

A MURDER MYSTERY

There will be time to murder and create. T.S. Eliot

*O world, no world, but mass of public wrongs,
Confused and filled with murder and misdeeds.
Thomas Kyd*

Preamble:

My name is Jazol. I belong to a non-carbon race of beings. I state this because I have recently learned that somewhere, possibly eons ago, there existed a carbon-based race of creatures long extinct. It matters not what our biochemical makeup happens to be. Our history is a long and very rich one. Our physical requirements are amply provided simply because we are able to assimilate and convert ever present and ample radiant energy. Therefore we have no need to struggle over economic necessities. We live very dedicated to an insistent desire to seek 'truth' in a variety of fields that include both the natural and social sciences. We travel extensively and have become rabid space explorers seeking new worlds and other animate species. So far, the ultimate truth has escaped us. In our travels we have stumbled on mysterious phenomena, which we often cannot explain. It is my chore to seek these out and to elucidate them. What follows is one such attempt.

The Mystery:

I was on my way back to my home planet when I received an urgent distress call. It came from a world named Paritte, which I had visited on numerous occasions. I was well known there. The inhabitants were a serene and likeable people. They had always shown me kindness and a generosity of spirit that was actually quite rare. I knew that something had to be starkly amiss for them to send for me on a matter that would require my immediate attention. They were quite familiar with my professional activities and would ask for me only on that basis.

To a certain extent the natives of this planet resembled us. While their biochemistry and physiognomy differed from ours, like us, they assimilated radiant energy, which was also in abundant supply. However, we were way ahead of them technologically, scientifically, artistically, politically and socially.

I immediately rerouted my space vehicle and within a relatively short period of time arrived at my destination. Upon landing and much to my surprise I was met by a contingency of the planet's influential personages headed by Morgine, the leader of Paritte's largest and most powerful political entity. He had a distressful look as he approached and addressed me.

"Jazol, I am very pleased that you were able to come and get here so quickly on such short notice. I would like to introduce you to our top scientist, Alov, who will explain why we summoned you."

Hesitantly, Alov stepped forward, a mild mannered meek person.

“Jazol, we know that compared to yours, our science is far less advanced. We hope that you can help us solve a most perplexing mystery.”

I acknowledged their greeting and politely asked what the problem was.

“Perhaps before going into detail it would be appropriate to take you to the locale of the enigma.”

We got into one of their primitive vehicles and rode a lengthy distance to our destination. During the drive Alov prepared me for what I was to observe on a first hand basis.

“About a week ago, one of us, Ravi, a good friend and fellow scientist disappeared unexpectedly. We did not take much notice because it had happened before but only for short periods of time. As you know we all wear a device that emits a specific signature signal, something that you had provided. We then used the master device, also made available by you, to trace his locale. We are now taking you to where we found him in a condition totally unknown to us. Ah! There we are.”

We debarked from the vehicle and walked toward a small group encircling a prone figure lying on the ground with a foreign object nearby.

“That is Ravi.” Alov murmured. “His condition is completely alien to us. It appears that he has been totally deprived of his storehouse of energy, something that has never happened to anyone. As you are aware, when our life is over our material being simply disintegrates into dust and we are borne away by the wind. We are usually forewarned, allowing us to prepare for our ultimate departure with appropriate rituals. As you can see, Ravi has not disintegrated but he appears to be without any life whatsoever. Also the object beside him is completely unknown to us. We cannot make any sense of it nor why it is somehow involved with Ravi’s moribund state.”

I too found this situation quite bewildering. Like the inhabitants of Paritte, when we die, we simply disintegrate. However unlike them we change into a form of radiant energy. I had never seen anything like this in all the worlds I had visited. It seemed that something or someone had caused the death of Ravi. If the latter were the case, Ravi’s demise was the deliberate act of murder by someone; someone whose profile simply did not fit anyone I had ever met anywhere. Indeed this was a mystery. I must admit that at the onset I did not have any idea as to how to approach or solve it.

The first thing I did was to have the strange foreign object totally analyzed. At first glance we felt that we would have great difficulty in determining its makeup because it was largely charred. However our chemical analytical tools yielded a near complete analysis. The results were surprising. The object consisted of very rare elements, namely, carbon, oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen as well as some others we could not identify. Also, we surmised that the object had at one time been a living entity. It appeared to consist of a plethora of cells arranged in a particular structure. However because of the rarity of its components we were neither able to understand its biochemistry nor able to deduce whether the object played a role in Ravi’s demise, although we were pretty certain that it had, without being able to figure out how.

