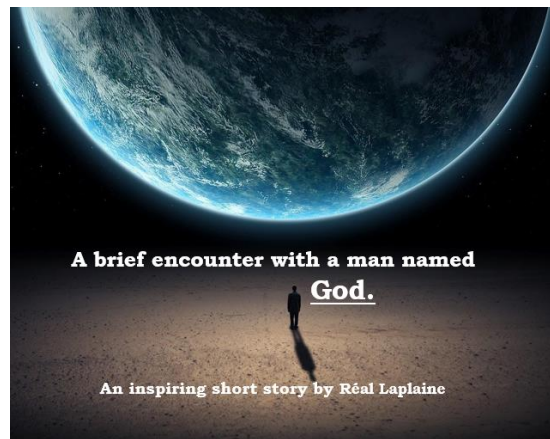


A brief encounter with a man named God.

by R  al Laplaine

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It has been thirty years since I was here.

Standing on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, I watched and listened to the people who sat outside, and the sounds of voices and music echoing from within.

If I am being honest, it felt a bit surreal, as if I had been transported back in time, three decades ago to this very spot.

The ***Cat and Fiddle*** was quite possibly the only real English pub in all of Hollywood, at least, as I recall.

It still had the same look to it, that classic English old-world fa  ade and vintage ambience.

I glanced at my watch. 10:30 p.m., and of course, Los Angeles being Los Angeles, the air was as balmy as a South Pacific Island.

I had come to meet with studio executives who wanted to turn one of my books into a film rendering. The meeting, held at their studio on Melrose Ave, lasted less than forty-five minutes.

It was my first film contract; and besides the fact that it would put my name and book on the big screen, I not only walked away with a sizeable check in my pocket, but I would also receive proceeds from sales of the film, whether on the big screen, streaming services (thank you Netflix, HBO et al) and CD sales – although, they cautioned me that the CD market would soon vanish entirely as streaming squelched it out of existence.

My flight back to Sweden was early the next morning, and the idea of sitting in my hotel room watching shitty television stations was tiring at best, so here I was, drawn to this very spot, in fact, the same place where my wife and I had taken the first steps in our relationship thirty-years earlier. But that is another story, for another time.

I stepped into the pub, into the welcoming arms of a mellow, harmonic symphony of voices, salted with a melodic tune from Coldplay, one of my favorites.

A casual glance confirmed that all the tables were full, so I headed to the bar; a mahogany sized ship like structure, glazed with copious layers of shellack, and pock-marked with the vestiges of countless people who had patroned it over the decades; the scrapes and dings they had left behind as traces of their time there.

If only a bar could speak, what stories it would tell us about the people who idled over it, spilling their guts and tears about the woes of their lives or the skeletons hidden in their closets.

I lowered myself into one of two remaining stools, noticing with a quick glance, the gentleman sitting next to me.

He seemed out of place compared to the rest of the clientele, with a thick white beard, which even in the dim light of the pub, clearly concealed an aged face, a pair of worn jeans, black sneakers, and a faded plaid shirt – and on his head was a baseball cap.

As I said, he seemed displaced like he did not belong here.

I ordered a Corona, took a sip, and felt relieved.

After over a decade plugging away as an author, those late nights pounding at my keyboard, I had managed to publish fifteen novels, and ironically, it was on the very day when I published number fifteen, that I got the call from the studio in Los Angeles.

That was three months ago – and now, with the papers signed, the dominos were set to fall.

I casually glanced to the left and was surprised to see the elderly bearded man staring at me.

My eyes locked on him, involuntarily, and in those brief seconds I noticed several things about him which struck me. On closer inspection his beard appeared like threads of finely spun silver, as if each hair had been carefully woven in place – like the threads of a Persian rug. Secondly, while he was clearly old, judging by the wrinkles and creases which traversed his face, there was something oddly timeless about him, and his eyes, they were mesmerizingly depthless to look into, as if I were gazing into the cosmic void.

“Do we know one another?” I asked, nervously breaking the awkward moment.

“Nope,” he casually responded as he continued to romance his beer. “You might recognize me, however.”

I turned back to him. “No, I would definitely remember you.”

“You have seen pictures of me. I am everywhere.”

I shook my head. “No, I’m pretty sure I would remember you,” I said, feeling by this point quite awkward.

He turned and offered his hand. “I am God.”

My brows crawled halfway up my hairline at that statement. “God?!”

“Yes, God,” he said with casual disinterest.

