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"I sketch your world exactly as it goes." -Arthur Foot
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The Revenge of The Martians

Aradhya Jain | Winner of the B.G. Pitre Science Fiction Short Story Contest, 2021 (Junior Category)

I am stuck underground, waiting for the military to finish the war. This is the story of humanity's greatest mistake. If I do not survive, at least someone may find this, if humanity remains. This is how we underestimated the Aliens, and almost destroyed ourselves.

They sent us hundreds of messages, but we ignored them. They tried to destroy the rovers in a dust storm to tell us not to send any more. They made the rovers get stuck in a sandpit and never come out. We just continued to send more. They even tried to send an ambassador to earth, but we destroyed the asteroid shaped ship, thinking it to be an asteroid for obliterating life. They finally thought it was the last straw when we sent humans out there.

"Xf nvtu sdfmbjn pvs qmbofu", said the general. "Uif fbsuimjoht bsf b ejthsbdf." (We must reclaim our planet. The earthlings are a disgrace.) "Xf tibmm buubdl uifjs Nbsujbo cbtf bu ebxo. Uifsf bsf pomz tjy pg uifn, boe pwfs gjwf ivoesfe pg vt. Uifz ibwf op xfbqpot." (We shall attack their Martian base at dawn. There are only six of them, and over 500 of us. They have no weapons.) "Uif cbuumf xjmm cf bo fbtz wjdupsz." (The battle will be an easy victory.)

And so they attacked. They kidnapped the human who was outside. The rest (leaving one

person behind) went to see the guy who had been kidnapped. They saw guns and bombs and then surrendered immediately. "BIB! Xf gjobmmz dbvhiu zpvs tqfdjft, uif obtuz jousvefst!" (AHA! We finally caught your species, the nasty intruders!)

"Can you understand what they are saying, Daniel?"

"It seems they are using some type of Caesar cypher to speak. It'll take me some time to decrypt it."

"Do it quickly."

"It seems they are saying that they have finally caught members of our nasty and intruding species."

"Tell them we had no idea of their existence."

"They are saying that if we had looked properly, we would have found large heat sources just slightly below the surface, and they will punish us for trying to exploit Mars for humanity"

Meanwhile, back at the base, the remaining person, Andy, was looking through the outside camera, and picking up every word the Martians said.

"We have a problem Houston.", he said, while relaying all he had received.

"Alert all military at once. We must prepare for the War of the Worlds"

And so they prepared. Andy kept collecting more information for humanity. He found that the Aliens

called themselves Buths and that they had a very good memory and were very good at making speedy spacecraft. In fact, they could cover the distance from Earth to Mars in ten days at their closest. At this point, however, they would take over sixty days to reach Earth.

"So what if they have good ships? They look safe enough. Just prepare to destroy their ships. Doesn't look like the ships have any weapons." This was the opinion of most military leaders, the keyword being most. Some countries were still prepared for a large interplanetary war; however, these were mostly underdeveloped ones and only India and the USA had the type of firepower required. Meanwhile, Andy was caught passing information by the Buths, and was captured like the rest. The two months passed in the blink of an eye. The Aliens then launched their first attack, while most countries were in ignorance, by dropping a Denial System¹, which burnt the skin of all people within 100 km, followed by an EBomb which disrupted all electronics and prevented any further accurate writing.

Sources

1. Hecht, Jeff. "Top 10: Weapons of the Future." New Scientist, 4 Sept. 2006, www.newscientist.com/article/dn9979-top-10-weapons-of-the-future.

Go Fish!

Vivaan Sood | *Runner-Up of the B.G. Pitre Science Fiction Short Story Contest, 2021 (Junior Category)*

“Go fish,” said Mayur with a smug look on his face. “I find it quite hard to believe that you don’t have any sixes. Where did they GO?” yelled Ashwini. Her voice echoed through the barren room. Save for two chairs and a table, the basement was empty. Two lightbulbs precariously hanging from the ceiling lit up three-quarters of the room, giving it a strange stewed-mango yellow colour. Aside from the bulbs, the dull screens of the pairs’ personal tablets were the only other source of light. Outside, the tuneless caterwaul of sirens droned incessantly, however, the siblings were unfazed.

