

Our journey to a strange planet

The best way to introduce these notes from our journey is to report Great Leader Cottaft's speech to us. On the day before we left Earth he called us all together and said:

"Tomorrow, the Globe will go out. Tomorrow, the science and skill of Earth will win a victory over nature. There were other races on Earth before ours, but they could not control nature so they died as conditions changed. We have become stronger, and we have solved problem after problem. And now we must solve the most difficult problem of all. Earth, our world, is old and nearly dead. The end is near, and we must find a new home and make sure our race survives.

"Tomorrow the Globe will set out to search the heavens in every direction. Each one of you holds the whole history, art, science, and skill of Earth. Use this knowledge to help others. Learn from others, and add to Earth's knowledge, if you can. If you do not use your knowledge and add to it, there will be no future for our race.

"And if we are the only intelligent life in the universe, then you are responsible not only for our race, but for all intelligent life that may develop.

"Go out into the universe, then. Go and be wise, kind, and truthful. Go in peace. Our prayers go with you."

After the meeting I looked again through the telescope at the planet to which our Globe is being sent. It is a planet, which is neither too young nor too old. It shines like a blue pearl because so much of it is covered with water. I am glad we are going to the blue planet; the other Globes are being sent to worlds that do not look so inviting.

I am full of hope. I no longer have any fear. I shall go into the Globe tomorrow, and the gas will put me to sleep. When I will wake again, it will be in our shining new world. If I do not wake, something will have gone wrong, but I shall never know.

It is all very simple really – if we trust in God.

This evening I went down to look at the Globes for the last time before we board them. They are amazing! Our scientists have achieved the impossible. They are the largest things ever built. They are so heavy that they look more likely to sink into the surface of Earth than to fly off into the space. It is hard to believe that we have built thirty of these metal mountains. But there they stand, ready for tomorrow.

Some of them will be lost. Oh, God, if ours survives, I hope that we can meet the challenges and satisfy the trust place in us.

These may be the last words I shall ever write. If I do write again, it will be in a new world under a strange sky.

I have just woken up. Has it happened, or have we failed to start? I cannot tell. Was it an hour ago that we entered the Globe? Or was it a day, or a year, or a century? It cannot have been an hour ago. I am sure of that, because my body is tired and aching.

However, it seems only a short time ago that we climbed the long passage into the Globe and went to our place. Each one of us found his or her compartment and crawled into it. I fastened myself into my compartment. Its plastic walls filled with air and pushed against me, protecting me against shock from all directions. I lay and wait. One moment I lay there fresh and strong. The next moment, it seemed, I was tired and aching.

The journey must have ended. The sides of my compartment are empty of air. We must have arrived on that beautiful, shining blue planet, with Earth only a tiny light in our new heavens. I feel full of hope. Until now, my life has been spent on a dying planet. Here, there is a world to build and a future to build for.

I can hear our machines at work, opening the long passage which had been filled for the journey. What shall we find, I wonder? Whatever this world is like, we must not betray our trust. We each possess a million years of history, and a million years of knowledge. All this must be preserved.

This planet is very young, and if we do find intelligent life, it will be only at its beginning. We must find them and make friends with them. They may be very different from us, but we must remember that this is their world. It will be very wicked to hurt any kind of life on its own planet. If we find any such life, our duty is to teach, and to learn, and to work with them. Perhaps one day we shall build a world even more civilized than Earth's own...

This is a terrible place! Is this really the beautiful blue planet that promise so much? We are by far the most advanced race there has even been, but the horrible monsters around us terrify us (or: we are terrified by the horrible monsters around us).

We are hiding in a dark cave. There are nine hundred and sixty-four of us. There were a thousand. This is how we lost the others.

The machines clearing the passage out of the Globe stopped. We crawled out of our compartments and met in the center hall of the Globe. Sunss, our leader, made a short speech. He reminded us that we must be brave as we went into the unknown. We were the seed of the future, and we were responsible for taking Earth into the future.

We went through the long passage, and left the Globe.

How can I describe this terrible world? It is a dull and shadowy place, although it is not night-time. What little light there it comes from a huge square hanging in the sky. The square is divided into four smaller squares by two black bars.

We stood on a wide level plain, but a plain such as I have never seen before. We could not see an end to it, whichever way we looked. It was made of rows of

straight, endless, parallel roads all going the same way. (I call them roads, because they looked like roads, but each one was much wider than any road I have ever seen.) Each road was divided from the next by a deep, straight cutting as wide as by height. The man next to me said that we had come into a world of straight lines lit by a square sun. I told him he was talking nonsense. However, I could not explain what I saw.

Suddenly we heard a noise, and looked towards it. We saw an enormous face looking at us round the Globe. It was high above us, and it was black. It had two pointed ears, the size of towers, and two huge, shining eyes.

As the monster came towards us round the Globe, we saw its legs, which were like great columns. We turned to run away, so great was our terror. Then the monster moved like lightning. A huge black paw, suddenly showing long, sharp claws, smacked down. When the paw was raised again, twenty of our men and women were no more than marks on the ground. The paw came down again. Eleven more of us were killed.

Sunss, our leader, ran forward and stood between the monster's front paws. His fire-tube was in his hands. He aimed and fired. I thought the weapon would have no effect on such a huge creature, but Sunss knew better. Suddenly the monster's head went up, and then the creature dropped dead.

