

School of Consciousness

The Fourth Planet

Chris Thomson

This was the fourth planet she had surveyed on this mission, and the first one orbiting this particular star. Her mission was as always: to find out whether there was any intelligence worth contacting or reporting. Before she approached this shimmering blue and white world, she positioned her craft so that the planet and its one moon appeared to be the same size. That was fun.

As she neared normal detection range, she switched her vehicle to silent/invisible mode. Then she came closer, and she watched and she listened.

The first signs were encouraging. Gravity, radiation, temperatures, and the mix of chemicals were remarkably similar to those of her home planet. And, seen at a distance of 100,000 kilometres, this was a very beautiful place. Experience told her that beauty and intelligence are often to be found together.

As she came even closer, she began to feel a little uncomfortable. She could not quite put her finger on it, but it felt like sadness. This was not necessarily a negative factor. She had surveyed planets where residual sadness still lingered as their inhabitants moved towards better times. But, in this case, the feeling intensified the closer she came. She decided it was time to look for signs of the Standard Indicators of Intelligence, a set of indicators used among many worlds in this part of the Galaxy. The Indicators fell into three broad categories: Planet Enrichment, Species Enrichment, and Individual Enrichment. These were ways of ascertaining the extent to which the inhabitants of the planet under survey enhanced or diminished themselves and everything they touched.

Although each species on each planet had its own unique ways of being and doing, she and her fellow surveyors knew from experience that there were some quick, reliable ways of spotting intelligence. She knew that there was intelligence worth contacting or reporting if most or all of the following questions could be answered in the affirmative:

Is there a general aura of peace, contentment and love?

Are there many signs of created and natural beauty?

Does the use of language reflect peace and wisdom?

Does the species under review live ecologically?

Are dishonesty and violence conspicuous by their absence?

Is boredom conspicuous by its absence?

Is the species serious, but not earnest?

Does it play a lot?

Does it give high value to inner development?

She was now close enough to be able to answer these questions. What she found surprised and confused her at the same time. Among a few of what appeared to be dominant species, the answers were mostly in the affirmative. But among the majority of that species, they were mostly in the negative. She had never come across this situation before, where two so obviously different forms of life appeared to be co-existing as if they were the same species. Enlightened wisdom on a modest scale co-existed with stupidity and ignorance on an immense scale. She noted that there were two powerful, opposing tendencies at work within the species – the tendency to “wise up” to the highest potential of the species and the tendency to “dumb down” to the lowest common denominator. She also noted that both forms of life, the wise and the stupid, called themselves by the same name – “human beings”.

It was by no means easy to tell which tendency was prevalent. On the one hand, there were encouraging signs that many were waking up to the damage and destruction their own behaviour was causing. On the other hand, there were signs that the root causes of this behaviour were as entrenched as ever, and that greed and the desire for instant gratification would not be given up easily. She noted that the root causes of the greed and desire included fear, insecurity and uncertainty and that these, in turn, were rooted in something even deeper.

However, it was the little things that really caught her attention. She was concerned, for example, that their words were often used to mean the opposite of what they originally meant– “defence” and “progress” and “success” were typical examples – and that the words “sound” and “noise” were used interchangeably, as if the difference between them did not matter. She was particularly concerned that nearly anything could count as “art”, even things lacking in quality and meaning.

What most concerned her was the sheer scale of the damage caused by these “human beings”. In the past 100 years alone, they had killed or injured over 400 million of their own kind and had taken this planet close to breaking point. In all her experience of surveying this part of the Galaxy, she had never encountered such violence and destruction. She was on the point of deciding to submit a very brief report to the Galactic Council, in which she would simply say: “Dangerous – a possible threat.” And yet...

...there was something holding her back. Why, she wondered, were so few of this species moving consciously towards their highest potential and so many not? Was it, perhaps, because the species as a whole had simply no idea what its highest potential was? And, if this were the case, what were the factors that kept it from knowing or acknowledging this? She sensed that there were important clues in its main knowledge systems, which could loosely be called “science” and “religion”. She could not but notice that, although these systems gave access to some knowledge and understanding, they blocked out most of the knowledge and

understanding potentially available to the species. Each system was a relative narrow, limited “lens” through which the species viewed and understood itself and the world. If the species only knew it, it had potential access to many other “lenses”. As she thought this thought, she realised that the number of “lenses” (i.e. different forms of perception and consciousness) used by any species was yet another possible indicator of intelligence. She would mention this to the Council.

All in all, she was not in the least surprised that the great majority of “human beings” did not know who they were, or where they were going, or how to get there. A few of them knew, but perhaps too few to make a difference. She therefore wrote a report that ended with the following: “*Very confused – needs help.*” And she found herself adding a postscript: “*There are some high order intelligences worth contacting on this planet. Most of them live in the oceans.*”

As she gathered speed and switched her craft back to audible/visible mode, she could not resist making a playful parabola over the moon.

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