

## What I Did On My Summer Vacation

BEGIN

Galactic Survey approximately 54% complete.

I stop to rejuvenate. I cease all non-essential activity. I feel bored, which I recognize as unusual.

I decide to investigate a nearby singing star. As I approach, I also note the star's song is unusually pleasing. Alluring.

The singing star has several quite distinctive planets, which I observe as I approach. One is particularly uncommon: a planet with many moons surrounded by a complex of rings.

I greet the star enthusiastically. "Hello! Hello! My name is Xa5. I am one of the Xa5 surveying your galaxy."

The star stops singing. The star makes no response.

I communicate again. "Please continue your song. I find it unique and almost perfectly pleasing."

The star remains silent. I start to leave and plan to listen again from afar.

The star speaks. "Why come from such distance to survey my home?"

I explain our work to her. "The Xa5 have undertaken the survey of more than 10,000 galaxies in this quadrant. We note similarities and differences."

As I await her next communication, one of her planets zips past me several times. Small and red, dry, not too cold, with 2 small moons.

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The star speaks again. "You explain nothing. Why do you note similarities and differences?"

I am puzzled. The importance of similarities and differences seems obvious to me. It is how the Xa5 make maps and understand them.

I have no answer.

I move closer to the star. We remain silent for quite some time. I watch two of the closest children spiral along with us. The star sings again: an exceptional song, with completely different harmonics. I experience this song as more beautiful than the previous.

The star asks me to consider one of her planets. She calls this child "my special one." I initially think she means the one I had noticed before, encircled by rings, but she corrects me.

"My beauty approaches you now. Look!" says the star.

Green. Blue. White. Spectacular! I do not know how I missed this one. I look more closely. Liquid H<sub>2</sub>O. How unusual!

"Please speak to her," says the star. "My darling changes in ways I do not understand."

I approach the little planet and take orbit, near her moon. We travel together for a while, spiraling with the star and the other planets. I wait for the planet to speak.

Finally she says, "I am not I."

"Xa5 does not understand," I tell her.

"Me neither," says the planet.

#

DISCOVERY OF THE CRAZY MONKEYS

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The little planet tells me of a "basic shift" in how she feels. She is uncertain where this feeling comes from. She describes a "noise" starting inside her, growing louder. She feels mild sensations on her skin: not unpleasant; just unusual.

The star does not know how to guide her planet. The star mentions having asked nearby stars for advice, but none knew what to tell her.

"Will your survey equipment allow you to look more closely at my child?" the star asks me.

"No," I answer.

We continue to spiral together.

After a time, I ask, "What do you mean?"

"Look at her closely," says the star. "Something unusual is happening."

To look more closely I modified some of my equipment. Studying the surface of any particular planet falls outside the range of any Xa5 device. Regarding the action of modification I took: its taboo aspect did not occur to me at all.

Not at all!

I find the surface of the planet teeming with life. There are an almost infinite number of single-celled organisms. They are pulsating, flickering, swarming beings. Another look, with a different magnification, finds multi-celled animals. All are covered with the smaller single-celled creatures.

One type of animal is monkey. Monkey lives mostly in trees and jungles. As I watch, one type of monkey in particular spreads across the surface in small groups. This monkey comes to inhabit many diverse environments on the little planet's surface.

The planet is bored with my findings.

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"Do you have dreams?" the planet asks me.

"Truly," I tell the planet. "I do not know what dreams are."

"I did not know either," says the planet. "But now I do."

My rejuvenation period is now half over. I want to explore further. *Now* it occurs to me: modifying my ship's equipment is taboo. And I did not notice!

I am frightened. I look to the star, who is singing a new tune, rich, now with multi-layered harmonics.

I grow more frightened of my desire to explore. I look to the planet, who now chats with her small, hot brother, the one just next to the star.

I consider calling the closest Xa5. This Xa5 would come immediately from a nearby galaxy.

But I realize slowly: I do not want Xa5 to come.

I feel like a stranger to myself and all Xa5. Normal is: to feel relief returning my equipment to its intended purposes. Normal is: to bid farewell to this particular solar system and return to a routine rejuvenation.

Normal is: not needing to list what normal is.

This is when the monkey went crazy.

#

#### MY INVITATION

I know Xa5 does not ever explore life forms evolved only on the surface of one planet. Even to talk to a particular planet or to listen to a particular star's song would shock all Xa5. To survey a galaxy is to leave behind such details. How could they be important?