“I heard they’re dropping a bomb,” said Mayur. “Which bomb?” asked Ashwini. “The Caloos. It can level a city”. Ashwini began to feel apprehensive. “Do we have enough supplies to make it through?” she wondered aloud. “If not, I’ll have to eat you.” Mayur said facetiously. “My P-droid would rip you to shreds if you so much as lay a finger on me,” she said. “And if you were to get past it, I’d knock your teeth out”. “Fine, I guess I’ll just have to eat Jub-Jub,” he said.

Jub-Jub was Ashwini’s prized pet Lotter. A small, yet fearsome creature, it resembled a weasel, except with bigger canines and a faster sprint. At this remark, Ashwini was left speechless.

The continuous sirens meant that the bunker was no longer safe as the missiles were coming. They needed to get to the aeropods. That was a lesson they had learned from losing their parents who had been killed in the second air raid when 3 Kilotons of Phosgene was dropped on the city, suffocating most inhabitants, including their parents. The teenagers had long stopped counting which air raid was currently raging outside.

They quickly packed up essentials. Nothing too heavy. Just dry food, battery packs, gas masks, oxygen pads, and left the building strapping on their night vision goggles.

Outside, the smooth black sky was the canvas to four red streaks of light, each gradually increasing in size. The whistle of missiles dropping stirred in everyone’s pulses, begetting a rising anxiety within each one.

Mayur threw an oblong disc which produced seven levitating steps leading up to a rooftop. As they were climbing up, the bombs reached impact. A thunderous boom shook the entire marketplace, disturbing pristine fruit pyramids and stalls.

The two were thrown forward and scrambled onto the rooftop. Ashwini urged, “Come on, we should keep moving”. “No no, let’s just sit and enjoy the view on this rooftop. You brought sandwiches, didn’t you?” he said sardonically.

The rooftop was no less crowded than the market place below. Jub-Jub ran ahead, snapping at terrified onlookers to make a path. As the pair made their way towards the aeropod, more missiles fell. The blast had spewed dust and debris, blinding many. A mist of Botulinum toxin in aerosol form descended upon them “I can’t see, I can’t see!” cried Mayur. Ashwini took out the gas masks, and strapped one onto both her and Mayur. She then hauled him into an aeropod and sealed the aeropod shut just in time to avoid the next barrage of missiles.

Mayur cleansed his eyes and washed his face. He breathed a sigh of relief and strapped himself in a chair. Ashwini unloaded all of her belongings, neatly placing them on the table, and began to prepare food. “I’ve got to say, that was close...” Their aeropod began to ascend towards the Exosphere. Below them, a fleet of fighter jets zipped, dropping chemical agents filled with Lewisite and Mustard over an already decimated and depleted city. Mayur shuffled another pack of cards. “How ‘bout another round of Go Fish?”

I Solemnly Swear To ...

Vivaan Sood *explains the principles on which the ‘exam pledge’ works and analyses its effectiveness*

An oath is a statement or promise made saying that you will tell the absolute truth. It is a solemn attestation of truth and expresses a specific intention. In the recently-conducted online exams, where the exams were held in ‘high security’ mode, an honesty code was also added for the first time. This was an addition to ensure that students too can take responsibility for their learning and assessment. But what is the effectiveness of an oath against cheating?

When students take exams without an invigilator present, they may find it easier to search for answers elsewhere or to discuss the question with others. Now in the middle of such ambiguity, what role does an oath play?

Promises or oaths are what are known as speech acts, commitments by merely saying specific words. While they seemingly have little binding power, research shows us that people do keep their word,

(Continued from Page 2)

even at a personal cost. These pledges contributed to viewing cheating as a negative practice, and studies have shown that not cheating is viewed as a simpler option with 94% of people keeping their promises after a prewritten promise¹. Moreover, sometimes people want to feel content and consider themselves morally superior by not cheating. These promises are effective because they allow us to enter into voluntary commitments for future behaviour, something which is an attractive proposition for most students.

