

Excerpt from science fiction satire: Captain Gravitas and the alien proboscis

(In this work GE satirises well known works like Star Trek and Lost in Space, as only a fan of the originals could)

0 Setting

Space – the current frontier.

An Admiralty Starship slices through space, disturbing the occasional stray hydrogen atom or dust mote.

Its five month mission, to boldly go where a carefully gender-balanced Diplomatic Corp, have refused to go.

1

They say in space no one can hear you scream. Thank heaven for that. It would be terrifying to encounter a creature that had the capacity to hear in the near vacuum of space. Even worse would be a creature that could scream in space.....

Memo to self: if it is imaginable it could be real and cause havoc to ship and crew.....

Well that was a useful fifteen minutes, thought Gravitas, but now there must be something else to do, something active. As a man of action he hated the times when he was not on duty and making decisions, being at the centre of awesome events. Dr Mac called it a narcissistic-paranoid personality complex, the belief a psyche has that it belongs at the centre of events, and when it is not, it is because others are conspiring to take its place. In the case of Gravitas it was not dysfunctional, far from it; it was the foundation of his incredible decision-making powers.

The desk intercom buzzed. It was Hoorah, his senior communications officer.

‘Captain to the Bridge. We have detected an alien vessel.’

In a perfectly coordinated movement, Gravitas flicked the response button, announced he was on the way, leaped through the sliding door barely nanoseconds after an opening appeared, and made his way to the gravitonic elevator. It is my destiny, his sub-sub-conscious told him. Even during rest breaks, events resume their urgent dance, a choreography waiting for me to appear.

Five levels up at supersonic speed, the crippling affects dampened by the gravitonic generators below the floor. With a swish, the elevator door opened on a scene of organised chaos. The crew on the Bridge were repositioning themselves for the arrival of the Captain and yet another close encounter with an alien force.

Spook vacated the command chair for Gravitas, who reached it without his usual stumble on the steps leading to the lower central section. Spook took up his position at the science console. Hoorah, with her long legs tucked safely out of the way, was already directing her

computer to scan across the communications spectrum for any coherent signal. At the navigation station in front of Gravitas, Chukup was already laying in a course to bring them around to intercept the oncoming vessel; Dulip had already taken manual control of the helm for what could involve unexpected or dangerous manoeuvres.

Gravitas peered at the forward sensor camera projections on the screen. A fuzzy looking vessel in the shape of a gigantic brick was heading their way.

He spun the chair around, almost too fast and missing the science section.

‘Spook, what is that thing?’

‘Insufficient data to support a conclusion, Captain,’ he said without looking up from his data screen.

‘Your best guess Spook.’ Gravitas was already in his element, responding with the immediacy of a command instinct unburdened by the need to think.

‘The vessel appears to have dropped out of Weft-Space and is slowing down, distance 343,023.58731 Kilometres and closing. I am presuming we have been detected.’

‘Dulip, disengage the Jorgensen-Weft Drive. I think we better meet our visitor under pulsing-power. Hoorah, is there any signal from that.....thing?’

‘Nothing that makes any sense, Captain,’ said a puzzled Hoorah. ‘A lot of interference from what looks like an ionisation cloud around the object.’.....

‘The fuzziness, Spook. Why is it there?’

As a man born to command and capable of little else, Gravitas would always unerringly focus on the essential datum he needed for decision-making. Let the Spooks of this universe worry about other details and theory.

For the first time since the encounter begun, Spook looked up from the readings projected on his data console, pulled himself upright, and inflated (flexed?) his left nostril, a sign of puzzlement. ‘I do not know why Captain. And that is amazing.’

‘Hoorah. Hail them. Give them the standard Admiralty ‘love, peace, respect, let’s do business’ greeting. Run it through all frequencies, tight beam aimed at that fuzziness. Chukup, put in a course to bring us in front but off-centre from that thing so we can slide by if we need to. It could be hostile. How long until we are within hugging distance, Spook?’