A full-fledged investigation was in order. I began by questioning Ravi’s fellow scientists about Ravi’s personal life and his scientific endeavors. I began with Alov who I thought

would know the most. It was amazing how little any of them knew about Ravi and his work. It seems that he was most secretive. He appeared to have no personal life whatsoever. He was totally wrapped up in his work. He was a speculative (theoretical) scientist, that is someone who, after carefully examining empirical knowledge, provides some sort of underlying explanation. He was a rare example, for even in our world there are very few successful theoretical scientists. Initially and because of the relative backwardness of science on Paritte, accepting Ravi as a competent conjectural researcher was difficult for me. However after going over his notes, which were found hidden in his rather spare lodgings, I had to drastically revise my views. He was a genius. His apparent loss was a great tragedy. Every effort to revive him using the best biomedical technologies from my home planet had been attempted. None succeeded.

According to our leading scientists, Ravi had been way ahead of anyone in explaining the relationship between matter, energy, space, time and the macro and micro aspects of existence. Deciphering his notes was a difficult task. He used a form of mathematics and linguistics unknown to us. Once we successfully decoded his language we were able to come to grips with his ideas rather easily and with dispatch.

However none of his notions provided us with any clues as to how he had been murdered until Morem, one of our best scientists, stumbled upon an outlandish idea he thought that Ravi was contemplating. Ravi had developed a quantum approach to energy and was extending that concept to time. He theorized that if time were not continuous, there must be minuscule spaces of non-time between the fundamental units of time that are part of our universe. If that were the case was it not possible for parallel universes to exist in those apparent time voids? At the time of his demise he was exploring ways to travel into one or any of them if, in fact, they existed. Unfortunately he had not as yet succeeded.

After examining and re-examining Ravi's notes, Morem determined Ravi's means of travel to a parallel universe. We are reasonably sure Morem was correct because he successfully embarked upon such a journey. We hoped it would lead to the profoundest understanding of the cosmos. Unfortunately, he returned in the same shape Ravi had and with same type of object accompanying him.

Fortuitously, Morem had passed on the means for the voyage to his senior assistants. Because of their adulation for him, one by one they, too, attempted the voyage with the same tragic results. Before the last of Morem's acolytes was to attempt the apparent deadly trip, he described the means to me. I convinced him to abort his crossing.

As an investigator of the mysterious and unknown, I felt that it was my responsibility to engage personally in this onerous chore. Prior to leaving I learnt as much as I could about the previous trips and much to my surprise I discovered that none of the travelers had taken any precautions. It was apparent that their mishaps had occurred in the parallel universe and that somehow or other they had been robbed of their stock of energy. I decided to take no chances. I donned an outfit that did not allow any exchange of energy.

Since Ravi's travel consisted of a melding of mind, matter and energy the trip could not be managed by technology alone. I had to go along because my mind was involved in making the crossing. There was no way that the paraphernalia alone could do it nor make unsupervised observations since we had no way of surmising what to expect. We

had to be prepared for the unexpected. Needed measurements would be based upon the use of sophisticated equipment that could withstand temperature extremes as well as cosmic energy, the most powerful form of known energy. I even tried to allow for the slight possibility that the parallel universe might consist of anti-matter, which would immediately destroy us, but I could not figure out how to overcome this if it were indeed the case.

Once everything was in place and carefully checked out, my travel odyssey began.

Within a moment, I found myself together with all my equipment in a very strange place. Everything seemed to be dead. Nothing was emitting any energy. There was no movement. While we were able to observe masses of matter they seemed devoid of anything resembling a living being as we understand it.

Perhaps the most horrific phenomenon was the presence of bodies that had once been alive. We quickly ascertained that they had a very peculiar property. Even though they were dead they were able to suck the energy out of living things. We discovered this when we exposed one of our experimental organisms to them. It immediately died devoid of any energy. The dead body that sucked its energy exploded into a luminous body that quickly became charred like the bodies that had accompanied our scientists back to our universe. We now understood what had happened to our brave confreres. It also explained in a rather bizarre fashion what had happened to this universe. All of the available energy needed to sustain life had been sucked out probably by these once living things. Even dead they were able to accomplish this. It was conceivable that when alive they could and probably did cause infinitely more harm.

I considered this colossus of horror with abject fear. Could this happen to our own universe? What reassured me was that Ravi had theorized that, more than likely, there were an infinite number of parallel universes. We had no idea as to the actual size of the time voids or how many different sorts actually existed. Thus the likelihood was that ours, and the one we had just visited were only two of many, each with differing traits. We could only hope that the others would not resemble this dead universe, which was probably due to the unseeing, unfeeling and senseless behavior of its one-time inhabitants. Upon returning to my home universe and world I destroyed all records of my voyage. I did not want anyone to contemplate the dread possibility I had witnessed. However one alarming fear remained. In light of the number of passages that we had undertaken between the two universes, was it possible that some sort of leakage could have occurred? Could the two universes have coupled and become one? I had no idea whether this was possible but the thought that the two universes could conceivably be joined and become the most enormous cemetery that ever existed with a potential for further destruction was too ghastly to contemplate.

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