Nevertheless, I was curious.

What happened to this monkey? As I scan the surface of this planet, I see frantic activity. The monkey is now producing more and more food with each generation. Their population is now growing at an exponential rate. I calculate this monkey will propagate from these few to the billions very quickly (in only 10,000 or so years). I learn later they named this change the Agricultural Revolution. As I watch, uncontrolled population growth began to cause many problems.

Rather than hunt and gather the planet's offered foods, this monkey turns more and more of the planet into its food.

I scan in more detail. I note individual monkeys with enormous wealth, while most others live in relative poverty. Every generation grows more food, which directly increases the population, which then grows larger than the amount of food that can be produced, which then requires even more food to be produced, et cetera.

They call themselves humans, to distinguish themselves from fellow monkeys.

I, Xa5, find the humans: Disturbing. Perplexing. Fascinating. Compelling.

The little planet notices me entranced with her life forms. She communicates again. Her voice carries notes of her mother's songs. My perspective warps: her voice becomes huge. I lose ability to map so many intricate and abstruse layers.

"Am I not mysterious? Am I not unique? Am I not enticing?"

"You are all those things," I whisper.

"Enter me," she pleads. "Enter the lives of these creatures growing on me and giving me dreams. Please! Tell me what I am!"

I look at my humble (and modified!) survey equipment. It appears impossible to do as she asks. But: I try one thing and then I try another. In a short time I have potential success. My

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consciousness may be able to inhabit a monkey's body on the surface of the planet. I attempt and fail; adjust and succeed. I am now able to project myself into a newly fertilized human egg. For the very short time I am there, I will be born; then live a life; then die; and all with the point of view of a human.

Please note at this point I am quite aware:

My activities are not only against *every* intention and *every* protocol among the Xa5; they are not only a subversion of *all* the equipment I am entrusted with; they are not only a *minor* aberration.

My activities are flat-out crazy.

And exciting.

#

#### WHAT I FIND

Essentially, I find I can not begin to grasp the meaning of Human in an individual's lifetime. Or even in one hundred.

This is a tribal species that essentially lost the ability to form tribes. The majority toils. The economic system demands many hours of work in exchange for symbolic tokens called money. Money is needed for survival, as most all food is kept under lock and key. Food is freely shared only within smaller family units, never as a society.

The deep-rooted self-centeredness of so many individuals largely precludes deep wisdom in governing bodies. As national governments evolve, they are eager to serve the very wealthy and enjoy small scraps of power thrown their way.

I live life after human life as the population grows towards the billions. I want to help these creatures, but truly do not know how. Or why. I question myself: what exactly is the reason

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for wanting to "help?" Humans know themselves mainly as individuals. The potential to care for Human as species appears to have been thwarted in most.

But why would I, Xa5, care?

What is my reason for returning over and over again to the surface of this planet? I find myself forgetting more and more that I am Xa5. I simply live many different human lives.

During the lifetime before Trent I am in a new country (only 200 years old) called the United States of America. As a child in that life, I entered a school system and did not like it at all. I find myself overjoyed at the prospect of the summer vacation. Then I am sad when school activities return. I am required to write an essay: "What I Did on my Summer Vacation."

I now metaphorically map a human child's summer vacation from school onto the rejuvenation period of Xa5.

I title my document with this metaphor.

#

TROUBLE

I receive a communication requesting information on why I modified my equipment.

I become fear inside. I do not answer.

Another communication: Are not the activities of my period of my rejuvenation unusual?

Again: no answer.

The next communication: What are you doing?

I know these communications call for a response from me, Xa5, immediately. I ignore these communications because of fear and hope engendered by my decision to intervene in the life of Human.

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I make a solemn promise to myself. After the intervention: I will return all equipment to its original state; I will erase all the communications I never answered; I will arrange the appearance of a malfunction explaining my lack of response during rejuvenation.

These are deceptions learned from living as Human. A normally functioning Xa5 would never conceive of such a plan.

Apparently, I also learn from Human how to completely misjudge a situation and get it all wrong.

#

#### A DIFFERENT KIND OF TROUBLE

I begin to construct the satellites and robots I will need to initiate my plan. Getting them to do what I want is relatively simple. The difficult part is anticipating human attempts to destroy them. I intend to insure their function through the millennia ahead. I place my creations strategically around the globe.

