What Am I?

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Abstract

Mister, can you tell me? What am I? Where am I going?...
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I. I Am a Seeker

MISTER, can you tell me? What am I? Where am I going? The man in the black suit says, “You are a child of God. Cast aside worldly things, believe in Him, obey His commandments, and thank Him daily. If you do all this, He will let you into His heavenly city to spend eternity. Now we will pass the collection plate.”

The man on the street-corner says, “Yer a fool. Goin’ to get licked by the world, kid, that’s where yer goin’. Wanta buy a pencil?”

The navigator of a B-29 says, “I dunno. I dunno. It’s the good guys that get it. And the world is lousier than before.”

Mister, I can’t base my life on intuition and folk tales and rose-colored glasses; I won’t be sent fleeing to the minister by fear of hell and fear of despair. I shall go to the scientists, to the men who peer through the telescopes and microscopes, who chart and calculate, who doubt until they can doubt no longer. I shall go to the truth-seekers.

II. I Am a Pinpoint

The sun is a gaseous mass 860,000 miles in diameter, premiere danseuse of a troupe of planets, satellites and planetoids, all twirling on their axes and circling about it.

The Earth is a tiny cold ball in black immensity, a speck in the sky which would hardly be missed even by Mars if it suddenly disappeared.

The sun-mother we trail through space has at least a hundred billion star-sisters. We call her family the universe. Beyond it swirl other universes in an endless sky.

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Who am I? Why do I crawl microscopic on this cold pellet, with space swishing past my ears at twelve miles a second?

III. My Home Was Sun-spawned

Two billion years ago the sun spat out a bolt of gas. Gas eddied and merged, liquefied into a molten ball bouncing through sun-nights and days, cloaked in an atmosphere of gases.
As it cooled to rock, the gas condensed; rain fell. Rivers cut furrows in the rock, began battering it into soil. The water danced itself into seas. Through the broken clouds knifed the sun-rays. Life was possible.

Who am I? Why did my home shoot from the sun two billion years ago? Where was I then?

IV. My Mother Is a Starfish

Who was my mother? I know only that she rose from the sea. Amoeba . . . sponge . . . seaweed. From her veiled form the centuries dragged life. First tiny crustaceans and sand-burrowing worms. Later armored fishes, fishes with teeth and spines and lungs. Life wriggled up from the sea, grew legs from paddle-fins, conquered the swampy land. Growing and lifting its belly from the ground, it became a dinosaur. It spread out wings and flew. It became a tiny mammal, creeping through time toward higher forms of life, snatching the land from reptiles. Small apes bore larger apes, and then almost imperceptibly the larger apes merged into man. Man—a youngster now just over a million years, a youngster who has been writing himself down only seven thousand years—in a home two billion years old!

I am a newcomer. It took a billion nine hundred million years to bring me forth—and then a million more to bring me even this far. I am a baby in the world.

V. Tomorrow Is My Child

Shall I tell you who I am? I am a creature rising. I am a creature growing now, just as I grew to reach my present stature. I am being shaped by the same mysterious forces that have pushed me this far up the ladder.

As an individual I parallel species-evolution, developing from conception as a one-celled animal to adulthood. Once in a while I rise above myself—rise to life a hundred thousand years from now. Is it any wonder that sometimes I sink to myself a hundred thousand years ago? Disorder is but a phase in my growth as a species, as ice ages and the crumbling of mountains were phases in my previous development.

I am a humble creature who has learned very little, who tries again and again to revise the process of evolution. I am a sex pervert, a killer, a sadist; I mimic the monkeys and mock the
truth-seekers; I challenge the stars and curse them; I try to destroy this world.

The minister says that sin is doing "Thou shalt nots;" but the truth-seeker says that the only wrong I can do is that of scrambling back toward the ape, the dinosaur, the amoeba.

Where I am going, I don't know. At the end of my own life I may sing in a heavenly city or crumble into soil or merge with the wind and stars. Why should I ponder the end of "I"? "I" is a word, a chicken-track in spinning dust; "I" is a balloon pin-pricked by death.

But I am the first paragraph of a story. I cannot believe that only by chance the sun bore a world, that only by chance I inched out of an amoeba. I am a pinpoint, but I am the mother of tomorrow.

This, then, may well be the purpose of my wandering, painful years: to live for the child tomorrow. I sought an ultimate value; I can find it in her glory.

**Shadows**

Ray Walrath

In a distant land, under a sweet, soft moon, guitars are softly sighing.

In another land, under that same moon, many men are dying.

And as I walk the silver sand, and listen to guitars, I see the dead and dying gaze, unseeing, at the stars.