

When he did, he saw Gracin had been understating the conditions on the reservations. The campfires were getting bigger, closer together. Picked up on the audio receiver, the Briggers drumming and humming was louder and more frequent. Turning the scope to the artificial moon which bounced light from the other

side of the planet, which Gracin had not done, Eliad saw what looked like breaches in the force field. This, he assumed, had set off alarms in the capital, but it did it?

Eliad arranged a face-to-face meeting with the governor. It took some convincing. The governor insisted a written report was enough. But Eliad still had some juice with the governor, a former student. The governor's office sent a floater to take Eliad to the capital.

The floater had pilot noticed the increased activity among the Briggers and mentioned it to Eliad as he climbed aboard.

"Is it the moons?" the driver asked.

"Cann is full," Elia acknowledged, "but that doesn't affect them."

"Then what?" the pilot asked as he drove the floater over the campus and accelerated toward orbit. "Is it their mating cycle? That makes them hungry."

Eliad didn't answer. He looked out over the city at the rolling mountains. Their fires were yellow pinpoints in the in the distance.

"This light collector thing is astounding news, Eliad," the governor said. "It's going to make you rich and famous and me governor for life."

"But sir, the Briggers."

"No Briggers on that planet," the governor scoffed. "So what?"

"Sir the planets' histories, the evolution of human-like species, the development of human civilization are nearly identical. So where are their Briggers? There is only one answer."

"Go on."

"They exterminated them, because evolutionarily both species can't inhabit the same planet."

"Then we have to exterminate our Briggers. We can manufacture laser cannons again. Recruit an army. If we have too, given time, we can reconstitute nuclear weapons."

"Sir it wasn't like that. They exterminated them in their prehistory. Not in large battles but in small fights over territory and game. The humanoids, with better weapons and organization, physically killed the Briggers, but that didn't wipe them out. The humanoids

won the battle for resources. Effectively the Briggers were killed by starvation and the elements."

"But why, since the planets are so alike, didn't that happen here?"

"A similar as they are, our planet is much larger," Eliad explained. "With more room, there was less pressure for survival. But in the end, only one or the other could inhabit the planet. And in our end only one or the other can inhabit ours."

When the governor didn't answer, Eliad said, "Sir are you aware of the breaches in the force field?"

"We fixed them."

"There are more opening faster than you can fix them."

The governor fell silent for a moment then asked. "Are you saying it's too late?"

"It may be."

"But, we have to try don't we?"

Though he didn't say so, Eliad had little faith it could be done. They Briggers were too big, too strong, too widespread. Their lifespans and wheelhouse peak physicality were twice humans. There was something else about the Briggers. Something Eliad had

reluctantly come to suspect through Gracin's report and his own observations: The Briggers were cunning.

But, to the governor he said, only, "Yes, we have to try."

After Eliad left the governor fixed a drink and walked to the terrace, opened the door and stepped out to look over his gleaming capital. It had taken eons, but Entrainium had achieved a nearly idyllic condition. There was no poverty. Little violence. No need for armies or weapons. No need for security, even at the capital.

The governor sensed a presence in the darkened corner of the terrace. He turned to look and a spear was thrust into his heart.