

Suicide Note

J. Harmon Grahn

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To Whoever, if Anybody, Finds This:

My name is Mud. It doesn't matter what my real name is. Mud will do. I was born on the Moon in the year 2014, where I still live 50 years later—if you can call this living—to parents well situated within the privileged strata, in those days, of extreme wealth and power. Now, just because I think somebody ought at least to leave a note behind, as to how it all happened, I am going to sketch out briefly why, after 50 years of futile struggle, the last remnants of humanity in the Solar System, so far as we know, are finally giving it up.

Fifty years ago, very few people on Earth were aware that we had bases on the Moon, Mars, and numerous outposts in other parts of the Solar System; or that our most advanced technologies were beyond the wildest imaginations of even the most imaginative among the billions of humans then populating planet Earth. The various “space programs,” in the U.S. and other “advanced nations,” were only decoys to divert the attention of the teeming masses from the real leading edge of our swiftly advancing capabilities. Come to that, even “nations” were decoys, whose only purpose was to mislead the masses in the illusion that they had any voice at all in the conduct of business anywhere on the planet; and to disguise the corporatocracy that was the real ruling power. Oh yes, we, the “power elite,” were in absolute control of everything on Earth; and as in the time of the Pharaohs, no one lifted hand or foot on the planet, except by our tolerance.

But then we lost control; and now no one lives on the surface of planet Earth anymore. In fact, nothing at all lives on the surface of planet Earth. All the continents, and all the islands, and all the oceans, are deserts now, void of any trace of life, anywhere.

It all happened so swiftly, and so suddenly, that it is still practically beyond belief—except that the brown and lifeless world now rising slowly beyond the far rim of the crater Tycho, as I gaze out across the Moonscape outside the airlock of my parked tractor, tells me once again that, unless some may still be sheltered in caverns within Earth's subterranean depths, Earth is as dead and lifeless as the Moon, and will remain so for perhaps thousands of years to come.

Maybe, after the last of the radioactive poisons that now pollute the planet from pole to pole have fully decayed, and become inert and harmless, life will once again germinate on that sterile world, and begin a new cycle of evolution. For there is water there; and where there is water, life is possible; and where life is possible, there is life. But for now, biological life is not possible on planet Earth, and there is no life on the planet—except maybe buried deep in the rock, beneath the roots of the mountains. Here on the Moon, we have not heard for many years from any of those who went underground on Earth; so we no longer know how it is with them.

Oh yes, we thought we had it all worked out. Everything was under control, and nothing could possibly go wrong. We were masters of the Earth, masters of the Solar System; and everything of any significance that took place anywhere, on Earth, or elsewhere, occurred because we planned it that way; and *there were no accidents*.

Some among us began to sense that not all was as well as we had imagined, following that fateful day in March, in the year 2011, when a magnitude nine earthquake off the east coast of Honshu, Japan sent a tsunami ashore that completely wrecked the nuclear power plant at Fukushima. In response to the earthquake shock, the reactors themselves shut down automatically, as they were supposed to do. But in the aftermath of the disaster, the critical issue became the large inventory of spent fuel rods that had been cycled through the six reactors at the plant since they had been commissioned, beginning in 1970, through 1979.

By March, 2011, almost two thousand tons of spent fuel had accumulated at the plant; all of which had to be kept submerged in constantly circulating cooling water, in order to prevent it from heating to the melting point, due to its residual radioactivity, spontaneously igniting, and releasing into the atmosphere large volumes of highly radioactive airborne fission products. At Fukushima, some of the spent fuel cooling pools were situated on upper floors of the buildings housing the reactors; and all of those buildings were severely damaged by the 2011 quake and tsunami. Removing the spent fuel rods from their precarious locations was a ticklish and time-consuming operation, that ultimately proved to be beyond the capabilities of those who attempted it.

The handling of spent fuel at Fukushima was typical of practices at nuclear power plants all around the world: so every nuclear facility on Earth was also the site of growing inventories of spent fuel that was mostly kept cool in pools of constantly circulating water. In fact, there had never been, since the first nuclear chain reaction was ignited experimentally in Chicago in 1942, a satisfactory protocol for disposing of spent nuclear fuel, after it had been cycled through a reactor core. Spent fuel simply accumulated, for the most part, at the sites where it was spent: with the intent that it should somehow be disposed of more permanently—“later.”

Now, it is *too late*; and the once beautiful blue-green jewel of planet Earth, burgeoning with literally uncounted species of teeming life, is a brown and lifeless desert world, in which anything living that touches its surface is doomed to die as well. There are still oceans of water on Earth, seasons, weather, snow, and rain; but they are all sterile, and void of life.

Who knows how long we might have soldiered on in the same old way, from one year, one decade, one century to the next, somehow keeping the precarious structure we called “civilization” patched together over the past several thousands of years? Our history is

punctuated by the successive rise and fall of civilizations, which have typically risen to some impressive height, and then, due to structural flaws, or internal stresses, collapsed: only to be succeeded by the raising of even more impressive constructions—that also collapsed eventually, in their turn. This time, however, due to a kind of fiendish “Cosmic collaboration” between Earth-humans and our Sun, all such structures on Earth have been swept away, as if they had never been. And when shall such another ever rise again?