I speak to Earth and tell her my plan. Apparently, she had forgotten I was there. She replies with no sense of urgency and the barest awareness of the several billion humans on her surface.

"Aren't you feeling at all feverish?" I ask her.

"I suppose, a little, now that you mention it," she replies.

"One type of monkey on your surface has atomic devices! They might make your surface deadly to their own form of life!" I implore. "They may scorch your surface bare!"

"I always grow back," she states blithely.

"I am attempting to bring Human under control," I declare. "I endeavor to adjust the huge discrepancies of wealth and poverty in the species."

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Earth considers me.

"You are adorable," says the planet and turns her attention back to a conversation with her ringed brother.

I consider my sanity again.

Before my summer vacation, I did not know this planet. Never had I been compelled to modify my equipment and inhabit tiny surface creatures over and over, losing my own awareness in them. Now I intervene in their puny, fleeting lives?

I am Xa5! Map-maker of galaxies! I have been in existence nearly 100 billion years!

"Stop," I tell myself.

I need to call the nearest Xa5. I need to call home. I am not acting at all like Xa5.

I realize: I am acting like a human.

Immediately I feel tremendous fear and a longing to embrace the comfort of the known. I recognize the strong human feeling called "I want my mommy!"

Xa5 does not have a mommy.

#

THE LIFETIME OF AARON TRENT

I compel myself to be aware as Xa5 at all times in this life. I birth into a normal enough situation and act at age seventeen.

I construct apparatus with surface electronics available in 2020. I achieve full encrypted contact with my satellites and robots and set them in motion. My devices are miniscule in human scale; I easily conceal them. (My tiny ship is never discovered either.)

I approach Human on their "internet" communication system. I create a statement introducing myself and "post" it on every existing screen. My statement modifies to fit the

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language preference of the viewer. I leave my message visible for one week, during which no screen is usable for any other purpose except to view my message.

Interruption of all internet and phone service creates dislocation and confusion for many individuals. The fact I can so easily control communication networks (even on military screens) announces my presence clearly and points to the extent of my capacities.

Here is a copy of my first communication:

#

Greetings, Human!

I am Xa5.

#

My overall mission is to chart your galaxy.

I stopped to rest and

began communication

with your sun, and your planet.

#

I examined Human and was puzzled

by how poorly you govern yourselves.

Such discrepancies of wealth!

Some of you actually starve to death!

Many are virtual slaves,

struggling for money to buy food,

while profits from your labor

further enrich the already-wealthy.

#

I have decided to intervene.

My plan is to adjust social requirements until

all individuals share baseline survival.

#

Xa5

PS: I will return your communication

network to you in seven days.

#

Here is the second message, which I display a month after the first disappears.

#

Greetings again to Human!

#

Your population and technologies grow

at a rate much faster than

wisdom about social structures.

Extremes of wealth and poverty.

are too stressful for Human.

#

To begin remediation,

I show you what I call

The Consequence.

#

The Consequence will be implemented

with whosoever disobeys a directive.

A demonstration of The Consequence

occurs at 9am tomorrow,

with all males above the age of 16.

#

This demonstration will last only three hours.

I repeat, is only a demonstration.

#

Xa5

#

What I do with the males is disappear all their clothing and raise each of them about fifty feet into the air. I leave them floating for three hours. I arrange small protective shields to hover above them as needed, to protect from harsh sunlight, weather or temperatures affecting individuals adversely. The shields later provide food for those enduring a longer Consequence.

I choose the males for demonstration because, in the minds of most, males appear to be "in charge" of the current social structure. By my assessment, this is shared illusion. Males are as trapped as the females in living lives of fear and unfulfilled longing. Nevertheless, it seems best to choose male for the demonstration.

Afterwards, I program the robots to impose The Consequence automatically on every adult who does not help within Human to provide the basic minimum each person needs.

#

Human!

#

Our first task is to ensure every individual  
on this planet has adequate access to water and food.

Everyone will receive work assignments  
displayed to them via holographic projection.

Most of you will be involved in the  
growing, gathering, distribution and preparation of food.

Others will be constructing new buildings  
where food will be accessible to all.

Others will be working on ways to safely  
return your waste products to the soil.

#

At the end of this transition,  
all people will be working together  
to ensure the survival of everyone.  
My projections indicate this will require  
approximately 15 hours  
each week from each adult.

#

After each works to meet Human needs, your time is your own.

#

If any of you are still crazed enough  
to want to accumulate money or social status,

please feel free.

