

from *And I Feel Fine*

When the asteroid was first discovered barreling passed Jupiter, measuring in at 11 miles wide, no one really could comprehend it. The world continued as it always did, rolling around its wonderful axis. Pictures were uploaded. Dogs barked. A child somewhere drew a smiley face and labeled it dad. A woman screamed. A bug was squashed. People died. People were born. People mourned and loved and hated and regretted and farted. It was a normal Tuesday.

It wasn't until another astronomer confirmed the story, and then a famous astrophysicist found a way to explain it clearly, desperately. And then his remarks were re-tweeted and re-blogged and finally picked up by news networks, the same AP phrasing repeated ad nauseam. Something about a crushing, obliterating impact. Something about scientist prodding us for years to invest in worldwide detection and deflection programs. Something about denial.

But slowly, yes, slowly, and painfully, people began to notice. At that point, it was about four months out. An asteroid we had no idea existed would mean our total, worldwide extinction? We would go the way of the dinosaur? Impossible. And then, in fact, nobody believed it.

This is not something that should actually happen. The probability was just too low. We had too much technology. Maybe in five million years. It's something that our children's great, great, great, great, great—to the infinity—grandchildren would have to worry about. And, really, let's all be honest, something else would have killed us off by then anyway. This is nonsense, really. Utter nonsense. We couldn't all be obliterated.

Could we? And then arrogance set in. Disgust even. We have an atomic bomb. Couldn't we just send that into space? Haven't there been movies about this?

A doctor wrote an op-ed piece in the New York Times relating it to end of life care. If the world was a person, and that person was his patient, how would he recommend they go? Fighting the cancer (asteroid) with treatment (nuclear bombs)? Or enjoying the remaining days with dignity and love? The article received well over a million comments, opinions ranging like a spectrum of light.

Paleontologists compared us to the dinosaurs with subversive smiles, almost as if they were excited to compare events, as if, afterward, they could argue, evaluate both the events, and finally prove each other's theories right or wrong.

Computer and technology enthusiasts remembered Y2K and scoffed.

Religions came out of the woodwork with response. Some argued there was a savior among us. He would come to our aid, revealing himself as the son of God. One religion blamed the greedy, corrupt nature of our society. One religion blamed women for reaching beyond their "natural role." One religion blamed homosexuals. One religion blamed everyone for the destruction of the environment, which inevitably drew the asteroid toward it because of magnetism (or something like that). One religious leader claimed that this waiting period before the absolute death was reminiscent of purgatory. One religion was totally cool with everything that was happening, because God was the one that was making it so, and those that *believed* would be saved, so relax, man. One person claimed that this was what the prophecy of Noah's Ark was all about, and he began building it. One person hugged her newborn child, wishing she just had a little bit more time with him.

Big, secret government meetings occurred all around the world. Men sat around round tables with perfect posture postulating solutions. They brought in experts with charts and flow diagrams and predictions. They brought in trusted advisors. They brought in religious leaders. They brought in psychics. They brought in anyone that could provide any information. They all gave opinions. They all gave ideas. They all said,

I can't believe this is happening. They all said, The human race must live on. They all said, I have to get back to my family.

Every country made decisions. As if they had some control. They made plans, back-up plans, plans to back up their back-up plans. Grasping at any idea that could help save their people. Some countries decided to go underground, others decided to go into the air. All decided to meet.

All of the countries sent leaders. Of the 7,095,217,980 people in the world, about 300 people were in the room representing 196 countries, from all seven continents, crossing all five oceans. Only a handful of women were present. With nearly 6,800 languages spoken throughout the world, no one was surprised that English was the official language of the meeting. It was a closed meeting. No media. No recording devices. Thank you.

Everyone was civilized at first. People were seated next to their flags and interpreters. People nodded courteously as others spoke of plans and representative opinions. But everyone wore civility as a thin mask. Since the world was ending, the norms, the alliances, imploded. Those that never attended United Nations Summits, due to political reasons, attended this meeting and wanted discourse. Representatives from Kosovo, Taiwan, even Palestine were sent. Even the Pope attended, representing Vatican City. Those that tended to remain polite or silent at the Summits, due to the size of their country or their allegiances, wanted the space, the respect to speak their mind. Those that inherently dominated the meetings held fast to these traditions. What started as one speaker at a time, devolved into mass murmuring, turned into yelling, ended in all out panic. No one knew what to do. No one could agree on anything other than the need to continue living. But how? Should they try to destroy or deflect the asteroid with an atomic weapon? And by whom? There were only so many resources. There were only so many people that could continue on in some sort of capacity, either sent into the air or buried under ground. Ideas were thrown around like bombs. No conclusions were made. There would be another meeting. This meeting was adjourned.

In the private sector, companies met with companies who met with clients who met with experts. Everyone set in effect their Disaster Recovery Plans. Companies were backing-up data to back-up systems where they would turn around and back-up those systems again. There were so many copies of copies of other copies that they sent to vaults known to withstand tornados buried deep in the Rocky Mountains and other mountains. No matter what—from stock portfolios to sports paraphernalia, data and more data regarding virtual money to government metrics on everyone—it would all be retained.

Tribes in the remotest reaches of the Vale do Javari, still housed in the lush expanse of the Amazon, remain uncontacted by the world, and thus, carry out their daily existence in straw-roofed huts, flanked by banana trees and shielded by jungle, unaware—some would argue blissfully while others obliviously—that destruction was inevitable. Or maybe they did. Or maybe they knew all along it would come. But perhaps they assumed it in the form of a bulldozer. Maybe the form didn't matter at all.

Everyone could see the asteroid piercing white in the sky both day and night, like a sparkling moon. People began to rush and then slow and then rush again, an accordion of breath. No one knew what speed to exist in anymore. Take care to really take it all in. But do it quickly; there wasn't much time.

The hours before contact, there was a collective silence, as if breaths around the world were being held. But that was still many months away. Everyone was left to count the days until then.