An irrepressible chuckle escaped my lips.

“Right...” I shrugged as I reached out and shook his hand. “Nice to meet you. I am René.”

“Hmm,” he uttered. “Have not met a René in a long time. Not since...” he paused as if reflecting, “oh, it was back around 1792 as I recall. France, yes, yes,” he said more definitively, “just before that whole affair with the Bastion and cutting off all those heads – terrible stuff,” he flicked a hand to the air.

He resumed sipping his beer leaving me sitting there with a strange sensation tingling up my spine as I tried to reconcile his words, thinking, as most people would at this point, that I had just managed to sit next to a very delusional old man or at the very least, a very drunk one.

“You are referring to the French Revolution,” I played along, lacking anything better to say, and certainly not wanting to abandon the pub just yet.

“Marie Antoinette, wasn’t that her name?”

“It was,” I answered.

“She lost her head,” a mischievous grin appeared on his lips as his cheeks puckered and his eyebrows lightly danced on his forehead.

“You talk about it as if you were there,” I responded, seriously considering if it was time to take my leave.

He turned to me, “You think I am quite mad, don’t you?”

“The thought did cross my mind, I mean, God, France in the 1700s – seriously?”

“Who do you think God is anyhow,” he asked quite casually.

“Not my place to answer as I have never been a believer.”

He smiled. “Ah, a sceptic.”

“I prefer to think of myself as spiritually neutral.”

“So, in your mind, I don’t exist, is that it?”

“No one has ever proven that God exists, so then I’d have to assume that you are a fake or...” I paused, “not to be insensitive, but maybe you’ve had a few too many of those,” I nodded at the bottle in his hand.

“Well,” he sipped his beer, “that’s a low blow.”

I offered a tempered smile.

“No insult intended, but seriously, what would God be doing in a pub?”

He smiled. “Maybe God likes beer.”

“Yeah,” I uttered as I took another sip – preparing myself for a diplomatic exit.

“Let’s put those doubts of yours aside for a moment and discuss your book deal.”

I nearly choked on my beer. “My book!” I exclaimed. “How did you know about my book deal?”

“I am God after all – I keep track of things.”

“Okay, hold up,” I exclaimed, the pitch of my voice causing some of the other patrons to look my way. “I just signed that deal a few hours ago. Is this a prank of some kind? Did the studio put you up to this?”

His smile was barely visible through the beard that engulfed the lower of his face. “I am in touch with everyone, René.”

“That would make you the world’s best multitasker.”

“It is one of my finest attributes.”

“Yeah, right!” I lightly exclaimed with a dose of unrestrained disdain.

“Look,” he pointed a finger my way, “you do not believe in God, so let us not press the issue. Besides, there are about six billion people in this world who are believers, so I am not particularly offended.”

“Fair enough, I’ll play along, besides,” I toyed with the bottle of beer, “my flight doesn’t leave until tomorrow morning, and...” I turned to him, “you still haven’t answered my question, how did you know about my book contract?”

“You don’t believe in God, so you’re not going to accept my answer anyhow.”

I sighed, feeling like this old man was just screwing with my head.

“Look, I am not that close-minded. I mean, if you had read my book, assuming that is even true, you know that I am not a slave to mediocrity.”

“No, indeed, you are not,” he smiled, this time a warmer smile. “In fact, I quite liked your ideas in that book.”

“Really?”

He nodded. “You are not too far off the mark with some of the concepts you presented in it, although frankly, you are still missing the bigger picture. That is why I was interested in meeting you.”

“Wait!” I raised a brow. “You think I came here to meet you?”

“You are the only person sitting in a bar stool next to God. You think that is coincidence?”

I shook my head as my incredulity mounted like a volcano about to erupt, but something inside me, the very spark that made me want to write and write about the themes I did, a desire to unlock the mysteries about life, compelled me to stay the course.

“Okay, what am I missing about the bigger picture?” I lightly shot back – my rebellious writer juices suddenly stirred by his comment.

He turned his entire body to face me, and in that moment, he did not look like an elderly man, he looked more regal, bigger somehow.

“For the sake of discussion, nothing else, do you think it is possible that I could have created this entire world in just six days as the Bible claims?”

“Putting aside the fact that I do not think you are who you claim to be, absolutely not,” I shot back. “It’s a nice bedtime story, but no, no one could do that.”

“Why?”

