

Rebirth

By T. E. Stazyk

I'm telling you. It's not easy living on a pension. Especially when you used to be a government exohistorian. It's even worse when you were an exohistorian with unpopular ideas. They're taking care of most of the guys, but I was never one of "the guys." But I don't harbor any bitterness. At least I have my integrity and know that I'm right, even if no one else agrees with me.

Up until a few years ago, I was the lead exohistorian advising the exploration fleet of the PanGalactic Empire. My job was to do research on failed worlds. That was political speak for dead planets that had once been advanced civilizations. There's more of them out there than you might expect and the Emperor's staff was interested in those planets. They wanted to know what had happened. Let's face it, death of a civilization is a catastrophic and, unless you're an exohistorian, unexpected event. We wanted to understand what went wrong on those failed worlds because it might give us insights on what not to do on our worlds.

Even though I worked for the Science and Research Department, my office was at Imperial fleet headquarters. The fleet explored huge sectors of space, and officially, they were in search of knowledge. But don't let that fool you. You know me. I always say what's on my mind and that gets me in trouble, so in case you didn't know, the crews of those exploration voyages weren't only in search of knowledge. Everyone in the Navy knew that their real objective was to find planets with valuable natural resources. The second objective was to find uninhabited worlds that could be used to take some of the pressure off our home planets. Ever since they passed the Freedom of Procreation Laws, our population had exploded. Space and

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resources were at a premium and we needed new planets. That was the “knowledge” they were really seeking.

I don’t know, and I don’t want to know, what all went on out there during those explorations. They only called me in when they found evidence of a prior civilization.

Let me tell you a little more about dead planets. In my career, I never saw a dead planet that had simply been abandoned. It was usually horribly evident that the planet had been made uninhabitable, either by its sentient population willfully destroying it and themselves through wars, or, more frequently, through overpopulation and over exploitation of natural resources. That was one of the ways I used to get in trouble with my bosses. I’d tell them, “Look, we’re out there looking for planets where we can expand and grow and we’re finding evidence of other civilizations that failed because they couldn’t control their growth.”

But no one wanted to hear that. The official line was that history had proven that there was a technological solution to every problem and even abundant evidence of overpopulation and resource depletion wasn’t going to convince anyone to think about changing their behavior. But solutions had become harder to find, involved more tradeoffs, and were more expensive. And that’s why these navy exploration voyages found their way into the budget.

A lot of my friends thought that exohistory was grim and depressing, but I loved it. When we found a dead planet, we would sift through the geological, architectural and, where possible, documentary records. Inevitably, what we found was rarely a sudden catastrophe. There was usually evidence of a long period of warning signs that the planet’s systems were getting out of control. That’s why I was so vocal about our situation. Because we seemed to be on the same path as some of those worlds. But like I say, the Empire’s leaders and the people didn’t want to hear dire

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predictions and calls for sacrifice. The government wanted the people to be happy and the people seemed happiest when they were procreating and consuming.

One of the reasons I saw things differently than a lot of other people was that exohistory is the only branch of science that studies planetary systems as a whole. Most other scientists just look at certain aspects, such as geology, zoology or botany. But exohistorians study all life forms and how they interact with each other and with all of the planet's systems.

Believe it or not, we built up a lot of evidence demonstrating that individual planets are actually a single organism made up of many different physical components and life forms. Each of the discrete life forms on a planet is linked to the others. So just like all the cells in your body work together to make you, all of the organisms on a planet make up cells in the larger being of the planet.

We found evidence that all the organisms making up a planet actually generated an energy – like a planetary life force. My theory, which got me into a lot of trouble, was that the true ultimate goal of each organism on a planet was to support and nurture the planetary life force rather than its own individual physical entity. The physical body is just a shell.

I wrote a paper explaining my conviction that the goal of all life is to break out of its physical limits and to reunite with the life force of the planet. Ultimate progress for each individual organism meant liberation from its physical form.

I figured that the most perfect world was one in which all life forms had shed their physical form and consisted solely of pure positive energy. I think those worlds might be the stars.

