



SURPRISE FROM OUTER SPACE

a short story by
Marco Bigliuzzi

Toposodo Publishing

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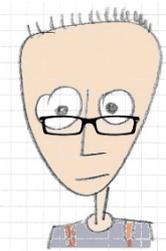
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Cover art by the author

About the author



This bloke on the left is Marco Bigliuzzi.



Marco is a cartoonist, animator and director, paints some pictures, writes some music and plays drums with Parafulmini toon-rock band,. He is one of the founders of Toposodo Independent Productions and Animation Studio, set in Pisa, Italy, where he directed the animated TV series *Bird Squad* and *Taratabong*.

As a writer, Marco worked on several scripts for animation and a bunch of other stuff, including short stories. You may read just one of these in the following pages.

<http://marcobigliuzzi.wordpress.com>

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Surprise from outer space

I had heard predictions and conjectures for years – many years – but when it actually happened it was very different from how anybody might have guessed.

It's not that the other hypotheses – the ones which didn't occur – were all wrong, all rubbish. It's that when it happened, it happened in a different way.

Everybody had always thought that it would have been an asteroid or a comet – a very oversized stone or hailstone. In the stone occurrence especially, huge craters and earthquakes and columns of aftermath dust, which would have obscured the sun in thick and baleful clouds for centuries, were predicted. Extinction of most part of life forms. Civilization canceled by an oversized stone.

Instead, a snowball came.

I'm not joking. It was frozen and crystallized water. A snowball indeed, and even not so compact: an obviously denser core, but the rest was fresh, crunchy, full-of-nothing powder snow – emptier than fuller, really.

How did it come out is still a mystery. A scientific mystery, I mean. Origin apart, now we know many things about it. For instance: why didn't it end up melting down as snowballs do approaching the sun? Why didn't it dissolve in space way before getting here? There's still those who state that it'd have evaporated by entering the solar system – it'd have sublimated as it was coming closer. Just what comets do, right? But comets are small and have no atmosphere.

The fact is that this Outer Space Snowball was almost as big as our beloved Earth.

The fact is that this Cosmic Snowball had an atmosphere.

Being not that dense, it didn't have as much gravity as our beloved Earth – it had enough anyway to afford a tiny atmosphere. And – as earthly atmosphere kept our beloved Earth protected against small meteorites, cosmic radiation and a bunch of more junk coming from out there – Snowball too was kept protected by its own tiny atmosphere. And never forget that Snowball was arriving from the coldest cold you can imagine. Snowball was pretty frozen.

Even if it had been spotted some months before, all these details were discovered when Snowball came close enough to us, roughly at the outskirts of Uranus' orbit.

Big turmoil everywhere. Excitement. Ufologists, new-age gurus, mystics, religious leaders – all unleashed themselves. Broadcast networks gone mad. The web exploding. Heart-stopped astro-physicians.

Not at once, of course – not everything all together, I mean. We had to wait that Snowball passed Jupiter for the marketing gurus and trend mongers to start their merchandising campaigns. Little souvenirs, gadgets: small telescopes, synthetic snowballs. When Snowball reached Mars, magazines and other publications had already been released, with titles such as: *"The Sign Of The Lord From The Universe Depths"* or *"A Planet As White As The Pope"*.

Even though some anxiety had immediately started spreading among the people – the threat of a collision course with our beloved Earth – it was at this point that catastrophism skyrocketed.

Conferences about the unlikely catastrophe.

Meetings about the possible catastrophe.

Conventions about the likely catastrophe.

Summits about the certain catastrophe.

Millenarists everywhere.

It has to be stated: this time they'd been right. Even if it didn't go as they predicted.

What happened then? It melted. I mean: when it came close enough and entered our atmosphere – which was thicker and denser than its own – it begun overheating. The sun heat – closer and closer – plus our beloved Earth's atmosphere and Snowball eventually followed the fate of snowballs.

No huge craters! No venomous clouds! No doomsday earthquakes!

An enormous water bomb, though.

That's right: try and imagine a snowball almost the size of the earth (80,37% of equatorial diameter) how much liquid state water represents. It's a fact that the most part of it evaporated and escaped in outer space. It's a fact that, core apart, it was quite rarefied. Still, it was a *huge amount* of water.

All this water was spilled onto earth as a Galactic Water Bomb. Just a fraction of its frozen core – a 11,7 km diameter stone – arrived intact and got stuck in the Pacific Ocean – as shown in the very last worldwide broadcast images – offshore Easter Island.