“Look at the millions upon millions of species of plants and animal life on Earth alone. The hierarchy, the choreography and symbiosis of it all – it is so complex that not even the most advanced computers could replicate this world in six days, let alone six hundred days. Add to the fact the human body is a fantastically convoluted and integrated system of billions of cells working in tandem and again, no computer or man, or God for that matter, could whip that up in years.”

“Correct. In fact, you could take a thousand, ten thousand of me, and collectively speaking we would not be able to create a Universe, let alone just this one planet, with all its complexities, certainly not in six days, if at all.”

“Of course not, it is a ridiculous story.”

“So, we are on the same page.”

“We are, on that, but if you still claim to be God, then it derails right there.”

“Fair enough. So why does the story exist at all? Why are billions of people here on your planet buying it, and praying to the Almighty?”

My head shook. “I don’t profess to be an expert in this area and being a non-believer anything I say could easily be relegated to the trash heap by the other camp.”

“I don’t take sides, René, I serve all people, not just those who believe in me.”

I shrugged. “Well, I think the stories about God, whatever God, gives people both hope and closure, something to anchor to concerning their existence.”

He sipped his beer, his silence inviting me to continue.

“I have never been a fan of organized religions or cults, but I do see the value of giving people hope that there is more in life than just this,” I waved a hand, “and that something more awaits them when they die.”

“More as in...what?” he asked.

I smiled. “You are poking the bear buddy, because, as I said, I don’t buy the whole narrative about heaven and hell or seventy-two virgins or Nirvana – but I do acknowledge that the prospect of something more, something greater, is important, and to that end, I think religion serves a purpose. Beyond that, frankly it is more about controlling people and property ownership – sorry to say.”

“You don’t need to apologize to me – I think your assessment is fairly accurate.”

“Didn’t expect to hear that from the guy who claims to be God.”

“I know, the Bible thumpers make me out to be one-sided, believe in me or go to hell and all that tripe, but it is not true. How could it be? If I were a jealous God, a mean one, someone who would consign people to hell because they failed to bow to me and me alone, that would make me anything but a God, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, it is a contradiction in terms – and yet, mainstream religions do exactly that. The problem here is that organized religions have started wars, social objectification, and divisional camps because of differences about their God and their faith.”

He waved a dismissive hand to the air. “I never asked for it and I certainly do not want anyone suffering on my behalf.”

“So, the stories they tell in their religious texts are not endorsed by God?” I asked with an insouciant and flippant tone – enjoying the dialogue even though I was sending everything he said to me through a mental filter.

“I did not write them, and I certainly did not endorse them.”

I romanced my beer for a time, debating whether this conversation was worth pursuing. The debate suddenly erupting in my head was arguing over the pros and cons – was he a fake, or not, and of course, how could there be any credibility to his claim?

I sighed – because my curiosity was simply too much to refuse.

“Challenged to continue a dialogue with an old man claiming to be God?” he asked with a pleasant, almost impish grin.

“Yeah, a little.”

“You are a writer; does that not give you a little more imaginative latitude?”

“Sure, but...uhm, this seems a little extreme.”

“Look,” he flicked his hand, “put aside your doubts and let us discuss topics that might be of interest to you and the concepts you presented in your book. The one you just signed a contract for. What was the title of that book?”

“Earth Escape,” I answered.

“You said that you did not believe in heaven or hell, so what do you think happens to people when they die?”

I hesitated a moment, because here I was about to speak to a complete stranger about one of my most intimate experiences. Looking into his eyes I sensed a sincerity about him, and while my perspective was colored by my vaulting incredulity about his claims, I felt compelled to answer the question. Besides, what is a good writer if not someone who can push the edges of the box we live in? All great writers throughout time have been people who could see beyond the walls of Mediocrity, and I prided myself on being in that camp.

“I have had several out-of-body experiences in my life.”

“And these experiences changed your view on death?” He probed.

“Yes. Profoundly. My first experience, where I left my body for several minutes, proved unequivocally that I was something separate from it, moreover, that if I was not my body, then I could not die. That answered more questions for me about my life and existence than the thirteen years I spent in formal education learning mostly, crap.”

He smiled.

“My other experiences, shorter in length, corroborated the fact, because if one experience was not enough, three or four out-of-body-experiences over the course of the next couple decades simply put the icing on the cake.”

“And that’s why you don’t buy the religious narratives?”

“I never bought them, but after those experiences, I knew that we were spiritual, non-corporal entities, and that we go on lifetime after lifetime. And that started me on another journey of self-exploration over the course of several decades, eventually leading me to author books which espouse my views.”

