The Perfect Planet

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T
HE Council of Superiors of the planet Nelb silently filed into the room. From long years of common experience, they knew and placed themselves in synchronization. They sat patiently, senses expectantly tuned to the transportation tubule which was whooshing as it functioned. As expected they saw the beginning drop of a Nelbian, and finally the entire dab of Professor Plackar reforming into the respectable domed shape that distinguished personages of the planet preferred.

The Eldest Superior spoke, “I’m sure there will be no need for introduction, Plackar, the Council is well acquainted with you and your work.” Plackar did not think that he would have liked to be introduced to the members of the council, since telepathy made secret thoughts impossible. You never knew who might be tuned to which thoughts. The Eldest continued, his thoughts gliding smoothly on the curved walls of the chamber. “If you would like, you may now begin your report.”

Plackar cleared his mind; he wanted to present the details in the clearest manner possible. “Honorable Elder Superior and Esteemed Council Members, the reason I have requested a review has to do with a new development in my Social Education experiment.” The Superiors assumed relaxed poses. The experiment referred to meant little to them; the only reason it was allowed to be conducted at all was due to the professor’s reputation. “The problem, Esteemed Ones, is that the control student in the experiment has completely broken down, indicating that Nelbians of this generation level are not capable of handling the impact of the logic presented in the experiment.”

The Elder spoke, “That was assumed when you were granted permission to conduct the experiment.”
"Yes, perhaps it will be better if I summon the memory tapes of the day of the breakdown. It seems that before this student went completely berserk, he presented an idea that the Council of Superiors should hear."

The Elder sensed the agreement of the Council. "Proceed." Plackar mentally summoned the memory tapes of the day to be replayed in the chamber. Then he oozed back to observe the Council's reactions.

Focusing gradually, the Nelbians in the chamber could see the control student, Malthu, gliding down the side of the experimental classroom. He was already excited, although the class had not yet started. He moved to his place near the front of the room and slid into his seat. His seat was identical to all the others, a simple ring of chrome metal, but the council members noted that the ring was smudged and smeared.

Malthu hadn't always been this enthusiastic about learning. The Superiors could see that he had a record of competence as a student but that he had always been rather uninspired when it came to his studies. This was typical of his generation, a flaw that had to be bred out of them. The other members of the class began to arrive; the council members noted with approval that they were of the more advanced generations of the planet.

The generation differences were unimportant to Malthu, it seemed; he enjoyed the class purely for the sociological aspects presented. Malthu loved the thrill of fresh information that was fed to the class. All actions and reactions on Nelb had long ceased to be mysteries. Every law of physics was catalogued and filed. Physics students were fed every bit of this knowledge, which they used and passed on in the traditional way.

That was the reason that Malthu enjoyed the class; there were new decisions made at times and once in a great while some overlooked discovery would surface. Even after millenniums of millenniums, hybridization had not ridden the Nelbian race of imperfections.

"Imperfections," the Elder interjected into the tape,
“that will best be worked out by clear logic and perfection-seeking students, not dreamers like this one.”

The mental replay continued. Although no one was supposed to know that Malthu was of a different generation than the rest of the class, it was obvious to the Council that everyone did know. Plackar was now oozing into the room. He was not surprised that Malthu had come early.

He worried about his control student. The success of his experiment depended on Malthu’s ability to absorb the sociological information in the proper manner. It had taken much persuasion on the part of the professor to sway the Council of Superiors. Traditionally the Superiors had made all the decisions that went into the planning of the Nelbian race. Some of the members of the Council had felt it was foolish, and perhaps even dangerous, to allow students to observe the decisions made without the backgrounds necessary to understand the logic.

The experimental class would never have come into being, but many of the Superiors were former students of Plackar’s. They trusted his judgment. If Plackar felt that Nelbians would be benefited toward perfection as a result of this experiment, then it was permissible.

Plackar hoped his thoughts of that day were not objectionable to the Superiors. None of them seemed concerned at this point, but the replay hadn’t reached the worst part yet. His thoughts of that day continued.

Plackar could see that the most modern generations of students had no problem dealing with the information presented, but in Malthu he often thought he could perceive some strange reaction to many of the facts of Nelbian sociology. If he could only help this eager student to be successful in his logical understanding of this class, Plackar was sure that the Nelbian race towards perfection would be hastened.

