

Exposed

Back then, I voluntarily entrapped myself in the prison-like, unwelcoming room. I resided in an artificial area saturated with shadows that weaved between massive mounds of overly sophisticated equipment. A myriad of various instrument cables hung in an untidy heap that resembled a cluster of undernourished anacondas. The doctor's office scent of powdery latex gloves permeated the air, which mingled with the headache-inducing odor of Isopropyl rubbing alcohol. White walls stood stiff as if at attention, an effect that merged with the retina scorching fluorescent light, and Antarctic temperature to create a detached atmosphere. Black, white, and gray governed the color palette of my world. I slumped forward in a stainless steel rolling chair, with my chin pressed against the thoroughly disinfected surface of the lab bench in front of me. A pool of saliva aggregated on the table while I continued to respire, snorting with each breath taken. A sudden massive, but seemingly distant noise obstructed the almost vacuum-like silence of space that manifested itself within the closed walls. This caused me to shift back to consciousness. My unfocused eyes immediately widened, and fixated on the beaker in front of me.

My hippocampus still retains the 24-hour footage of that particular day in 1945. The sixth of August, more specifically. The Day. Nobody ever warned me of the possible side effects of a discovery, and because of this, I lost the purity of my being on 8/6/45. The happenings my eyes witnessed on The Day shackled my entity to the confines of my living quarters. I became an unsociable recluse after the event. I couldn't destroy the blissful ignorance of my peers with the infectious images I encountered. My mind never recovered from the exposure, and my soul remains soiled.

It all began on the fifth, when I ventured into my backyard to trim the hedges, which by then resembled a rancid mendicant's beard. As I strolled across the dirt pathway that led to my shed, I couldn't help but notice the mosaic of pebbles decorating the trail. The miniscule stones appeared to have come from outer space. That's what I thought when I first spotted them. After all, many chattered about odd objects plummeting from the sky in the forties.

The stones looked alien, and strangely alluring with their immaculate spherical shapes that gleamed with luminescent color. Actually, they resembled Collector's Edition marbles. The \$50 kind. The one with the largest radius (called the Shooter, in the marble game) seemed the brightest, reflecting a warm, amber hue. The less massive pebbles that lay scattered around this stone appeared more dim in luster, but just as vibrant in shade. The menagerie of variance enthralled me. My eyes revolved around the amber mother rock, carefully examining its clinging infants. One appeared red-orange, like a ruby mixed with a hint of citrine. Another contained elaborate swirls of sapphire and topaz. But only one particularly caught my attention. It stood relatively close to its yellow mother, and consisted of a multitude of colors. The pebble most closely resembled a blue opal. It contained bits of lush, green jade, and airy wisps of marble, but translucent aquamarine constituted 70% of the sphere. All of a sudden, a strange, avaricious feeling came over me and caused my hand to snatch the thing right up from the ground. I had to. My brain conjectured that someone plotted to emerge from the untrimmed bush and steal the precious jewel, so my hand habitually acted. Now it was *mine*.

I marched back to my lab triumphant, cradling the delicate sphere tenderly in the palm of my hand. For hours, I studied its exterior, and combed through texts to uncover

its possible origin, but my efforts remained futile. My only findings included the diameter of the sphere, which measured five millimeters, and its weight, which rounded to 0.2 grams. When I grew weary of searching, I placed it into the beaker, and drifted straight into the REM stage of rest in my uncomfortable, metal chair.

As I stated earlier, a noise that echoed from a presumably remote location awakened me the next day, on the sixth. The sound, which resembled muffled thunder, seemed to have come from the pebble. I gazed through the glass, and watched the stone as it sat innocently inside the beaker. *It couldn't have made a sound, it just couldn't*, I thought to myself. After pondering for a while, I decided to inspect it under my microscope, which took me almost half an hour to plug in, because a massive jumble of electrical snakes blocked the outlet. When I finally placed the pebble under the microscope, a brand new dimension emerged in front of me.

Things moved. Life existed within the sphere! Organisms flourished elsewhere while we called ourselves unique. I felt celebratory. I felt like I discovered fire. I wanted to tell *everyone*. But I chose not to. I just zoomed in. The living things reminded me of ants in the way they moved about busily. They looked like specks, but every single one seemed to have a mission, or a purpose of overwhelming importance. The little beings built mounds that they entered and exited regularly. Like termites. Their mounds towered upward, seemingly competing in height. The abundant figures all formed the same shape, as if somebody used a stencil to reproduce each creature from one prototype. They consisted simply of naked skin, with sparse patches of hair on their apical side, and moved around by utilizing two lower appendages in a successive order. Only the pigment of their skin differentiated these animals from each other. Like species of pork.

Some possessed a dark coloration, and others appeared light, but their thorax, abdomen and appendages varied in hues that came off as unnatural. They seemed programmed, with a minimal ability to make judgments, and probably only possessed a 1:40 brain to body ratio. Due to their lack of intelligence and unattractiveness, making contact, even for the purpose of enslavement, would have been a fruitless endeavor.

I sighed, and shifted the slide on which the sphere rested slightly to the left. The scene completely transformed and I suddenly understood everything. I understood, because I saw nothing. The object “nothing.” Something swept all matter away in a relatively vast perimeter. Something that left a trail of haze, and annihilation. When I looked further outside of this circle of destruction, I found mounds leaning outward. Mounds, and an immense sea of junk that once meant something to the savages. Even further from there, the scene appeared as if somebody dropped a rock onto an anthill. Creatures scattered in all directions, and a sense of panic arose within me as well. I felt helpless, because I knew. Shrieks of pain and devastation reverberated through the sphere, and twisted their way into my ear canal. Some of the creatures collapsed, and lay with their abdomen parallel to the ground. Others tried to lift and drag them away from the decimation, the way worker ants carry found items twice their size. Many lost limbs and still prevailed, trailing behind them a terrible lane of red. Thousands just froze on the ground and never moved again. All throughout, I sorrowfully remembered the muffled sound of thunder.

When the scene proved as too much for me to bear, I pulled the slide even further to the West. There, I became a witness to a cheering population of brutes. The organisms traveled through their communities in a calm, but upbeat manner like nothing affected

them. They all congregated in an area, where they tightly packed themselves together and surrounded a single creature. The population flocked around the being the way worker bees gather around their queen. At once, following the lead of her highness, they all emitted a prolonged, jovial buzz.

The scenario left with me equivalent feelings of disgust, and angst. Making a discovery of such caliber stood at the very top of my list of ambitions, and yet, it evoked within me a sense of intense dissatisfaction. The immorality of the tiny residents in the marble world tainted my soul, and still I can't forget. The thoughts of awe and wonder that I associated with the word "universe" vanished. After breaking past the hypnotizing brilliance of the sphere's surface, and examining its rotting core, I no longer valued its possession. I wrapped it in plastic, and sprinted outside with the Sphere of Malevolence as if it contained a contagious disease. I returned it to its origin. It was the third pebble from the amber mother stone.

(© Cindy Orosz. Reprinted with permission/FlaglerLive.com.)