



### Probing Intellect Kills an Anomaly

The minor Council for Galactic Anomalies was meeting in stormy plenary session. The Honorable Leader of the Igon delegation stood.

Probing Intellect spoke angrily into the translator, head feather's erect and vibrating.

"It's impossible that my noble ancestors could have caused this Anomaly. I do concede that the crew were Igons. But," and Probing Intellect glared, shaking it's massive fighting claw while stamping one foot, "The ship was of Roontz manufacture, hauling freight, hazardous freight I might add, for the Rilkon Federation. The questions we must address now, before arbitrarily assigning blame for this Anomaly, is did the ship malfunction? Did the hazardous cargo erupt? Was it crew error? Should this council even concern itself with the fate of such a distant, insignificant species? The proposed mission will be a stupendous, expensive folly."

Probing Intellect preened, though the effect was lost on the non-avian races.

The Council's chairman, a dark, gnarled and tentacled creature named Bott, growled it's judgment.

"This Anomaly has affected an entire star system. The fourth planet is dead, barren. The second planet is a miasmatic swamp. Three races on the third planet exhibit symptoms of evolutionary skewing. One race of large reptiles is extinct, another race, an aquatic mammal, has mutated away from an opposed hand and thumb. And yet a third race has suffered hemispheric brain damage, evolving into a predacious, technologically advanced, ferocious culture. In time this third race could threaten the All. This council concedes that Igon may not be completely responsible for the Anomaly, but all loss claims were

paid to Igon interests, indicating that the profits of the voyage would have accrued to Igon. It is the judgment of this council that an expedition, crewed and financed by Igon, be dispatched to study and remove this Anomaly thereby allowing the surviving races to resume their normal evolutionary path."

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Sandy and the kids hid trembling in the closet, burrowed deep behind the winter things. Jim crashed drunkenly through the house, shouting threats and obscenities. Josh, four, was nearly catatonic. Little Cindy clung tightly to her mother's hand.

"What's wrong with Daddy, Momma? Momma, your bleeding, oh, Momma, why doesn't he just leave?"

"Shh, baby, just be quiet. Be quiet, and be very, very still." Sandy whispered, and hugged her daughter closer. Tomorrow he would awaken sick and contrite, but tonight he was just too dangerous. With her free hand she wiped away the bloody tears. Oh God, just let it end.

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Probing Intellect entered it's bridge, brooding, as the ship approached the star system. The scientists began their work as they glided past the affected primary before entering polar orbit around the third planet. Glaring Hate, competent First, conned the ship into orbit. Probing Intellect stood silent, it's feathers drooping, memories of the audience with Burning Logic, Igon's hereditary leader, still echoing in it's head.

"The Motherhen was wise when she pruned your sexual organs at birth." chirped the Leader. Burning Logic jumped, flapping his wings in anger. "You no longer represent the Igon race at the Galactic Council! Furthermore, your Nesthouse will finance this expedition, and you," Burning Logic stamped the floor with his fighting claw, "will command it!" The Leader turned his back to Probing Intellect, showing his disdain. "Now go, before I rip you apart and feed you to the Herds."

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The President entered the Situation Room, her aids trailing behind like a battleship's wake. The Joint Chiefs were already there, at attention. She went to her chair, eyes scanning the screens. Tall, dignified, she projected a kindly, grandmotherly image. But the Joint Chiefs knew better, she could be deadly as a cobra.

"At ease gentlemen, take your seats." Her voice, calm, mellifluous, was her greatest assets. Like oil on water, it calmed the room.

"General Shagin, please report."

The General, head of the Joint Chiefs, stood. He delivered his report in clipped, military accents.

"Madam President, at 2137 hours last night, Washington time, an orbital surveillance station reported a very large object approaching from sunward. At 0629 this morning we were able to rotate two recon satellites and took these photos." The General nodded, an aid activated a screen. An object filled the screen, obviously a space ship, obviously alien.

"This ship is in polar orbit. At 0823 today we detected particle beam activity from the ship, shortly thereafter people began exploding in Peoria, Jacksonville and Detroit. Three buildings caught fire in Houston and Seaworld is missing three dolphins. Internationally, there have been reports from South Africa, Indonesia and possibly Russia, although we can't be sure there. They probably think it's some kind of American plot."

The president steepled her hands, resting her chin. "How large is this ship, General?"

"Over five thousand feet long, a little over two thousand feet in diameter. A very large, very dangerous presence in our skies, Madam President."