We, the “power elites” around the world set the pieces in place, deliberately, systematically, persistently, over the course of nearly a century. We needed nuclear reactors in order to produce the components for the manufacture of nuclear weapons. During the “atomic age,” the only way to get into the game with the “big boys,” was to have a nuclear arsenal. So nuclear weapons proliferated among the “nations;” and we advertised the nuclear industry (that was essential for building nuclear arsenals) as a cheap source of power to turn the wheels of commerce. “Atoms for Peace,” we called it—having first proven the devastating effectiveness of nuclear weapons in war. But nuclear power was never cheap, by any means: because there was never a cheap way to dispose of the poisonous wastes it produced. And it was never an instrument of peace; and was ever an instrument of war.

Ah, how wise we were in our own eyes, and how little we understood the Cosmic forces amongst which our little planet so serenely and guilelessly danced around our Sun. We assumed Earth had always been as we found her in our time, and that our Sun had been shining benignly upon her, effectively “forever.” We were aware, but attached no significance to the fact, that our Solar System was passing through a particularly dusty part of the Galaxy at the time, and large volumes of interstellar matter were falling into the Sun, and to a lesser extent, into our planet as well. When that happens, the body receiving the influx of matter increases in mass. This is a process of accumulation that has been operative in varying degrees throughout the life of the Solar System; and the Sun, and Earth, have been growing in mass, and in size, all the while: as indicated by the gradual spreading of all the ocean beds on Earth.

The process of accumulating matter is gradual; but the growing body of a planet, or a star, makes adjustments to it at infrequent, several-thousand-year intervals, in sudden convulsions of extraordinary violence. Now in 20/20 retrospect, we can see that what began happening 50 years ago—and the aftermath still lingers—has happened a few times before in human experience, and has been described by those who experienced it. The Sun “burped,” and let out a blast of matter and energy that blew our planet, and its lunar satellite, into a somewhat wider orbit. So instead of $365\frac{1}{4}$ days to complete the circuit of a year, a year on Earth now occupies about 380 days; and the Moon no longer turns the

same face always toward Earth, as it used to do, but has acquired a more rapid rotation, with ten lunar days, instead of one, in the span of a lunar month.

This has happened before. There was a time when an Earth-year conveniently occupied 360 days exactly, instead of $365\frac{1}{4}$ days—which made it possible to have a very tidy calendar of twelve uniform months, of 30 days each. That was probably the period in which ancient geometers began dividing circles into 360° .

Legends passed down from sometimes prehistoric oral traditions describing such cataclysms had been summarily dismissed by modern scholars as products of primitive and superstitious imaginations: because of course nothing of the kind is recorded historically—perhaps excepting Biblical accounts of the Hebrew exodus out of Egypt, or the flood of Noah. These have been widely interpreted metaphorically, instead of literally; yet now that we have had a dose of the same medicine ourselves, we can read those earlier descriptions as records of what people actually experienced, in terms commensurate with their understanding of Cosmos at the time.

In any case, the year before I was born here on the Moon, the Sun “burped,” and everyone on Earth experienced cataclysms that far surpassed anything in historical human memory—one of the consequences of which was that a great many, if not every one of the 460-some nuclear facilities around the world were destroyed, and scattered to the winds; and their inventories of spent fuel abruptly and simultaneously stopped being cooled, and started boiling highly radioactive debris plumes into the atmosphere and oceans: with nobody around who were able to do anything at all, about any of it.

The follies of hubris are boundless: for although such catastrophes have happened in the past, this was the first time humans had deliberately seeded their planet with lethal time bombs, set to explode automatically, unless constantly prevented from doing so. The members of the “power elite” immediately took refuge in their subterranean cities, prepared long in advance, and lived for awhile, I suppose, in comfort and ease—while seven billions of their fellow humans perished on the surface; along with every living thing that grew in the ground, or browsed on the Earth, or flew in the air, or swam in the seas.

Whether any of them are still alive down there, we here on the Moon no longer know. It has been many long Earth-years now since we last heard from them. So here we are: the last remnant of Earth-humanity, so far as we know, marooned on the Moon. Earth, for all practical purposes, no longer exists. We have long since stopped having babies here: for who in their right mind wants to bring a child into *this* world? We have no home, no hope, nowhere else to go; and among us, suicide has lately become a popular practice.

So now that I've told my tale, as I watch the brown Earthrise across Tycho, I think I'll just open up the airlock here, with my helmet off, and breathe the refreshing lunar vacuum for a little while. Whenever, if ever, the radioactivity on Earth subsides enough to allow life to take root there once again . . . or maybe Mars, now warmed by a larger, brighter Sun, will once again become habitable—for somebody. If so, either way, I hope it works out better for them than it did for we former Earth-humans. Whoever you are, if you ever read this, I wish you well.