Malthu was concentrating intently on his beloved professor. The rest of the class had gradually filled the room, the air bristled with telepathic whispering and occasional outbursts. An authoritative beam cleared the air. The old professor began his lecture. Malthu was not
listening at first, he was admiring old Plackar's scholarly composure, the dignified way he held himself, rounded and smooth in his teaching ring. When Plackar was younger he had undoubtedly been a handsome one, with a clear blue epidermis. Now age had gradually changed him; Plackar's inner layers were gradually becoming visible.

One of the younger members of the Council of Superiors broke in, "With all respect, professor, must we go through this immature student's entire day's thought? When is the important event to occur?"

Plackar answered hurriedly, "I think it is important for the Council to know the entire background of the case. It will be important for you to consider Malthu's development when you make a decision about this experiment."

The Elder considered both opinions, then ruled, "If Plackar believes it is important to know the entire background of the case, we will review the replay in that manner."

"Thank you, Honorable Elder Superior." The replay continued.

Plackar had a surprise for the class that day. "Today we are going to visit the population control labs." Malthu was elated, the rest of the class merely attentive. These were the famed control labs that kept the Nelbian race on the path to perfection. Plackar knew that if Malthu could be logical about the labs, then an important step of his experiment would be made. Red bubbles of enthusiasm raced beneath his surface as Malthu hurriedly oozed to the transportation tubules. He was one of the first to be drawn into the narrow opening.

"Excuse me, professor," another of the Superiors had a question, "I have been trying to decide exactly what your experiment was meant to prove? It was never made clear in your request to conduct this class."

Plackar was momentarily dumbfounded. It had never occurred to him that the Council might not know what he was doing. "Esteemed Council Members, the experiment was conducted to determine if the less advanced
generations might be satisfactory as a control factor to determine what progress has been made in the newer, more advanced generations. My experiment is an attempt to provide, through the sociological education of different generations, alternative proposals, from which, with the use of the Council of Superiors' wisdom and logic, the best proposal will always be selected." The Council was astounded! "Not that your decisions have not been logical to date, but I think the point I am trying to make will be made clear if we continue with the replay."

"Malthu dropped to the floor of the population control lab. A Nelbian named Ricktab waited until all of the class dropped from the tube opening and glided into an expectant group around him. Ricktab began the tour he had prepared for these unusual guests.

"As you may know, the population control labs were originally established to control our numbers and to prevent overcrowding, but in the last few thousand years they have been refined somewhat. We are now concerned more with quality, or as some put it, purity."

He led the students into a room labeled "Primary Monitoring." Malthu seemed to be mentally recording every word spoken. "In here the electromagnetic scanners orbiting our planet register their reports on these recording monitors. The scanners register the births occurring in our populace."

Malthu rippled with the thought of the scanners observing the ecstatic exchange of juices and was somewhat disappointed when the monitors revealed only points of light indicating new Nelbys in Region Three.

Ricktab continued, appearing distracted by Malthu's unorthodox thinking. "These monitors also feed the information received into the banks of the main computer. The computer analyzes the personality pattern that will develop from the fertilization of a new Nelby globule.

"If the pattern is acceptable, the record of the birth is stored. However, if the conposition is unacceptable, the computer reports that information to the Master Control room."
“Who sets the standards of quality for Nelbys?” Malthu thought aloud.

The rest of the class sent out heavy mental sight. They were used to Malthu’s useless questioning.

Ricktab answered, “The Genetic Research Council.” Malthu had heard the sighs from the class. They always did that. “What are the standards?” He was now determined to know.

“That’s classified information!” Ricktab snapped. Malthu was silent. He was always running into classifications with his questions on these trips. Professor Plackar sent a mild rebuke his way. Malthu was wondering if anybody really knew how the Nelbian society worked and why. He doubted it. Everyone just took care of his specialty and left the rest to the next expert.

The Elder interrupted the viewing, “Plackar, must we continue to review this ignorant student’s random thinking? What’s the point?”

“If you will just watch for a little while longer, you will witness a rather unusual development. It is important for you to know the background, Honorable Elder Superior.” Plackar knew that in order to understand the final scene of the replay, the Council would have to see the whole thing.

Plackar had decided that Malthu had been a bit too presumptuous. “That’s enough of that thinking, Malthu.” The professor decided it would be better to remain auxiliarly tuned to Malthu for the rest of the tour. There had been several embarrassments on previous trips because of his control student.