"Can we kill it?"

The General grinned tightly.

"We have six ICBM's targeted, with four more being reprogrammed as we speak. They should be targeted within the hour."

The President leaned back in her chair. "This thing has destroyed American property and lives. Our duty requires us to take action. Besides," and her voice went hard, dangerous. "when someone slaps me, I slap back. Fire when ready, General."

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The ship was a hubbub of activity. The creatures had been scanned from orbit, proving unfortunately delicate. Courses of action had been proposed, rejected, modified, then proposed again. Probing Intellect was in conference with its' Chief Scientist, Scrolling Nodule. Like Probing Intellect, Scrolling Nodule had been emasculated at birth, becoming an it rather than a he. In squeals, chirps and screams, Scrolling Nodule reported to its' captain.

"We have found the Anomaly to be a concentrated sphere of conflicting matrixes, disturbing the radiant gamma flow from this primary. Extensive computer modeling suggests that a twenty second burst from the main energy cannon should disrupt the Anomaly, causing the discordant matrixes to lose cohesion and be expelled from the primary through normal solar burning. Great care should be taken both in targeting the Anomaly and ensuring that maximum power is delivered to the cannons. Once the radiant flow has returned to normal the inhabitants of the third planet should return to their normal evolutionary path. I would recommend a follow up survey in perhaps three Galactic years."

"Two questions, Scientist. What caused the Anomaly, and how soon before the effects of the burst affect the third planet?"

"The Anomaly was caused by the molecular explosion of the ship's cargo, a rather dangerous blend of Cesium and Tafana. Once the Anomaly is disrupted there will be some minor behavioral effects at once, although it will be years before the creatures return to normal evolutionary tracking. It's unfortunate we were unable to obtain live specimens, dissection would have been most interesting."

Probing Intellect hopped one legged, flapping it's wings in glee. This despicable mission was almost over, thank the Motherhen, and they could return home. Successful in it's mission, perhaps Burning Logic's anger would abate, allowing it's return to Galactic Councils.

"Number One! Remove us from orbit. Maneuver into optimum firing position. Divert half of ship's power to weapons. After firing the energy cannons we will approach the primary and recharge. Then we can leave this cursed system behind and return home!"

The Igon Spear departed planetary orbit and moved towards the sun. Behind the ship ten sparkling points of light emerged from atmosphere and followed the ship into deep space.

On the bridge a technician chirped incoherently, hopping frantically at it's station. Glaring Hate kicked it across the bridge with his fighting claw.

"Report!"

"Rockets!" it screamed "with nuclear warheads. Tracking us!" The tech began to chirp incoherently, again. Glaring Hate kicked, again.

"How many?" he chirped.

"Ten!" squealed the tech.

"Time to impact?"

The tech checked it's boards.

"Twelve minutes!" it squealed.

Probing Intellect grabbed the squalling tech with its' fighting claw and hurled it from the bridge. Hopping on two legs, flapping it's wings in frustrated anger it screamed "By the Leader's Holy Testes, we cannot escape, we have diverted half our power to the weapons! They have killed us, damn them, they have killed us! We should have nuked them into flaming oblivion, I knew it, I knew it!"

"Captain, listen to me." Probing Intellect looked into the calm eyes of its' First Officer. "We can escape. We will program the ship's computer to fire the cannons at the proper moment, then take to the escape modules. The missiles will impact after the cannons fire. Just take us a little longer to get home, that's all." Glaring Hate was

sexually Unmodified, stronger in some ways than his emasculated captain. Probing Intellect absorbed the calming strength.

"Very well, First Officer. Make it so."

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Jim walked outside, looked up into the clear sky. He felt calm, untormented. At last, the demons were gone. Cindy watched him, uncertain fear in her eyes. He smiled, and she ran to him, the fear gone.

He held her, tight.

"I love you, Daddy."

"I love you, too, baby."

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"Should we have tried to talk, instead of killing them?"

"I don't know, Madam President. I thought we were right but now... I just don't know."

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Probing Intellect grumped about in the confines of the overcrowded escape module. It's mission was a success, sort of. The Anomaly was destroyed, but so was a very expensive starship. Burning Logic would complain about that, no doubt. But the Galactic Council would be mollified, and that should take the heat off the Igon trading interests. Even Burning Logic should appreciate that. Should have just nuked them, it thought. Been a lot cheaper, quicker that way.

Probing Intellect settled in. It was going to be a long, uncomfortable ride home.