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The Void Travellers

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(In the year unknown [which possibly could be 2023]*, unknown aliens from the planet unknown arrived on another unknown plan*et [which possibly could be Earth]. *They were both shocked and fascinated by what they found there, for they would never think of discovering another breed of intelligent species who, however, were nothing like them and had a physical form!)*

—Tra-ta-ta-ta. Poo-pey-ty-poo-pey-ty,—said the first alien.

—Bo-ra-bo-ra. Bloo-pey-ty-stoop,—said the second alien.

(The aliens were... shall we say... on another level of intelligence. It was orthogonal to earthlings and rather extradimensional, completely unknown, incomprehensible, unfathomable, cryptic, esoteric, mysterious, intriguing, and fucking funny, too. They weren't even like aliens from "Slaughterhouse-5" or aliens from "Arrival", no, those were the aliens made up by humans in their fictional stories. Our aliens here were nothing alike, they were real aliens.)

—Throo-too-throo-too ya-pe-ty-yap,—said the second alien.

—Doo-doo-doo-doo?—the first alien inquired.

—Doo-doo.

(They were the void travellers. And ugh, ah, uh, oooooh, ugh—)

[Unfortunately, the first narrator is having some sort of seizures and has to step out to the loo. We're very, very sorry for the inconvenience. Let's switch the scene for a while and listen to the second narrator.]

Pub. Evening. Pints cling, ales splash, the telly roars, patrons try to outspeak each other.

—Mind is the ultimate paradox because when you start looking for it you can't find it. Do you know why?—says Vitya, a stocky and bearded chap who only drinks Russian imperial stouts that are as dark and strong as his soul.

—It's, er... hidden?—answers Illarion Illarionovich, or simply Larik, a gentleman of exquisite structure of body and not less exquisite structure of mind, which do not help much when he's drunk.

—No, Larik. It's not hidden.

—Is it visible then?

—It's not visible either.

—Well, then it's hidden, isn't it?

Vitya's growing annoyed.

—It is both, Larik, okay?

—How can it be both, Vitya?

Vitya's growing rather angry.

—That's what paradox means!

—Uh-huh, I see, I see. Interesting. Pretty much intriguing, I'd even say.

—Tell me something, Larik. Can you see your own face?

—You mean can I?

—Yes. Can you?

—Well, I can, if you give me a mirror.

—Can you see it without a mirror?

—In water probably. If it's clean and it's sunny. Or in ale. Look.

Illarion Illarionovich looks inside his foamless pint of extra dry 8% apple cider and smiles to a blurry copy of himself, a copy that has nothing exquisite about it, and has nothing to say to him either.

—Could you see it with no reflection, though?

Cornered by such a reasonable point, in his mind, Illarion Illarionovich steps back and, overtaken by desperate silence, ponders, while his thoughts weave themselves into a tangle.

—On a photo, perhaps, I could, yes.

Vitya's easy to annoy, especially when he's drunk and talking to someone drunk. To Vitya, he is, and everyone is, always drunk, metaphorically.

—Well, right now, not having any of those things. Can you see your own face?

—I can see my nose a little bit. And cheeks perhaps.

—For fuck's sake...

—Oh by the way, what do you think, it's just some inscrutable conundrum for me: do you think it's "for fuck sake" or "for fuck's sake"?

—It's for your sake, Larik.

Bringing a little bit of zen in his thinking, Vitya takes a deep breath (but he just tries to choke a burp), leans towards Illarion Illarionovich, and continues:

—Right now. At this moment. Can you see your own bloody eyes?

The tangle of Illarion Illarionovich's thoughts starts producing weird thinking sounds, akin to scraping or hissing underwater, somewhere very deep, probably like in the Mariana Trench, and then—

[For anyone who was worried, the first narrator is fine! The seisures

have ceased!]

(When the aliens first arrived on Earth from the void, all they could see is a blue planet, because they jumped right from the void in a slightly wrong position in space and not on the Earth directly, which was a shame and they had to travel back to the void, recalculate coordinates there based on their new knowledge, then travel to Earth directly. The reason they could do such a thing, even though not from the first attempt, is the void was (and is, really) everywhere between particles. Particles are, in fact, just the void packaged into funny wrappers, pretty much like candies or biscuits, which, quite amusingly so, makes them simultaneously visible and invisible! Bizarre, innit? So when the aliens discovered they can see the void, they gathered their thoughts and understood that they can see their thoughts too and, frankly, everyone else's thoughts, because thoughts are just electrical impulses [quite reductionist and materialist view, by the way]*, which were already quite well known to the aliens, for they were representatives of the most advanced civilization in the universe, and as soon they understood they could see thoughts and pretty much everything, including, of course, but not limited to, the void, they started developing a device they would wear on their gooey void bodies, the device that would allow them to void-travel!)*

—No, Vitya, I reckon I can't see them, unless...