“Well,” he tipped his bottle and emptied it, waving down the barkeep for another, “you are right. There is no heaven or hell, what awaits everyone after the illusion of death, is more life, an endless cycle of them.”

“Which brings up another question - past lives.”

“Good one, and one I was meaning to ask you about,” he said.

“Then past lives are a fact?”

“Have you experienced past lives?”

“That’s the thing – I have had flashbacks about times and places which, logically speaking, I have never been to or experienced in this lifetime.”

“Give me an example.”

I paused to think, “I was in Paris one time on a business trip, years ago, and I took a walk along the Seine – you know, toward the Eiffel Tower – and at one point, I felt as if I had just slipped into another dimension or time zone. I suddenly knew exactly where I was, where to go, and such, with a certainty that was uncanny, and I had never been to Paris in this life. I have had other similar experiences which cannot be explained by any other phenomenon than the fact that I had been in these places previously.”

“Well, again, you are right. Obviously, if people are not just bodies, then they have lived countless past lives.”

“I’ve read stories by people who recalled them, but of course, mainstream science and other authoritative sources don’t acknowledge it as fact.”

“It doesn’t fit into the accepted narrative, does it?” he said with the tip of his head and an impish grin.

“No, it does not. In fact, try bringing it up in social conversations and they will look at you like you just blew a mental fuse. Any time I have done so, I felt stupid and rebuked.”

“Because it cannot be seen or touched or proven to exist under a microscope,” he added.

“Like the existence of God,” I added with a smile.

“Sure, that’s why theology relegated as metaphysical, not science and not fact.”

We paused a moment to enjoy our beers. I ordered a bowl of nuts to help mollify the effects of the alcohol as I am not a big drinker and alcohol does not bode well in my system.

He broke the silence, “Religion is not the only ideology that anchors people to an abstract, a mere idea.”

“Okay, what do you mean?”

“It is easy to knock religion as just blind faith, but look at such countries as Russia, North Korea or even America, where blind faith is used to control and even enslave the minds of the masses?”

“True. Ideological conviction is a self-made prison – the most powerful one.”

“Exactly,” he said. “The moment you accept an idea, it has power over you and your life.”

“You included the United States of America, here,” I waved a hand around the bar, “in your statement – why?” I was curious what he thought, not that I didn’t already have my own thoughts on the matter.

“Well...America!” He guffawed. “They use my name in vain more than nation on Earth.”

“Oh, you mean their mantra, *God Bless America*?” I offered.

“Yes, that one. Why on Earth would God bless America more than any other nation?”

“Well, they do think they are the best nation in the world, with the best and only real democracy.”

“Which is exactly my point, they are slaves to their own delusion, an idea, that they are the best of the best, and while they did help break the chains of old-world empires several generations ago, they are no longer the torch bearers they once were.”

“I would agree with that.”

“I have paid attention to America because they are an important catalyst in the world. I have watched the devolution of their democracy over time, their slide from what they call “the American dream” – the land of opportunity, to now, where tens of millions live under the poverty line – people who pray to me every day for hope, for a chance to get out of the poverty they are in, to help feed their kids, to be able to afford medical care, where a small percentage of very rich Americans, and entitled people control most of the wealth, and the rest struggle to make ends meet – that is America today, and so their mantra and ideology is also just an idea, a false one at that.”

“You did not mention their suicidal love affair with insane leaders like Donald Trump,” I added.

“Oh yes, him - a real piece of work that one.”

I could not restrain myself from laughing out loud at that comment.

“Anyhow,” he continued, “despite the fact that religion has its faults, I do have a role to play, a sort of figurehead to the believers, but I am not the God which they make me out to be. I did not create everything, and I am not omnipotent. I am just me, and I happen to like beer,” he raised his glass to the air, and we clinked bottles.

“So...” I took his last statement as a cue to Segway into the question which had been patiently waiting to be aired. “...if God is not the source of all Creation – how did it all come about?” I asked.

He pointed a finger at me, “Didn’t you not touch on that very subject in this book of yours, *Earth Escape*?”

“Yes, I even proposed a different theory about Creation within the context of a fictional story.”

“Do you think your theory has credibility or were you just exercising your creative license?”