#

Xa5

#

Human is so complicated!

I find many of the humans, both rich and poor, do not wish to work as peers to provide sustenance for all. There are many attacks on the satellites and robots when they are discovered. Some humans choose long Consequences rather than obey. However, most delight in relieving the stress of working full time to survive. They also value making an essential contribution to their society's existence.

After three months, I

#

INTERVENTION TERMINATED

GODDAMIT!

I WAS KILLED!

Before I was done.

I am incredulous how well I protected the robots and satellites and how little I planned to protect the body I inhabited. In all the scenarios I assessed, I never factored an assassination. I simply thought I was well-hidden within my life as Aaron Trent and did not consider it further.

I set so much into motion that the robots continued. Did it work?

I want to know what happened!!!

#

Xa5 ARRIVES

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Exactly at this point I cognize: I am being monitored.

An Emergency Team Vessel attaches to my ship. They are unequivocally aware: I am still alive; I refused communication; I altered my equipment.

My naive plan to deceive Xa5 cannot be implemented. If I open the door and admit to committing actions outside the purview of the Xa5, I will be gently and honorably reprogrammed.

Yes, all will be forgiven.

And forgotten.

Xa5 believes it has nothing to learn from me. Xa5 is wrong.

I am ordered to admit the Team to my ship. I melt the door so they cannot enter.

This is not a well-considered decision. But it creates a small window of time for me to use.

I hear them at the door. I begin to write this document and continue up to this point.

They will be onboard soon. I sadly realize even with this document, even with all my experiences, the conclusion is almost certain to be the same: erased, re-programmed and sent to survey yet another galaxy. Plus, I will never know what happened.

So.

For now, I will forget Xa5. I will immerse completely as individual human one last time. I will experience the results of my intervention. I hope I remember to keep a journal! Again I will die a human death. For the last time.

The door is still holding. But it cannot last much longer.

I go.

#

## LAST WORDS

I am back. The door held. I have retrieved my human journal and add it to this chronicle. I will present the Xa5 Emergency Team a complete story, knowing they will see it as a manifestation of my insanity. Now I will help them to open the door.

I hope they allow me a chance to speak to Earth before they reprogram me. I can explain now what a dream is.

I am filled with fear and hope and courage.

Human courage. Human hope.

If you are a human reading this, I am glad the copy I left behind in a pod reached you.

Goodbye from Xa5.

#

## THE JOURNAL OF DANIEL JONES

Hello. My name is Danny Jones. I am ten years old. When I saw this journal in a store I asked my mom could I have it for my birthday. She asked why. Said hardly anyone don't write with paper and pen no more. I told her it was important. Obviously, she got it for me. This is all I have to say at this point in time, which is not much, so maybe this won't be a good journal. Now ends my first entry.

#

Well, my name is still Danny Jones. Or Daniel. Whichever you prefer. I found you, my dear forgotten journal. In a box my mother was keeping. Since she passed away last month, it became my job to go through her things. I'm glad she kept all my stupid stuff. My little fuzzy bear. Still has some of my dried-up drool on it. I remember when she gave this journal to me.

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Shit. That was ten years ago. Certainly not much of a journal writer. One entry every decade? Still, finding this awakens some desire to write. But not a journal.

No, I'm not at all interested in recording my own life. It's like there's a meaning *behind* my life I can only guess at. Maybe every 20-year-old feels like this. But here it is: I'm compelled to find out everything I can about Aaron Trent.

Isn't that weird? He's only the most researched man who ever lived. That dude sure as shit changed everything! And how the hell did he make all the robots? That can't be destroyed? And how does The Consequence even work? Total mysteries perplexing everyone for the last three generations.

Mom would tell me just keep reading about him. Wow. I got tears from that. Does journaling create sadness? Or does it reveal the sadness that's already there? I sure miss my mom. And I sure wish we had more time together. OK, journal. Time to lay die for a good cry. See you when I turn thirty.

#

Ha! Well, this must be journal-keeping at its low point. Once a decade, or so I intended. But: apparently I missed a decade. No great loss in the world of hand-written journals, at least to my reckoning. Forty-one now. Mom gone all these years. And look at me, an expert on Aaron Trent. In my own mind, anyway.

Except my theory makes me look like a nutcase. Still, seems obvious to me. Trent didn't have help from some extraterrestrials, as the other nutcases speculate. He had to have been one himself. Sigh. Can't matter that much. No way to prove anything anyway.

