

Reporting an Odd Planet

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SCRIPT

ON THE TELEPATHOPHONE:

SILICO-JAK
FRED (Ferro-Reactive-Electro-Dynomizer)

Location: Two points in the Universe

INTER-TEMPORAL COSMIC DIALOGUE: SJ: Operator?

Operator: Enquiries, can I help you?

SJ: Could you get me the following number: Ferro-Reactive-Electro-Dynomizer,
"FRED" for short, Galaxy: XL, Central5077, System APOL, Planet D.

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Operator: Just a second, sir ... Hyperspace Thought Channel B. I'm putting you through to the requested planet ... System APOL ... Planet D ... local name Xella ... Name of subscriber: Ferro-Reactive-Electro-Dynamizer - "FRED" for short. Region: Raka, Municipality: Ulima. Life Ce11: KOM567 ... number: 93421 ... hold on, sir...

SJ: Hello, FRED

FR: Hello, who's thinking?

SJ: Me, Silico-Jak.

FR: Silico-Jak? Oh, Silico-Jak! Haven't heard from you for light-yonks. How's life?

SJ: Can't complain. Your end?

FR: My diodes have been giving me a little trouble, nothing to worry about though. How's the Polysilico-Dicarbonelotrope?

SJ: She's just fine. And yours?

FR: Not too bad, thanks. One of the minisilikids has had a bout of electron rash ... seems to be getting over it.

SJ: Yes, there's been a lot going around of late. It's those pulsars cause the trouble, and then with the cosmic wind

FR: Something awful, eh? When are you coming round these parts?

SJ: Hope to be down in a couple of light-centiyonks. Of course, they still haven't cleared up that trouble on the intergalactic superphotonic highway.

FR: Yes, a stray black hole messed up the intertemporal conversion exchange. Anyway, they'll soon be on the job putting the matter to rights. How have things been at work?

SJ: All right. Business has been slower, of course, mainly as a result of the robot- android strike. The robots are protesting their status as second-class citizens and want parity with the androids, the same old story. Oh, did I tell you about my spot of bother when lightin down the MW 6 six light-centiyonks ago?

FR: Can't recall. Sounds interesting. Tell us

SJ: Well, I was just changing up into postphotonic drive when the console indicated that my rear expulsor was losing pressure. There was nothing for it but to pull in at the nearest astro-station of the IGAA. I slowed down to a gentle drift and turned off the MW 6 down a minor space-lane I'd never been along before. A space beacon pointed to a nine-

planetary system to starboard. I scouted around for a likely landing site and plumbed for the third planet from the central star - high oxygen and nitrogen content

FR: Any intelligent life there?

SJ: I found some quite intelligent swimming creatures in the salted H₂O and some of the flying creatures in the atmosphere were reasonably bright too. As far as terrestrial creatures were concerned, I can only speak of the most dominant life-form - bipeds - upper limbs with five protrusions on either extremity, communication based on sonic vibrations, form of reproduction: sexual

FR: Sexual?

SJ: You know, like the Libomils on Xantu.

FR: Oh, like that, eh?

SJ: They do evince an intelligence of a kind - a high degree of social organisation, a degree of technical skill, relative of course to their stage of development. They have made a modest beginning with space exploration, having reached their local satellite and sent probes to neighbouring planets. They have no inkling of superphotonic transfer or supermaterial physics and telepsychis - except perhaps in certain religious concepts.

FR: Yes, in a relative way they're reasonably intelligent then.

SJ: Well, yesif you compare their intelligence with other life-forms in terms of the categories I mentioned but in other respects, the picture is quite different.

FR: I'm not quite with you, Silico-Jak.

SJ: As yet, they have failed to think in planetary terms. Though their intellectual abilities allow them to grasp the dangers they face, theoretically at least, they cannot collectively apply this knowledge to remove or lessen these dangers.

FR: What dangers, Silico-Jak?

SJ: First and foremost, self-destruction by their own nuclear weapons. They say that the first inhabitants of the planet Diepruh developed similar weapons before they died out. There was in fact a causal connection.

FR: Why did they make these weapons?

SJ: The two most powerful political entities developed them to defend their respective politico-social systems. They were emulated by lesser powers, as these considered that security - prestige even - attached to the possession of the means of destroying members of their own species on a massive scale....

FR: Hold on, Silico-Jak! What's a socio-political system got to do with intra-species destruction ...? I can't understand it.

SJ: Put simply FRED, they are prepared to kill each other ten times over because they disagree so strongly about the best way to live.

FR: I see.....WhaaaaaaaT ?????? But they all belong to the same species, I thought.

SJ: That's the strange thing; some of the lower species on the planet will attack each other if threatened or confused, but only in a panic situation. These bipeds are "rational" creatures, though. Another thing: the superficial differences between them that do exist in terms of colour, stature and so on apparently cause friction and hostility.

FR: Silico-Jak, I don't get that!

SJ: Well, you know what the inhabitants of the southern hemisphere of the planet Uyo look like.

FR: Some of my best friends are Yaki-Kipos. They are sort of pink splotches on a purple background.

SJ: And the northern hemisphere The - Ogliboglas ...

FR: No, the ...Oogiboglies ... they have maroon stripes on an ochre background.

SJ: They get on all right, don't they?

FR: Oh yes, pretty well.

SJ: They don't kick each other saying: "Take that for your maroon stripes or pink splodges".

FR: No, they get on all right.

SJ: Do they intermarry?

FR: Very occasionally.

SJ: And the offspring?

FR: Some very interesting combinations - quite decorative!

SJ: But on this planet they insult and attack each other because of differences of colour...funny.

FR: How long did you stay there?

SJ: I orbited the planet, made a few observations, then landed in a lonely uninhabited spot where I could change my expulsar without further ado. I contacted the IGAA, and one of their patrol ships soon arrived and my vehicle was fully shipshape.

FR: Were you seen by any of these beings?

SJ: A few times. Ray Cathosynthetron, who sometimes travels that way on business, tells me that sightings of interplanetary vehicles aren't taken that seriously. Theoretically they know that their planet is an infinitesimal speck in the Universe, but in their hearts of hearts they still believe that they are at the centre of the Cosmos and the pinnacle of all Creation.

FR: Funny lot! It sounds really quaint.

SJ: Why don't you go and have a look for yourself?

FR: Do you know something, Silico-Jak?

SJ: What, FRED?

FR: I think I'd prefer to take your word for it... and stay at home.

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