I shrugged. “Yes, I do. I spent many years with my nose buried in books. I read up about the Big Bang, studied the Bible, books by new age thinkers, and I did a lot of soul searching, and in the end, I think my take on Creation makes a hell of a lot more sense than the Big Bang or Divine creation – both of which fall completely short of explaining how the Universe came about.”

He leaned back on the stool, caressing his beard for a moment and then asked, “Tell me your theory and I will tell you if you are on the right track or not.”

“I thought you said you read my book?”

“I did, but I want to hear it from you, not within the context of your fictional story, but how you see it as actually having happened.”

I drew a breath and exhaled, “Okay, but my disclaimer at that my version is pretty radical.”

He laughed. “Radical?! Any more radical than pinning all of Creation on me,” he waved a hand around the bar, “Jesus, how irresponsible can you get?”

I smiled at his forthrightness.”

“So, using Jesus’ name isn’t profanity?”

He guffawed aloud, “Please, he was a nice guy, started a good thing, but all this business about being the son of God and the Holy Trinity...” his head shook, “that Church hired some good writers, that’s all I have to say on the matter.”

“In my book, the essence of the story is about the captain of a star ship sent to reach and colonize a new exoplanet, because Earth is about to go up in flames because of imminent global nuclear war. During the course of his mission, he goes off on his own, deeper into the Universe, further than any man has ever gone in search of the answers to existentiality.”

“He does find the answers, as I recall?”

“Yes. He meets an Ai, a cybernetic artificial intelligence, who is, for lack of a better word, the guardian of a repository of knowledge at the furthest edges of the Universe – and she reveals the truth to him.”

The bearded man cupped his beer in both hands, eager for me to continue.

“In short, she tells him that way back, before time, before there was even a Universe, the Creators as she referred to them, who were basically free souls or free entities, not encumbered by a body or physical limitations, decided to create a sort of universally agreed upon playing field.”

“Like a big game board,” he added.

“Yeah, she used that exact analogy. Instead of everyone going off in a billion different directions and doing their own thing, a handful of them got together and proposed a mutually interactive playing field where they could all engage and enjoy the benefits of physicality, while still being who they were.”

“Entrepreneurs of Creation – uh? Like Steve Jobs or Musk.”

I grinned. “Yes, I guess you could call them the fathers of entrepreneurialism. Anyhow, they figured it would more fun if they could experience this new playground on a different level, so they came up with the idea of bodies, and different versions of plants, animals, and burning suns and planets to play on – lots of them so that one would feel left out of the game.”

“During the course of their encounter she shows him how they created the suns and the planets using spherical balls of encysted self-sustaining quantum energy, along the lines of controlled nuclear energy – kind of like the God Particle which physicists are chasing after today in their cyclotrons.”

I looked at him to see if he was surprised or shocked, but he seemed completely at ease with my story.

“And who were the Creators, according to this Ai?” he asked.

I tipped my head and uttered the words as if they were sacred, “That would be us, or rather, our ancestors way back there.”

“So, if you guys created the Universe, and not me,” he smiled, “then of course that substantiates your earlier statement about people being immortal and it also suggests that way back there, you guys were sort of Gods of your own – right?”

“Well, I did not call them Gods in the book – but I did say that before we all became humanized and forgot who we were and our authorship for this playing field, we had godlike powers to create and do whatever we wanted.”

“Which explains your obsession today with films and stories about humans with superpowers,” he offered with a playful grin.

“Yeah, everyone loves a Superman story.”

“So,” he tipped a head my way, “the question that begs to be answered, assuming your hypothesis holds any water, is why did you decide to abdicate the throne and become pawns in this game you call life?”

I exhaled and shrugged. “That question haunted me for a long time during the research for the book. I eventually came to a conclusion.”

“Which is?”

“We got bored with being free beings – we wanted more action in our existence.”

He tapped the bar counter with his knuckles and pointed at me, “Bingo!”

“Wait?! What?! You agree?”

“Couldn’t have said it better myself, René.”

It was the first time anyone offered validation for my ideas in that book, although, the check in my pocket from the studio certainly accredited the value to the book itself.

“Do you know what drives prisoners to madness?” he asked.

“I am not sure what you mean?”

“Have you ever wondered what it does to a person to be locked up in a small cell for years or decades?”

“I think it would be horrible.”

“It is, but my point speaks to your conclusion; it isn’t just the fact of being locked up, it is the fact that they are prevented from creating anything meaningful in their lives – boredom would be a charitable word for it – and that degree of boredom drives them to do crazy and self-destructive things.”

