

ETs and Trees
by Robert Rietschel, June 3, 2023

So many people claim to have seen UFOs spying on us. Let's just play along and go for a ride on one of those UFOs. Here comes one now; hop on.

The Captain is asking the Science Officer for a report on intelligent life on this planet. "We've been doing recognizance for over a decade and Command Central wants a report. Tell me what you've found. I want to make sure we don't sound like we've been goofing off. We need to come across like the serious explorers that we are."

The Science Officer began his narrative by clarifying what intelligence was according to Command Central. "We are to find self-perpetuating life forms that live in harmony, adapt well to their environment, and have enjoyed enduring success. I am happy to report we have found such a species: Trees. While there are many life forms on this planet, far more than most places we have explored, there are only a few examples of non-predatory life forms. One that stands out is the trees, the most ancient of which is the Ginkgo. They have survived ice ages. They are found almost everywhere living in peace. They have great diversity and tolerate that diversity with no direct conflict among themselves. They do compete for light and soil, but it is what we would consider friendly competition. We extraterrestrials might compete in races to see who is fastest. These trees seem to compete to see who is tallest, or who is broadest. Some seem to compete in terms of who can survive the longest. Some trees are three thousand years old! The other life forms are nowhere close to this species.

"I will have to report that this advanced life form seems to have many natural enemies. There are six-legged beetles and termites that can destroy the trees. Some trees have developed natural defense mechanisms to ward off the six-legged predators, but the most destructive life form is the four-legged species. They have developed specialized weapons to attack the trees. They sever the trees from their nourishment system called roots. Once severed the tree is dismembered and turned into small pieces that are sometimes turned into paper and other times something called lumber. These four-legged pests assemble the lumber into domiciles and taunt the trees by placing the domiciles right among the very trees that they have dismembered. It isn't all that surprising that some trees take revenge by falling onto those domiciles and destroying them. I haven't been able to decide if this is a character flaw on the part of the trees or just a natural defense mechanism."

"The four-legged pests have a weapon called fire and they have used it to clear the land of trees. Once cleared, they plant a single species of vegetation, and they allow no diversification to occur on that land. It remains totally devoted to a single life form. In all of our exploration, I have never seen a species that failed to appreciate the advantage of biodiversity, but these creatures seem to thrive on favoring one species over others. It seems to spill over into their own species as there are tribal wars constantly among these four-legged animals. There seem to be favored and disfavored versions of the four-legged. It is all most illogical Captain."

The Captain shook his head. "This is a sad place. So many life forms to study and so little intelligent life. This is surely an outlier in the Universe. It seems that symbiosis is a foreign concept here. We have found species working together to survive just about everywhere we've explored, yet here we find just the opposite."

The Science Officer responded. “They have a spoken language, and they have a word they like to use called dominant or dominance. They speak of their genes as having dominant traits and those are considered desirable. They seem to value tribes that dominate other tribes more than they value tribes that assist other tribes. So illogical. I worry that Command Central will think that we are making this stuff up. It is so anomalous. It defies the universal imperative to join forces to survive and thrive in the hostile environments of the universe. I fear I may be reduced to kitchen duty after I file this report.”

The Captain nodded. “It might be so were it not for our video evidence. We have reams of video evidence demonstrating the attack on the trees. The area they call the Amazon basin has lost so much forest that we have visual evidence from our altitude that shows how much intelligent life has been destroyed by the four-legged creatures in the decade we’ve been studying this planet. I think that will make Command Central believe such a planet exists. I suspect this place will be blacklisted on the star maps and left to its own devices. I pity the trees. Is there nothing we can do for them?”

The Science Officer had some words of encouragement. “Our study of the history of this planet is that mass extinctions have occurred repeatedly. Some after meteor impacts, some after volcanic activity and others after ice ages. The trees have survived while the animal species have largely vanished, and different species have taken their place. There used to be much larger animal life forms, but those are all gone. Those were four-legged too, so the logical expectation would be that the current four-legged pests will suffer a similar fate and the trees will have to await the next cycle to see if a life form with cooperative survival instincts develops.”

The Captain contacted Command Central and requested a meeting with the Scientific Council. They were ready to file their report.

[The four-legged pests are the humans who have done a great deal of harm to the planet we are dependent upon for our existence. We have opted for short-term solutions over long-term solutions kicking the can down the road for the next generation to “just deal with it.” We are nearing a tipping point. Things will evolve to survive in what we leave behind, but there won’t be as many options left for those folks to work with. We will have exhausted many options. Would an outside observer suggest that we lack intelligence?]

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