Spook inflated his right nostril, a sign that he had noted the Captain’s effort at humour, doubtless made to place his crew at ease, but not of sufficient quality to warrant two inflated nostrils.....

The fuzzy, brick-shaped vessel approached within 100,000 metres and stopped.

‘101,003 metres to be exact, and we are being scanned, Captain’ announced Spook.

It was Hoorah next. ‘We are being hailed Captain but the communications signal is undecipherable. I am working on it.’

‘Green. Get Dr Mack up here. We may need him.’ Gravitas was sure that the good doctor would be able to assist in some way. His knowledge of alien physiology and psychology was negligible but his opinions were not, which made him a useful sounding board. Mack’s racist, emotional outbursts, often balanced the colourless logic of Spook, helping Gravitas to reach a sound decision, usually at some midpoint between the two senior officers.....

‘Captain, the scanning has ceased. I detect some unusual field structures around the intruder. Something I recall from my physics classes at Haephestus High. Intriguing.’

‘Who are you calling an intruder, you emotionless sponge? We are just as much intruders here. For all we know that ship hails from these parts.’ It was Mac, having just arrived on the Bridge.

‘Surprisingly, you make a good point Doctor. However, the preliminary computer analysis makes it clear that this vessel does not ‘hail from these parts’ as you so quaintly put it. It is truly alien Captain.’

‘I see’, said Gravitas, not really understanding. ‘So Gentlemen, and I include the ladies present, we have yet another challenge before us. This is why we are here. To understand and overcome. Hoorah, any luck on that signal.’

‘Yes Captain, the translator program was struggling but I compensated for Spook’s unusual field structures and it is now making sense. I’m afraid all we have is audio.’

‘Very well. Better than nothing. Let’s hear it Hoorah.’

3

Everyone on the Bridge tensed in anticipation. The voice that came through the speakers was a dead flat bass sound with no inflection. It made Spook’s utterances positively brim with passion.

‘We are The Bored. Prepare yourselves for absorption in one of your standard hours. The schedule has been sent to your intelligence unit. Biological beings will be absorbed first.’

Everyone was stunned.

‘Who or what in blazes do these ‘bored’ think they are. The Lords of Creation?’ Said Mack, waving his arms about to indicate the vastness of the cosmos and the seeming arrogance of the alien voice.

‘Easy Mack, let’s find out more. What is this absorption thing and why are they bored? Or are they a Board? Hoorah, patch me through: We are unable to comply with your request.....due to...insufficient...understanding. Please clarify.’

‘Captain, the Bored have activated shielding of a kind I have never before encountered. Instead of repelling the energy, they seem to have absorbed it, probably augmenting their power supplies. These Bored have some really interesting technologies.’ Said Spook, admiration creeping into his voice.

‘Yes, and apparently a pathological obsession with ‘absorption’, a mania you seem to be absorbing as well, you, you...dysfunctional boob. Captain, let me take Spook down to sick-bay. I have some therapeutic techniques I would love to try on him. I promise, only his psyche will be changed.’

‘Unlike you, Doctor Mack, I am able to operate on multiple levels. You are right about absorption being a feature of this alien culture. I say culture in lieu of species or any other designation. We do not know what they actually are like, but Captain, I have determined where they came from, as a first approximation.’

Gravitas felt the urge to make another decision. ‘Hoorah, tell the Bored we are endeavouring to comply with their request. We look forward to meeting them. That should buy us some time. Okay, Spook, let us have it. Green, make sure this is recorded in the ship’s log.’

At the science console, Spook turned his chair around and faced the Captain and the rest of the crew on the bridge.

‘The Bored come from another universe to our own. That is the only explanation for the amazing technology, the seeming violations of basic physical laws, the multiphasing physical presence of their ship in the space-time manifold. That’s fuzziness to you Dr Mack.’

Mack spoke first. ‘I told you he was nuts. There’s only one universe, you bubble-headed booby. That’s why it’s called a universe. Let me have him Jim. He shouldn’t be walking around!’