“So, my theory holds water?”

“You are missing a lot of filler, but in essence you are on the right track.” He pointed to the darkened sky visible through a window. “What do you see out there?”

“A lot of stars.”

“And I suppose the improbability of your theory is substantiated by the fact that there are actually trillions of stars, galaxies and planetoids in the Universe?”

“It makes my theory a tough sell just on that point alone.”

He shrugged. “Consider this; I happen to know, firsthand, that this Universe was created by us, you and I, collectively speaking, and that includes every other race out there in the stars – amounting to countless trillions of beings.”

He then drew an imaginary circle on the counter, “Imagine a universe, a singularity, not a physical one, but one where beings existed, a universe of its own without boundaries, without limit, filled with creative creatures like us, who loved to do things, make things, experience things they created – the very fundamental impulse that compels every living being today, the desire to create life – imagine if they combined all that potential and unleashed trillions of spheres, as you detailed in your book, and started the dominos falling; the burning suns, the planets which eventually coalesced and cooled, and then, over time, populated those which could sustain life with all forms of plant and animals which they created, the most complex system of interrelated symbiosis ever developed, and then finally, started populating them with bodies which they took over, like driving a car? Can you imagine the scope of that?”

“I can, but of course, to sell that idea to the world would be an impossibility at this time.”

“Why?” he probed.

“Because it’s not corroborated by any facts, any more than God or the Big Bang, but the argument would be that time alone would obviate the very idea.”

“Time is a relevance only in this physical universe, René. Free beings existing in their native state and Universe, do not operate on time.”

“That reminds me of Einsteins Theory of Relativity.” I offered.

He raised a brow.

“Einstein and subsequent quantum physicists, theorized that one second moving the speed of light, which is about 186,000 miles per second, would be the equivalent of decades or even generations of time on Earth.”

“A fair comparison. And by the way, the speed of light is nothing to a free being, because in our natural state, we cannot be compared to mere physicality because we transcend it.”

“I really like how you talk and your views,” I said, “but I am still challenged to accept you for who you claim to be.”

He dismissed the comment with a flick of his hand.

“Until your quantum physicists break the elemental code for creating or engineering matter, what you call the God Particle, and come to the realization that given the right processes they can replicate a burning sun or even a planetoid in orbit around it; and until your geneticists figure out the code for life and can replicate or engineer life forms, your world is generally not going to accept any other theory or belief about Creation. Do you agree?”

“I do.” I sighed.

“But?” he asked, noticing me deflating slightly.

“Well, it is a question of time and who wins the race. I have no doubt that we can eventually find the greater truths about existence because our desire for knowledge will always compel us to open the next door, but the question is, will we do it before some asshole like Putin or Kim Jong Un or even Trump, starts World War 3, a war that no one is going to recover from this time.”

His somber look betrayed his feelings.

“I empathize with your concerns, René, and you are correct, time is a factor at this juncture of your civilization, so let’s take up one more thing which relates to everything we have spoken about and is relevant to this matter of the future of your race.”

“Which is what?” I asked.

“Something I like to call the Universal Mind or Universal Synergy.”

I tipped my head with a questioning look. “Synergy?”

He smiled. “It is an old Greek word, means working together. In other words, the sum of two or more agencies working together is greater than could be accomplished alone.”

“Okay?”

“Let me explain by way of an example. Have you ever walked into a space or room with a crowd of people, and suddenly noticed one person, maybe a pretty girl and for a few seconds you felt drawn to her even though you had never met before?”

“Sure, they are a magnet for us.”

“I do not mean sexually. Let us say that you simply see someone and find yourself looking at them for no reason at all, and then suddenly, without a spoken word or other provocation, they turn to look at you as if they sensed you were looking at them?”

“Yes, that has happened often.”

“What power is at work there?” he asked.

“I do not know; it is a mystery. In fact, now that you bring it up, I have often found myself experiencing that very circumstance, whether I was walking down the street and looked over at

someone on the other side and they did precisely the same thing as me. It's kind magical, but inexplicable."

"That is not a matter of coincidence or chance, René. What you are experiencing is an immensely powerful force at work, a universal force which transcends all physicality. It is difficult to define it in terms of human words because your language does not encapsulate the concept of a shared energy, a synergy on a purely non-physical level, but it is there, all around us, a force which only we, as beings, can sense or perceive."

"So, it has nothing to do with physicality?"