The scene was dreadful: this immense disc, which had got closer and closer, bigger and bigger in the sky over panicking people, over people praying the most imbecile litanies, this disc that had obscured everything in less than one day – sun, moon, stars, everything – dissolved in a steam cloud as in the gigantic vent of a pressure cook.

Then, water came.

The rest is known. The water mass – because it was just pure, fresh water – that was poured on our beloved Earth – about two billions point seven cube kilometers – raised the sea level by 3698 meters. That's why today the land above the sea level represents only about the 1,73% of the whole planet.

Highest Alps and part of Caucasus in Europe. Himalaya. Tibet. Kilimanjaro. Some land in Cameroon. The Andes. Peak-Islands between Alaska and parts of Canada. Parts of Colorado and California. Parts of Mexico. Mount Fuji in Japan. Parts of Indonesia. A couple islets in Antarctica.

All the rest is underwater – towns, countryside, factories, harbors, airports, railroads. Cars. Universities. Theaters.

Australia vanished. Great Britain, too. India, too. Much, much more stuff, too, to be honest.

I am up here from the very first day – before that day indeed. I am an astronomer of the Mauna Kea Observatory, in the Hawaii. The observatory is on the top of this asleep volcano.

My life hasn't changed that much. I was already isolated in the middle of the sea; the difference is that now the Hawaiian islands are all gone with their volcanoes, except this one –

the highest one – and the Mauna Loa, which comes out of the water twenty five miles south, and that the ocean is much nearer. I can go down on my bike, following the old meandering road, for 500 meters in height that separate me from Slipper Bay. It's a small cove born after the cosmic deluge. I named it that way after having lost my slippers the first time I went there, one month after the Snowball hit.

It continued raining all that month long. All the vaporized water during the melting of Snowball that remained in the air had to come down somehow. A relentless and fierce rain. When finally it stopped and the sun came out, I went down the cove fishing.

All of the people at the Observatory who were not on vacation, or who didn't want to go anyway, were saved. Our apartments at a lower level were swept away with everything else, but we had gathered here on the top, inside the domes of the telescopes. Eighty nine people total.

About half of them committed suicide in the next month, while rain was pouring, and some ten others vanished in the following months trying to "go away".

Twenty years have passed. I have always kept in touch with some colleagues or other survivors by crock radio sets powered by wind or solar generators. A bloke in a Bolivian observatory, another in Colorado. A Tibetan one. Someone else here and there.

There have remained just people and things that were on high mountains and hardly had something to deal with sea. Nevertheless, some twelve years ago the news arrived: for the first time after Snowball, someone of a land had reached another land by sea – a guy from the Alps had gone to British Columbia on a big boat made of spruce tree. A boat of Christmas Trees. Since then, some other transoceanic trip have taken place – but here we have seen nobody yet.

That's no wonder, I think I'm in the most isolated place in the world. As a matter of fact I have an helicopter, but we are so distant from anything, here, that the fuel wouldn't be enough to get me anywhere. There was once another helicopter. My fellow researcher took it, he was one of those who wanted to "go away". I have never seen him and the helicopter again.

He perfectly knew that we were remote and there was no hope. I think that his own was a quite dynamic and enterprising way to commit suicide.

As far as I'm concerned, suicide never crossed my mind. I never got depressed. Never. Maybe I'm insensitive. Even if I'm sorry for the fate of those who didn't make it or for the Louvre or the Chrysler Building and libraries and forests and elephants and so on, what does this change?

Some things that I used to enjoy are still here. I study the stars. I have plenty of time to do that, telescopes work well and the job needed to keep them efficient keeps all of us busy. There are even some kids around – *post-snowballers*, as we define them.

I go fishing. I was fond of fishing once and still I am. I go down biking to Slipper Bay and there I catch a bunch of fish. Twice a year I go by a small boat – that I have built by myself – to the Mauna Loa little island, where the catch is amazing.

It seems that sea creatures suffered less than others from the catastrophe. That's not so strange. There were some deaths at the beginning, that's true, but eventually things fixed up. In some years you can spot dolphins and some very huge jellyfish that I never saw before.

Grilled fish with some vegetables from the kitchen garden that one of the guards kept behind the big dome of the infrared telescope – potatoes, tomatoes. Onions. I'm untroubled.

To be honest, there is actually something I miss: a beefsteak. It seems that on the Alps still they have some cows. Hard to hope to be able having one here.

When this thing starts demoralizing me, I simply use logic.

Nobody might ever have expected an Outer Space Snowball.

Couldn't a cow also arrive?