‘Let’s hear him out, Mack. We live in interesting times and the universe is a big place. Maybe it’s so big because there’s more than one.’ Gravitas was pleased with his insight – who needs Philosophy 101 when you are gifted with insight. Command was not just about issuing orders. Sometimes the capacity to reflect on the incredible wonders they encountered on their mission was just as important. But only some times. Nothing beat making decisions. ‘Go on Spook.’

‘There is a respected theory in cosmology that claims that our universe is merely one of a limitless number of universes, the set of all such universes being referred to as the Omniverse. At the quantum level, each microevent has a range of possible values, each of which has occurred in some space-time; a separate universe peeling off each time these events occur. It is the only way such events can have a reality. And remember your Starfleet physics – these microevents are real.’ Spook posed for emphasis but his listeners were confused. Maybe they all missed that semester of physics? He pressed on.

‘Philosophers themselves have long postulated the notion of a ‘possible worlds’ ontology. That is, for every meaningful proposition which is not asserting a logically impossible claim,

a world exists where that proposition is true. For counterfactuals and modal logic - it is necessarily the case that it is raining or not raining; it is possible that blue chickens read the works of Plato; Pegasus is a winged horse which can fly; The USSR morphed into a capitalist system; Dr Mack is a paragon of interspecies understanding, and so on - truth conditions exist in some possible world or worlds. The actual world is our world, whatever world we are in. The problem is that each of these worlds must be physically separate and isolated from each other world; otherwise the ontology collapses, causal chains span worlds, contradictions abound.'

'Wait a minute, just wait!' Dr Mack seemed to awaken from some reverie. Physics was not his strong suit but he knew when an attack on his ego called for action. 'You mean to tell me that there are other worlds with countless numbers of Spooks filling them with hot air? And other Dr Macks kicking their butt? Jim, you've got to let me have this demented sack of pomposity. A Nobel Prize in Medicine is riding on it.' A wicked, snake-like, smile crossed Mack's face as he turned towards the Captain.

Spook raised an eyebrow. 'According to theory, that is possible in some world in some other universe, Dr Mack. But not this one.' He went on, getting to the key point.

'What we have here Captain is a violation of that law. The Bored seem to have developed an ability to penetrate the space-time membrane which isolated their universe from all others and literally materialise in the space-time of another universe. It is supposed to be theoretically impossible. The Lewis Laws forbid it. But my sensors tell me the Bored ships are an amalgam of substances from which all universes partake their physical being, some of them completely unrecognisable and possibly dangerous to us. They have done it, Captain. Roaming the island universes, absorbing, endlessly absorbing. It is truly fascinating.' There was the merest hint of a sheen to Spooks eyes as he turned back to his sensors. Of all the ship's crew, he and he alone, was best placed to understand the wonder of the Bored and perhaps succumb to their siren call. The thought must have occurred to him.

'We are on dangerous scientific and philosophical territory, Captain. Reality as we have understood it for millennia is being compromised.'

This is just the sort of situation I excel at, thought Gravitas. Decisions I make now will impact down the corridors of the Omniverse for ever. He liked the thought of that.

'This is not some philosophy problem to fill in your time, you unfeeling, blue-blooded.....thing.' shouted Dr Mack, 'Good God man, our universe is under attack!'

'We can deal with this' said Gravitas. 'You know why? I think I understand some of this possible-world stuff. There must be a world in which we have dealt with this problem. We have already beaten the Bored someplace or other. If only we can find this world and learn how they/we did it.'

'Well reasoned Captain but you forgot the Lewis Laws. Interaction is not possible between possible worlds.' Said Spook, approving of the Captain's lucky insight but flawed logic.

‘But Mr Spook, the Bored have already violated those laws. Can’t we do the same?’ Asked Chukup.

‘Exactly. If the Bored can do it so can we.’ Said the Captain.....

And so it goes on, the war against the Bored who can only be stopped by Captain Gravitas of the starship Venture Capital – GE.

The work will be published as an eBook novelllet at some stage...GE