"Not one iota. Liken it to an ocean of the finest possible energy, energy which transcends everything. On the flipside, comparatively speaking, you have quantum energy, which is everywhere, all around us, all the time, which your mobile phone, computer and GPS devices can pick up, but which you, as human beings, have absolutely no perception of. Now, flip the coin, and this synergy which I speak of, this universal force, is undetectable by your digital and electronic devices, but completely perceivable by you, by us."

"So, it's an energy like us, but nothing physical?"

"Right. It is the main reason why your scientific community has not yet corroborated the existence of the soul or spirit as you call it, because their instruments, designed to measure quantum energy, cannot even get close to measuring this synergy – but," he waved a hand at all the people sitting around the pub, "every single person in here can perceive it, if they want to, because we are an antenna for that energy, we do perceive it."

"Okay, that explains a lot, but where are you going with this?"

"I can't stress it enough, René – the road to advancing your world to a higher culture, without war, hatred, racism and greed, and of course, to removing this existential threat with nuclear weapons, all of it, relies on getting people, collectively speaking, to raise their consciousness and awareness, and to open their eyes to the real power which resides within them."

"You mean, love?"

"Exactly. There is no greater power in the Universe than love. Love of life, love of creation, love of others – love transcends everything and all other base emotions. The religionists had it right, in a twisted way. In fact, from my station as God, I see the power of love at work all the time. Warring nations eventually stop killing each other and soon after, they are friends again. Hatred is dissolved by love, by this shared synergy – it is that powerful. That is the only hope for humankind and the only way you will win this battle against the insanity which the few are waging against the race."

So many questions in my mind had been answered, but there yet remained more – one of them, however, reached out to be answered, so I plucked it from the storm.

"Just to go back to something we discussed earlier, about the whole Creation paradigm – I am still asking myself, why, if we were such creative and all-powerful free beings' way back before all of this," I flicked a hand to the air, "what is your take on why we ended up becoming pawns, or better yet, prisoners in our own creation?"

He smiled.

"And for that matter," I took a long swig of beer and waved to the barkeep for another, "if we all evolved back to who were before all of this, wouldn't that just put us right back in the same soup? Trillions of free souls bored out of their minds, looking for some action to entertain their creative juices?"

“It probably would, but I think you would be smarter about it this time. You have gained experience over countless millennia – so hopefully you will learn from your mistakes. But to answer your first question, my take on why you became pawns in your own creation, let us take an analogy to clarify the simplicity of it – because it is not complex.”

“Okay?”

“When you engage in a sport, you know you’re playing a game, right?”

“Yes.”

“You do not forget that you have a job, maybe a wife and family, other responsibilities and activities, because the sport is just a game – it is entertainment.”

“Precisely.”

“So, imagine, let’s say for the sake of discussion, you play football or hockey, and you decide one day to do just that and only that, and abdicate any and all awareness or responsibility for anything else in the world – you just turn off the faucet of your own conscious awareness for anything except that football or hockey game and you play that game lifetime after lifetime for eons and forget about your authorship in the matter.”

“I guess the game eventually ends up controlling you.”

“And there is the essence of what has happened through the countless ages. You have been playing the game so long at this level that you forgot your part in it and why you even ended up here.”

He looked around the bar for a brief moment.

“It is really a beautiful planet, Earth, and beyond this one are planets and systems which are utterly awe-inspiring. Considerable thought, work and inspiration went into the creation of this Universe, and its very beauty and magnificence defies any stupid theory it all came about by some enigmatic spontaneity. Beauty like you see here on Earth is the work of artistic rendering – and that,” he turned to look me firmly in the eyes, “only comes from beings who are inherently beautiful and creative themselves.”

He paused, reflectively.

“And on that note, the people in your world who abuse this creation, who use it to manipulate, oppress or even kill others, they are very sick people who are violating the essence of a world which was created from love, not from the toxic and base motivations that compel them to do their sordid deeds.”

“Wow, you just keep stirring the pot in my head and more questions pop up.”

“Ask. The night is still young,” he grinned.

“If there are so many races out there, how do you keep track of them all?”

He leaned closer and, in a whisper, said, “You think I am the only guy playing God?”

“Okay, wow, never considered that possibility.”

He shrugged.

“Look, René, I know the more I tell you, the more incredulous it sounds, and of course, it’s so incredulous that even if you went off and told people about our conversation no one would believe you, especially those Bible thumping fundamentalists who will label this entire dialogue as heresy and probably burn you, and even me, at the stake for suggesting their version is wrong,” he grinned.