—Unless fucking what?

—I was just teasing you. No, Vitya. I can't see them. You're right.

—Good then, I'm happy for you, Larik. It's just lovely, innit?

—It is actually. Right.

—Now, imagine this situation.

—Uh-huh.

—Your mind is an eye.

—Uh-huh.

—And your mind-eye can see things like a normal eye can.

—Uh-huh, reasonable so far.

—So, if your mind is an eye, can it see itself, the mind?

Rolling his eyes, Illarion Illarionovich indulges into heavy thinking, making various thinking sounds, until a thought is produced.

—I suppose, considering all we discussed, my answer would be no. My mind wouldn't see itself.

—Exactly. Let's have another pint for this groundbreaking discovery.

—But wait, what does it see then?

—Anything and everything else but not itself.

The music in the pub changes to some psychedelic ambience. Quite

eerie and hypnotic.

(The void-travel device, called in the void travellers' language Boo-boo-goo-ta-ra-ta-ta-too-4-50-1732-2-poopy-poo, wasn't invented instantly because instancy implies at least some juxtaposition with time and speed of its flow. It could take a few nanoseconds or a few petayears, if we speak in human terms, but for gooey void creatures, it happened all at the same time, for inside the void, there's no time, hence to travel to the human universe, to the universe where time does exist, at least to some weird extent, defying the principles of linearity of time and the principle of forwardness, it has to be considered when calculating the precisest coordinates. They were rather befuddled and their first attempts (though how can you have concepts of first and second or third or fourth or any ordinal numerals in chronology (which is by the way a science that studies how events actually occur, occurred, will occur, in human perception and not the actual physical time that's to humans a line divided into smaller segments) if you don't even have such a concept at all, altogether, unscrupulously? [that's a big question, I'd say, it's too much of a question, a fabulous brainfuck of sorts]*) Not sure already where this sentence is going... Ah, yes! Okay, khm, khm. They were rather befuddled and their first attempts were a kerfuffle. I think if you boil a kettle for more than you should, meaning that when the water is boiling already and you keep boiling it, it'll evaporate! Marvellous! The minerals, such as calcium, would start to separate (pretty much a chemical divorce with dire consequences) and create deposits on the walls of the kettle, and the walls, now covered in what is called "lime". By the way, lime is good in cocktails,*

and it is, apart from the lemon, of course, probably the only juice worth adding to your cocktail. How bizarre, O how bizarre. How—)

[Amidst a universal silence, a melancholic piano melody starts playing. Familiar voices whisper.]

—Blip-blop-blib, zib-zab-zob! Toodle-oo, tra-la-la?

—Gleep-gloop-glop, gloop-glop-gleep! Whirr-whizz-whoop, zizzle-zazzle?

—Zab-zib-zob! Fizzle-fazzle-fuzzle, twiddle-twaddle-tweedle?

—Ah, gleep-glop-gloop, zib-zab-zob. Tickle-tackle-tockle, bingle-bangle-bungle!

—Tootle-teetle-tattle, gloop-glop-gleep. Bibble-bobble-bibble, zobble-zibble-zabble?

—Glop-gleep-gloop, zib-zab-zob! Jingle-jangle-juggle, wibble-wobble-wooble.

—Zib-zab-zob, gleep-glop-gloop! Dibble-dabble-doodle, flibble-flabble-floodle.

—Gloop-gleep-glop, zibble-zobble-zabble. Twizzle-twazzle-tweezle, dribble-drabble-dreezle.

—Oh, zib-zab-zob! Tingle-tangle-tungle, bizzle-bazzle-buzzle.

—Gleep-glop-gloop! Mingle-mangle-mungle, wizzle-wazzle-wuzzle.

—Zib-zab-zob, gloop-glop-gleep! Pibble-pabble-poodle, rizzle-razzle-raddle.