Oath-taking also plays into the psychological concept of cognitive dissonance. This phenomenon arises when you do something that does not align with your thoughts or beliefs. Therefore, by writing a pledge, the concept of honesty sits in their mind, and when they cheat, they may feel more uneasy than they would have had they not written the pledge. Therefore, to avoid this internal turmoil, a student may avoid cheating altogether, simply as a result of writing down a few words.

However, oath-taking, of course, does not completely convince students not to cheat. In online exams, since students access the Internet with relative ease, uncertainties about copying and sharing open up and students themselves might not recognise their actions as dishonest. They may even rationalise what they're doing because others may be doing it too. Students may even cheat because they may think that the consequences are not too severe. And that too, only if they do get caught.

Therefore, there are merits and demerits to oath-taking prior to exams to discourage cheating. While it is not a completely effective preventive measure, there are certainly benefits to it, and it can reduce instances of cheating. However, to maintain the sanctity of some exams, oath-taking may not be the best overall solution, and there are other options to be looked at, such as advanced software and even creating questions that would require higher-order thinking.

Sources

1. https://direct.mit.edu/opmi/article/doi/10.1162/opmi_a_00027/5380/Most-People-Keep-Their-Word-Rather-Than-Their



Problem of the Week

In continuation of last week's problem, (Six Notes all Nice Ratios) we explored a six-point scale: shortest length to double that, with four lengths in between. In this week's problem the scale now has 12 points: shortest to double, with ten lengths in between. We are going to look for a closed and complete scale. The question is this: If we work in fractions, where 1 is the lowest note and $1/2$ is the highest, what would the other notes need to be so that intervals between any pair of notes were fractions from elsewhere in the set?

Around the World in 80 Words

Taliban fighters used whips and sticks on the Afghan women protesting their rule. Six Palestinian prisoners escaped an Israeli jail. A statue of Robert E. Lee, a general who led a Confederate army into the bloodiest battles of the Civil War (Battles of Antietam and Gettysburg), was torn down in Virginia after 150 years. Ford, the American car company, declared that it will stop making cars in India by 2022 in a blow to the government's attempts to encourage foreign manufacturers.

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First, have a definite, clear practical ideal; a goal, an objective. Second, have the necessary means to achieve your ends; wisdom, money, materials, and methods. Third, adjust all your means to that end.

—
Aristotle

What Have You Been Reading During The Lockdown?

Anansi Boys

Author: Neil Gaiman

Publisher: William Morrow

Published: 20 September, 2005

Anansi Boys is a story about two brothers, one divine and one mortal, who undertake an inter-dimensional journey to retrace their origins and cover up their father's (a god) mess. The story feels a bit like a spider getting drunk while spinning a thread and getting all tangled up in various literary genres while trying to make sense of the pattern he created. The web is a fable posing as a detective story posing as an embarrassing coming of age story mixed with fantasy and crime, put in a treasure chest and shipped off to the pirates of the Caribbean, where it decides to take a chapter's break in the realm of spooky ghost stories, before wrapping up as a social satire on the nature of love and happiness.

- Vivasvat Devanampriya

What Have You Been Watching During The Lockdown?

Bhuj - The Pride of India

Director: Abhishek Dudhaiya

Producers: Abhishek Dudhaiya, G. Khanuja

Release Date: August 12, 2021

This Hindi film based on the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 is a tribute to the bravery of the freedom fighters and the 300 local women who helped reconstruct a damaged air base, which was destroyed in combat. This film reminded me of a quote by John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country". It was the resilience of those women and freedom fighters that motivated the country to win the war against Pakistan. Though the film is filled with thrill and action, it also teaches us that there is nothing that women cannot do. It's a great film and I would strongly recommend this film, especially to those interested in Indian history.

- Divyaansh Surana

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