“I think you’re probably right about that, which is why I take the safer road and put my ideas into a fictional story so that it appears more palatable.”

“And for the record, since we are on the subject of Gods, being all-powerful, all-knowing and omnipresent is over-rated.”

“Didn’t expect to hear that.”

“As a human, you live in a finite paradigm of space and time, but me, I reside in a timeless domain. No birth, no growth, no death – just existence through perpetuity. I know that I will go on forever. It is reassuring, of course, but it gets boring at times, and I too crave the opportunity to create. There are no challenges for me, besides having to listen to all those lamenting prayers. I cannot be killed, I cannot die, I do not have any excuses for things because there is nothing I cannot do.” He paused.

“On the plus side, I am fully aware of who I am and about existence. I am not plagued by the great “mysteries” which humanity, and others, attempt to resolve by looking outside themselves, instead of within. The pot of gold is right there inside all of you.”

“What do you mean by that?”

He waved a hand. “This, all of this. The game of life. It is what we do best. We create, because on the other side of that coin, if we stop creating then existence gets very monotonous, and if there is a hell it is the one which we create when we stop being who we really are.”

He paused to fix his gaze on me. “In your native or natural state before you all took on bodies and started playing games with them, you had the power to create whatever you wanted. You could have collectively created any number of Universes – but most of you agreed on this one because it was big enough for all the players, and it offered up some real challenges when viewed from the perspective of a tiny little body, a mere speck in the Universe.”

He continued, “A game, by definition, has to have an award, something worth fighting or playing for. What do you think this Universe offered up that was rewarding enough to keep you engaged in it?” he asked with a raised bushy brow.

“Sensation.”

“Bingo! Without sensation, this Universe would be a rather boring and flaccid experience. With it, you get to experience all manner of neural and visual input – touch, smell, pain, sight, and sex – one of the best carrots ever invented for keeping you glued to physicality.”

I laughed. “You make it sound so clinical.”

“The genders and the sexual urges between them were a necessary component to ensuring that bodies were perpetuated, otherwise, over time, no more bodies, no more game.”

We sat for a time in silence; well relative silence considering the echo of voices intermingled with music that filled the air.

He studied me for a moment with those cosmically deep eyes.

“Got another question brewing?” he asked.

“Yeah, one more. Given everything, we have just discussed, do you think that we actually have free will?”

“A far as I see it, until you break the cycle, the constant life and death without any awareness or consciousness of your true selves, your free will is relative at best, because to a very large degree, your existence is deterministic.”

“You mean, pre-determined?”

“Yes, and ironically, it was all pre-determined by you guys, not by any unknown force, omnipresence or nature – just you.”

That answer capped off the dialogue for me, and though I could have asked a dozen more questions, I was tired and, in a few hours, would have to Uber my way to LAX.

I slipped off the bar stool and turned to him, extending my hand, which he gripped firmly.

“Well, I can’t say that I will tell anyone about this conversation, but I am happy to have met you.”

“The feeling is mutual, René.”

I turned and left the Cat and Fiddle, walking down Sunset Boulevard toward my hotel several blocks away, when I realized I had left my phone on the bar.

I raced back and entered the pub, finding my phone exactly where I left it.

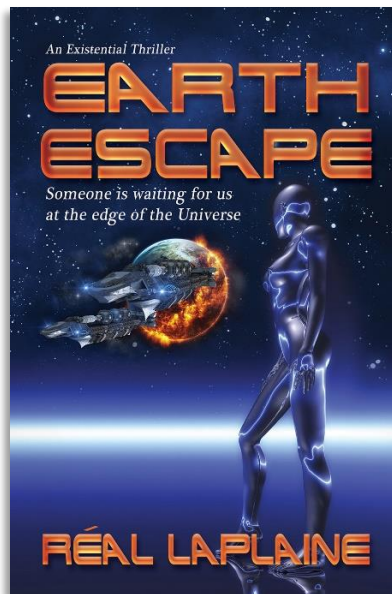
His bar stool was now empty.

I stared at it for a time with a small sense of nostalgia, when the bartender, a young pretty woman, approached. “You are back. Another beer?”

“No, no thanks, I forgot my phone. I was so caught up in the conversation with the old man sitting next to me,” I smiled.

“Oh yes, he was genuinely nice. Told me I was going to live a great life,” she smiled.

“You should believe him,” I said as I turned to leave.



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