I can hear you laughing, but we actually came up with techniques to measure a planet's energy. And guess what? We found that in the wrong circumstances, the positive energy within each physical form can be

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diminished and replaced by negative energy. That happened when a species lost contact with the others on the planet and only concentrated on the existence of its own physical form. The resulting negative energy would counteract the positive energy of the other species on a planet and this would often be the triggering event that brought about planetary death.

What makes the theory difficult to understand and accept is the fact that the life cycles of the different entities making up a planetary organism are vastly different. Some life forms, such as mountains, oceans and rivers have a lifetime billions of times longer than the more rapidly procreating creatures on some planets. So there was rarely any mutual awareness of each other among these entities.

When I published my theories, most scientists called me a crackpot. The ideas were simply not what modern science had determined was rational and logical. They did not fit into the existing scientific paradigms. But I had the data to prove it and I'd seen proof out there in the galaxies.

My boss told me to cool it, but I knew that if I could find and study a planet where life was dying but not extinct, I might get a chance to understand the mechanisms at work. Maybe I could redeem myself by figuring out how to prevent similar catastrophes from occurring on our worlds.

The big problem was that they only called me in when a world was completely dead, with no life at all. So it was hard to construct exactly what may have happened and to prove my theory about the causal effects of the extinctions being associated with a species fixating on their physical form at the expense of the positive energy.

Sure, I'd seen a lot of hints on the planets I'd studied. On worlds where one species had dominated and exploited the planet, there were often subtle clues that the other species had tried to intervene and save themselves. For example, there was evidence of mass extinctions of the

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offending species resulting from geological or weather upheavals. But what was missing was an incontrovertibly demonstrable timeline.

Finally it happened. Almost by accident. The deep space scouts had been exploring a fairly typical spiral galaxy containing an estimated million worlds at various stages of development. Out on one of the spiral arms, they found a perfect planet. All sentient life was extinct except for some geological life forms and a single primitive plant life form that was still surviving precariously. They thought it was a writeoff but it was just what I'd been hoping for.

The first thing we had to do was to stratify the planet's life forms. Sure enough, as on all other worlds, there had been a continuum of different kinds of life. At one end were the mountains and rocks with the longest life spans, further along were huge trees. At the other end of the continuum were mobile life forms. Those entities swam in the oceans, walked on the surface of the land or flew in the air, and some had very short life spans.

It was with one particular species at that end of the continuum that we found the problem. Ordinarily, all species on a planet interacted symbiotically, sharing resources and in many cases helping each other. But on this planet that species had learned to manipulate and exploit other species for its own benefit. They had lost contact with their non-physical positive energy and became focused solely on nurturing and protecting their physical bodies. None of this was a surprise. We'd seen similar patterns on other failed worlds.

What made this discovery such a success was that the species that destroyed this planet had left abundant evidence of their impact. Not only was their influence clear based on gross examination, even from space, they had also left vast amounts of recorded information which we managed to decode.

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With the help of our computers and technicians I was able to piece together a picture of what had happened. The planet had been highly stable since its formation. The species in question had emerged relatively recently. For a long time they mingled well with the other beings on the planet. But something had gone wrong. Unfortunately we never could pinpoint what exactly had happened. There must have been an event that triggered it and something happened to that species that turned them against the rest of the planet. Slowly at first, and then irrationally and uncontrollably, they started consuming resources and reproducing. Normal checks and balances no longer applied to them as their superior intelligence and mobility enabled them to artificially manipulate their environment so that they could live in harsh conditions, use technology to produce food beyond the natural capability of the planet and artificially extend their life span.

Our research showed clearly that the increasing hegemony of that single species led to a loss of its linkage to the positive energy of the planet's other life forms. Personally, I think that as the species acquired more power over the environment, they grew more interested in the material things they could make and acquire, and less interested in the spiritual connection they had with the rest of their world.

There was no doubt in my mind that all of the unusual things we found in the planetary history validated my underlying theory. But like everything else that was strange about this planet, there was another bizarre twist. Although it was abundantly clear from the history and artifacts the species had left behind that they were totally focused on the physical and material aspects of their existence, it appeared that they were also overwhelmingly interested in the non-material world as they defined it. It seemed that perhaps because they had lost contact with their spiritual base, they were seeking desperately to find a way to recover it, and during their history, especially towards the end, they had experimented with an

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enormous number of systems and philosophies that attempted to explain the world outside of their material experience of it. Their history, architecture and other documentation showed a tremendous fixation on attempts to explain the non-physical world, of which they may still have had some dim recollection. They seemed to have been organized into tribes with different beliefs about the non-material world. They built huge monuments to represent their beliefs and the planet's history was a monotonous chronicle of wars fought between different tribes of this species over what they thought were spiritual disagreements.

