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The Odds

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The Odds

Kyle Long

Every day I get up at 6 o'clock, drive thirty minutes to the satellites, and get comfortable inside the small tin shack sitting alone in a vast expanse of field. The satellites look like strange trees, growing tall and alone in the grass, reaching for the sky. In a way, that is what they were doing. Every twelve and three-quarter seconds, a highly concentrated infrared beam is violently shot into the unknown. This beam contains carefully chosen aspects of human culture, language, and intelligence, packed tightly into an invisible wave of light traveling through the cosmos, desperate to find a being capable of understanding its message. As well as sending a message in a bottle out into the universe, the satellites carefully wait and listen to what the universe has to tell us. Sadly, Earth's own protective layers of the atmosphere hinder our ability to listen to the seemingly random cosmic radiation.

Before I came out here, I worked for the military, deciphering enemy codes and supplying my country with the upper hand against the Russians. I was good, too. I took pride in my work and found I was capable of demystifying most languages, tricks, or ciphers thrown my way. I grew arrogant over time and began to realize that I was one of the single most important members of the military. Without me, our ships would be sunk, our planes shot down, our troops bombed. I provided my country with an edge unmatched by the rest of the world. I fully understood the leverage I had. The secrets I had decoded gave me enough power to do what I had always wanted to do in the military. Quit.

It was never about moves, countermoves, or strategy for me. Of course, I regret the loss of life in the war, but my only real motivation for my life in the military was my need to solve riddles. God knows I am the most horribly selfish person to ever be awarded a medal of honor for outstanding service to my country. I did it all for myself; all because I love the way it feels when I solve a puzzle that nobody else can even begin to contemplate. As soon as I was awarded the medal, I knew I had all the leverage I needed to leave. As the most valuable intelligence asset, it was not easy to convince my superiors to let me leave alive, but blackmail can get you a long way.

After entering civilian life, I found everyday life depressingly boring, and I felt myself longing for another puzzle to pass the time. On Easter day, I was dragged to church by a friend and forced to sit through a religious lecture that I found quite ridiculous. However, as the pastor droned on, my mind came across the tantalizing idea of God. The reason religion exists at all is because of mankind's obsession with finding meaning in chaos. I immediately saw the connection between this obsession and my own, and I decided I was going to do what every religion merely pretends to. A few quick calls to some old friends got me the set up I needed. Now I'm here, in the endless fields and rolling hills of South Dakota.

Every day I get up at 6 o'clock, drive down a dirt road made just for me, and set myself up in the tin shack I call an office. A gray, nondescript metal machine sits in front of me and spits out an endless roll of thin paper filled to the brim with tiny black letters and wavy lines. I am no luddite, but I think more clearly with reliable, old school gadgets. For hours at a time, I stare intently at these chaotic runes and lose myself in thought. Twice a day, I take a solitary run through the countryside to maintain my physical health, but my mind remains firmly planted in that tiny room no matter how far or long I run. I can see patterns where the average person sees monotony, but my mission to find meaning in the stars is the hardest puzzle I have ever taken on.

2 Long

I know that various scientists and alien conspiracy theorists attempt the same goal that I have, but even if the essential truths of reality dropped into their hands, they would not be able to distinguish it from the endless stream of nonsense caused by various galactic processes.

The day it happened was cold, dark and exactly the day that I relish coming to my little prison and feeding my obsession. An “a”. An “h”. An “f”. Several spikes in the spectrographic chart indicating ultraviolet emissions in a pulsing, semi-rhythmic interval. Curious... It was a pattern I had never seen before and I was almost sure it was a purposeful message. I leaned closer to the paper rolling towards me and studied it closer. Just as I was contemplating all the possible meanings and interpretations of the data, I noticed an unmistakable word at the top of the printer. It repeated itself over and over again in plain English, saturating the sheet of paper with its repetition. “God God God God God.” Over and over again the word repeated itself until it began to seem like it was merely gibberish. The waveform began to peak at regular intervals with clear intention. I stopped working and simply watched the word print out for ten seconds before the data suddenly and inexplicably returned to a random sequence. The same old chaotic randomness returned to the letters and the waveform again and the machine continued as it had for the six years before that moment.

To this day, I am not sure if I made the right choice when I burned the paper. No matter how hilariously or astronomically improbable the message was, it was not impossible to explain with logic. Given endless time, possibilities, and even multiple realities, one universe has a lonely man by himself in a small shack in South Dakota receiving a message from the great unknown that coincidentally mimics human religion. That man is me. No matter how badly others might want to see this message as proof that the vast expanse of open space above us contains meaning, I can only see it from the perspective of a scientist and a man of logic. Simply put, “God” is an English word for a deity created in the mind of men. The idea that coherent knowledge is being sent to us from something up above is even more ludicrous than the fact that arbitrary radiation from space printed a random three letter word fifteen times in a row. And this is a fact. Because that is what happened. An event less likely than any other we can conceive of was witnessed by one person who decided not to share with anybody else. If there are those who believe in the existence of a greater power on faith alone, then what good can come of showing them false proof? At least that is how I see it.

So here I sit, early in the morning, still alone. I have knowledge of an event that the majority of the population would regard as undeniable divine evidence. I have that knowledge, yet I tell not a soul and forever choose to keep this secret to myself. Perhaps I will go to hell.