—Ah, gloop-gleep-glop! Nibble-nabble-noodle, kizzle-kazzle-koodle.

—Zib-zab-zob! Riffle-raffle-roodle, zibble-zabble-zoodle.

—Gleep-glop-gloop, zib-zab-zob. Tickle-tackle-toodle, fizzle-fazzle-foodle.

[Someone enters the room and breaks the piano. Oh no, how terrible and unwise of them. We should call the police.]

(Khm-khm. On the planet unknown, the void gooies discovered something humans call "consciousness", or "conscience". They weren't quite sure how to pronounce that word and spell it and what it meant. Perhaps, they made a mistake, the same mistake many fictional aliens do, and "landed" in the English speaking country. In the void, there's no such thing as "uncertainty" or "obscurity" or "randomness" or "incomprehensibility", for the void is a uniform mass of nothing. The void, in a way, is utterly voidful. It can't even be called uniform and it can't even be called mass. [Actually, hang on, I'm not sure how this worldbuilding works anymore.] *What?* [If the void is voidful, how can anything, including void creatures, the gooey aliens, even originate it in?] *They are, erm, well, let me think... That's actually a dumb question. They are, of course, God's creations.* [How?] *He, or she, or it, is, erm, quite*

omnipotent, a creature possessing an ultimate power being able to handle anything, including the void, like plasticine.)

—But Vitya, I don't understand.

—What?

—Well, a lot of things, but now I'm particularly puzzled with, erm, perception capabilities of the mind, in particular, what you said, basically, the mind cannot see itself, which I kind of agree with, but if it can see anything and everything else, can it see other minds?

—Of course.

—Can your mind see my mind?

—Totally.

—And can my mind see your mind?

—Abso-fuckin-lutely, Larik.

—Hm. Uh-huh!

A muffled squawk resonates through the pub so loudly that the other customers turn round to look at Illarion Illarionovich — that's his "eureka!" sound. Bartender frowns and accidentally spills foam on the floor.

—So, if, by your logic, my mind can see your mind and your mind can

see my mind.

—Correct.

—Then can't they like, erm, have an intelligent discussion and tell each other about each other, or maybe paint each other or whatever form of depiction of objects they could use, so they could finally see themselves?

—I don't think so.

—Uh-huh... ... ... I wonder why it can't be the case.

—Your name should be Hilarion Hilarionovich. I thought you're smart, Larik, but it seems I was wrog. It's simple. Your mind can't see itself therefore it can't describe itself to the fullest therefore in a dialogue with another mind your mind won't be able to convey its essence to my mind.

—And your mind?

—The same thing. They would only see a wee bit, merely an opening act in a circus when boring clowns come out. Imagine it was just fucking clowns, Larik.

—Oh that wouldn't be fun, would it?

—It wouldn't, Larik.

—Uh-huh. Hmm... That's what I thought. Uh-huh, okay. Well, well, well.

Larik's "well" echoes into the distance.

(The introduction of the concept of zero to humanity was a funny encounter. Once the void travellers arrived on Earth and discovered—

Oh, maybe it wasn't 2023 after all, but who cares, for the void travellers it didn't (doesn't, will not) matter, for the void is all encompassing and omnitimely. The void travellers thought that if they showed humans the void, they would be able to build a bridge between two civilisations and share delusional knowledge, photos and artworks of naked individuals, amusing and nonsensical pictures, and other integral components of modern communication. There, in the universe, between the matter and the void, like in a happily married couple, would reign love, a utopia. High aspirations, you'd say. You wouldn't be wrong. But in reality, it was rather like giving a monkey a typewriter and expecting it to yield Shakespeare in an hour. [Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.] *Zero, a round hole of a number, numerical equivalent of a shrug, a placeholder where something could be but chose not to, in the gaping middle containing the void in itself, should've taught people what was the void so they could look into it and the void would look back, there would have occurred a cosmic bond, and perhaps some spicy sexy thing between the matter and void, between the mind and the mental vacuum, but instead humans started using zero to count things that weren't there.)*

—Okay-okay, so, Vitya, if the mind can see anything but the mind, does that anything include the void?

—The void?

—Yes, the void, you know, that thing that is nothing and doesn't exist.

—Fuck no, obviously. How would that be possible?

—I just wonder, if you can think of it, try to imagine it at least as a hole, is it really the void?

Read next part

When Nietzsche met Turgenev

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