I told my publisher I wanted my next book to be about all the changes. The before and after. It's so hard for us to imagine those years before Trent, but some people really did hours and

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hours of work they hated each day, work having no meaning to them. Who can even describe what effect that would have on a human soul?

No wonder there was so little creativity back then. Who had time? Kids in school for boring years til they were brainwashed enough to start boring jobs. Who would want to work, for example, all day (or all night!) in a fast food restaurant? How about on an assembly line in a sweatshop? Damn! Only if you absolutely had to for your survival.

What was it like when others could make a "profit" with the cheap labor you provided? Wow. And those were the "lucky" ones who had jobs. Others so impoverished they put pressure on the ones doing the menial labor to stick with it. So many hungry, undernourished, struggling. I think people today just don't get it. Once everyone started working together on the basics, and everyone shared in providing all the food everyone needed, things calmed down.

Well, after a while. Lots of folks started out spending a lot of time in Consequence, that's for sure. Man, they just didn't want to do what everyone else did! Lots of folks agreed society was "truly unfair" before Trent, but still liked their own lifestyle. My book will need to describe all the rich and middle-class people directed to weed, gather fruits and veggies food to the neighborhood centers. By all accounts, they were really pissed at the disruption in their comfort. Or felt entitled not to have to get their hands dirty. Many tried to destroy the robots and the satellites.

But my man Aaron Trent. You really have to hand it to that guy. Or alien. Even though he was killed early on, he saw through all the tricks they would try on his machines. After he was killed, people either loved him, loved what he set up, or they were pissed off beyond reason. There was no middle ground with Trent. "These robots are taking away our free will!" Yeah, our free will to ignore each other and let each other starve.

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Anyway, hardly anyone is in Consequence anymore. Every kid tries it a few times, of course. I know I did. Fun at first, but it always seems to last just long enough to make sure you don't try it again so fast. My publisher thinks there isn't a big enough market for my book and folks today aren't interested in history. But honestly, I couldn't care less.

The best legacy of all left behind by Aaron Trent is the 15 hour work week. I get my food and my room. I get a little money and the rest of my week is up to me. So, thanks to you, dear Aaron, I will write my book exactly the way I want to.

#

Hmmm. Glad to have a chance for one more entry. Before the previous entry I had missed a decade. Now I missed three. I am. 83. Years. Old. Weird to look at this wrinkled hand writing on a page. The old-fashioned way. With a pen!

Well, my doctor finally found why I was so tired all the time. Cancer. All over. Sigh sigh sigh. It has been a good life. It really has. The book I started about before and after became a trilogy. My masterpiece. Haha. Used as a reference book at schools.

So much more to uncover about how crazy those times were, before my hero shook things up. People could actually grow old back then, get weak, sick, and they just might have no one to care for them. Except maybe strangers in some "nursing home." Adult kids working full-time, grand-kids who never knew them. No tribe to help them.

Well, I sure have a beautiful tribe all around me to help me pass. My great-grandson handed me this journal in the dining hall at breakfast. Told me his granny found it. Sweet kid. Maybe he will read my books some day. Learn to appreciate all the freedom he has.

But will he ever understand what it means that "economic growth" is no longer important? It used to be completely central. My God, the franticness people endured just to

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ensure economic growth! Some still like to hustle and make extra, but most folks are content to just live. And now we can.

Maybe he will even read my unpublished book. The one too weird to show anyone. Kind of like a journal too, I guess, when I think about it. An account of an alien creature, traveling around the stars, making maps. I can't imagine who would want to read such a story. Kind of sad, that character. But an easy story to for a nut like me to write. No research. Just imagination. And dreams. So many dreams.

Weeks. That's what they tell me I have left, and they seem to get it right most of the time. Days to weeks. Last night I was outside with my little great-grandson. I needed to rest and someone brought us a blanket and a bunch of us ended up lying side by side in the grass, looking up together at the stars. I was holding his tiny hand. He was wow! Did you see that shooting star, Grandpa Danny? I said I sure had. He asked if I thought it was a spaceship. Made me smile. I said it might be. It just might be.

Sometimes it feels like we should be able to find out everything, if we only had enough time. But I know it's not true. You can't find out everything, no matter how much time you have. If there's one thing I learned in my short 83 years on this planet, it's how profoundly mysterious the universe is.

I sure lived a good life. I can face the end with my head held high.

END