It was so complicated I had to assign a separate team to get an understanding of the variety of spiritual beliefs that seemed to have been prevalent on the planet. In the meantime, I spent my time on the most interesting find of all. In a few spots on the planet, a single, primitive plant life form seemed to have actually started regenerating. Life was coming back on a virtually dead world! All other life on the planet was extinct except for this delicate plant. The plant form was limited to a handful of locations on the planet and always appeared near a type of building whose purpose we couldn't determine at first. The challenge became trying to find the mechanism that was causing the rebirth of life.

The more we looked, the more convinced I became that the regeneration had something to do with the buildings. If we could find out the purpose of the buildings, we might be able to determine the mechanism at work. We did every kind of analysis we could think of, but found nothing. There were no chemical or magnetic anomalies or anything unusual. All we knew for certain, based on what we pieced together from studying the historical records, was that the buildings had been very controversial – there had been a lot of disagreement about them and they had been heavily fortified to protect them from attack and destruction.

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And then I found it. It was the biggest shock I'd ever gotten and they almost locked me up that day. I'd been digging deeper into the archives looking for an answer. They tell me they found me at my desk, staring at the readout saying, "They almost made it," over and over. I don't remember that, but I sure do remember what I found.

That species knew they were in trouble. They saw that their planet's systems were breaking down and other life forms were dying off. A few people saw links between what their own species was doing in terms of exploiting the planet and growing their population and the damage being done to other species. Mostly they were ignored, but eventually, a small, enlightened group within this species decided to try to make a difference. They felt that they had proved the connection between their species' overpopulation and over consumption, and the effect it was having on their planet. In spite of their material possessions, their quality of life was actually fairly low. Their world had become overcrowded and they had turned violent as they fought each other over increasingly scarce resources. The enlightened group warned that the only way to save their planet was to slow down their population growth and resource consumption. Individual sacrifice was needed for the greater good.

Of course they were very unpopular, but slowly they managed to convince others. Some of them curtailed their resource consumption and refrained from artificially prolonging their physical existences. Their science had permitted them to keep their physical bodies alive long after they were able to function independently. Eventually, members of this enlightened group built centers where an individual of the species could come and peacefully free itself of its physical form if it believed that it was not making a positive contribution to the planet. These centers were heavily fortified to protect them from the rest of the population who condemned them based upon the artificial belief systems that they had developed to

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explain the non-material world, and because of their belief that the physical existence of the body was of paramount importance. However, the enlightened group believed that without drastic action their species and their planet would die, so they continued to build and maintain highly protected centers where people could make that sacrifice.

And that was the explanation of the regenerating plant form. It only grew around the centers where members of the species that had destroyed the planet came voluntarily to die. By their sacrifice they were hoping to save their planet as well as their species. The irresponsible behavior of the majority of the members of this species generated enough negative energy that they did in fact cause the destruction and virtual death of this planet. However, I'm convinced that although the sentient species had almost completely severed spiritual ties with the rest of the planet's life forms, there was enough of a spark to let some sensitive life forms pick up the aura of concern and self-sacrifice by the enlightened group and the positive energy that emanated from the centers. It was enough to make at least one organism start to grow again. This small plant is thriving on the last trickle of positive energy from the dead species.

That's why I kept saying "They almost made it." If they had started sooner or had convinced more people that what they were doing was for the good of the planet, they might have reversed the process.

It took a while but all of our top scientists finally agreed with our findings. Getting the military to agree with our proposal for what to do was another thing altogether. We convinced them to leave it like we found it. That planet is still out there somewhere. I hope it's still recovering and someday a more enlightened civilization than the last one will grow up.

That was my big success. Proving my theory. But so far I haven't gotten them to understand that the theory applies to all planets and civilizations.