And Sunss was under it. He was a very brave man.

We chose Iss as our next leader. He decided we must find a place of safety as soon as possible. Once we had found one, we could remove our records, instruments and equipment from the Globe. He started to lead us forward along one of the wide roads.

After traveling a very long way, we reached the bottom of a cliff. It went straight up in front of us. Its surface was made up of strangely regular blocks of rock. We walked along the bottom of the cliff, and found a cave, which went a long way into the cliff and to both sides. Again, the cave was very regular in shape and height. Perhaps the man who spoke about the world of straight lines was not as stupid as seemed...

Anyway, here we are safe from monsters like the ones that killed Sunss. The cave is too narrow for those huge paws to reach inside.

Later. We went to the Globe and we took all the equipment that was there. After that a terrible thing has happened! Our Globe has gone.

While Iss had taken a group to explore the cave, the rest of us were on guard at the entrance. We could see our Globe, and the grate monster lying close to it. Then a strange thing happened. Suddenly the plain became lighter. Then there was a noise like thunder, and everything around us shook. A huge object came down on the dead monster and removed it from our sight. The light suddenly faded again.

I cannot explain these things; none of us can understand them. All I can do is to keep an accurate record.

It was some time later when the worst possible thing happened. Again the plain became suddenly lighter and the ground shook. I looked out of the cave, and saw something that I can still hardly believe. Four huge creatures, compared with which the previous monster was very small, were approaching the Globe. I know that nobody will believe this, but they were three times the height of our enormous Globe! They bent over it, put their front legs to it, and lifted that unbelievably heavy ball of metal from the ground. Then the ground shook again even more violently as they walked away carrying the extra weight.

Our Globe is lost. Thanks God we had removed our precious things from it.

But there was more sorrow to come. Two of the group who had gone with Iss returned with a dreadful story. Behind the cave they had found a large number of wide tunnels, full of the dirt and smell of some unknown creatures. As the group went through the tunnels, six-legged, and sometimes eight-legged, creatures of horrible appearance attacked them. Many of these were a great deal larger than themselves, and had huge claws and teeth. However, the creatures, though very fierce, were not intelligent, and were soon killed by our fire –tubes.

Iss found open country beyond the tunnels, and decided to come back and fetch us. It was then that the next dreadful thing happened. Fierce gray creatures about half the size of the first monsters attacked them. These creatures were probably the builders of the tunnels. There was a terrible battle in which nearly all our men were killed before the monsters were beaten. Only two men survived to bring us the bad news.

We have chosen Muin as our new leader. He has decided we must go forward through the tunnels to the open country. We pray to God that beyond the tunnels we shall find a world that is not mad and evil like this one.

Is it too much we ask – simply to live, to work, and to build, in peace...?

As we went through the tunnels, we met again the “builders” of those tunnels. The battle begun, and this time we won. At the end of the tunnel we met some tiny creatures. I picked up one to take a closer look. It was a strange-looking little thing. Its body was an almost perfect half of a ball, with the flat side underneath. The round top was pink and shiny. It was like an insect, except that it had only four legs, which were very short. It had no separated head, but it had two eyes on the edge where the covered top of its body met the bottom.

As I looked at it, it stood up on two of its legs, showing a pale flat underside. In its front legs it seemed to be holding a bit of grass or thin wire. I felt a sudden burning pain in my hand.

“Hell!” I exclaimed, shaking the creature off my hand. “The little horrors certainly can sting. I don’t know what they are, but they’re dangerous things to have in the garden or the house. “

When I looked in front of me I saw several hundreds of the little pink creatures crawling towards the walls of the tunnel. I shook a tin, and send a cloud of insect-killer over them.

We all watched as the little creatures crawled more and more slowly. Some of them turned over, weakly waving their legs in the air. Then they lay still.

“We won’t have any more trouble from them,” I said. “Horrible little creatures! I’ve never seen anything like them – I wonder what on earth they were?”

Later. We entered the new world, a beautiful place, where it is light, green-grass and many rivers.

The planet it is called Ygam, as we later found out. In this planet, a race of detached, intellectual blue giants, called Traags, live in abstracted peace. They spend much of their time meditating, sending their consciousnesses sailing over their planet’s surface in colorful bubbles. They merge and distort their bodies in a ritual called “Imagination”. They acquire their race’s collected knowledge through a metal induction device, ensuring that even their young children quickly become remote geniuses. Their world contains cruel predators, but little seems to touch the aloof Traags.

As a society, their only enduring problem seems to be the presence of a race they call Oms, a species of tiny pink-skinned bipeds brought back to Ygam as pets after a trip to a planet. Oms have a tendency to escape and breed in the wild at an alarming rate, and they steal food and destroy property. Frequent “de-Oming” runs are necessary to keep the population down, and some Traags debate the wisdom of keeping Oms as pets at all—back on their planet, they show signs of organized life, and it’s possible they may even be intelligent. From one side they seem like us.

We make them our friends and we soon discovered that they were brought here without their permission.

They live in some villages and their society begins to change and mature from a near-Neanderthal tribal state into a more cohesive group (that might actually challenge the Traags) as they learn to read Traag language and use Traag technology.

Now that we are their friends we are helping them with our knowledge and they are teaching us the Traag language.

We hope that one day will live like we were used to live back there on our beloved Earth. But until then we are learning and teaching....