Ricktab had paused to see if that irritatingly orange-tinted student was through with his questioning. Then he led the class into the Master Control room.

“Now in this room a copy is made of a rejected Nelby’s personality pattern. The pattern is saved and the rejected Nelby’s molecular pattern is dispersed cleanly and without disturbance. It’s all relatively simple.”

Malthu remembered something, “Isn’t it against the code of Nelbia to destroy a personality?”
"I was just coming to that!" Ricktab remembered the classes he had taught. His students had been respectful.

"The pattern is recorded before the Nelby is destroyed. The Genetic Research Council heard the objections against the destruction of Nelbys and to placate objections it was decided to let them develop, but in other forms, in a place where contamination of our race would be impossible."

Glancing at Malthu as if he expected interruption, Ricktab proceeded, "The personality patterns are then projected to a distant solar system. I'm sure you have all studied molecular rearrangement. The projection lasers are trained on a randomly selected and newly formed creature of the only inhabited planet of that solar system."

"The lasers arrange the pattern in the chemicals which determine the physical and mental composition of these creatures, recreating the personality pattern sent from Nelb."

"Are the Nelby personalities acceptable to the other inhabitants of the planet?" Ricktab stopped, it was that orange-tinted student again.

"Yes... by means of our drone recording ships we do actually keep records of the Nelbys' development. The technical aspects of all this, you probably know; let it suffice to say that we are able to keep track of the pattern's development, actually down to the smallest detail."

"Why do you even bother keeping track of them?" Malthu felt strange, as if deep inside of him, something dark and primitive was stirring.

Plackar made sure that the entire Council noticed this, "Now please pay close attention to the strange emotions swelling inside of the control student. They are important to our conclusion."

"Why do you bother keeping track of them?" Malthu had repeated his question.

Ricktab was not disturbed, "Two reasons actually; one, the parents of the faulty personality are often in-
terested in the development of their offspring. They are reassured when they see that we are keeping track of their patterns. It helps them to realize that their Nelbys haven’t been destroyed, but are merely developing elsewhere.”

“The second reason is research, we constantly check the pattern’s development ourselves to make sure we haven’t sent a desirable personality pattern to develop in a foreign culture.”

Malthu was not satisfied with these precautions. “Have you ever made a mistake?”

Ricktab activated a monitor, alien code names appeared in the groups’ mind. “See the records yourself, most of the Nelbys develop into very troublesome creatures, causing nothing but misery to themselves and those creatures associated with them.”

“This is actually a list of the patterns’ names on that planet, although it is difficult to understand what they mean exactly due to differences in mind structure.”

The students scanned through the lists, picking out interesting or funny sounding names...“Mozart... De Vinci... Shakespeare... Bonaparte... Picasso... Hitler...”. They soon lost interest.

Malthu was upset, “Yes, but have you ever made a mistake? Do you know?” At first the feeling had been deep inside, but now it appeared that the emotion was almost visible just below the surface of Malthu’s rapidly reddening skin. The room filled with electric laughter; Plackar intently studied the thoughts that Malthu was having. He could scarcely believe the intensity of the emotion being experienced. He had read of it in scholarly old theses, the emotions that Nerbians used to experience. It was commonly believed that these emotions could not be aroused these days without a hypnosis that reached back through the generations of purity breeding.

Malthu continued to boil. Plackar knew something had been touched off; an unknown nerve in the control student had been discovered. It was a fuse that led to a prehistoric time bomb of feeling. Plackar moved to
Malthu's side, to intensify his authoritative mind control by lessening the distance. Malthu was a blaze of violent red, bubbles bouncing, streaking, barely contained. The class went wild; they provoked him, prodded him, as if they too had become savage, trying to destroy him by feeding his emotion to the bursting point. They turned on him like the strong to the weak; indeed that's what they were. They were the fittest, most perfect Nelbians.

Plackar was frightened. He could not get through to Malthu. The control student screamed! "What are you laughing at? You are laughing at yourselves, at what you see here. Do you realize what's happening? We are being... purified!"

"Cleansed and purged until nothing will be left, NOTHING!!! Clear bland, blobs of nothing, but neuron! With no connection to ANYTHING! NO INPUT, NO OUTPUT, NOTHING . . . ."

The Council of Superiors watched as the frenzied student was taken away by the security drones that Ricktab had summoned. The mental replay dimmed and faded. They focused on Plackar's thoughts.

"Undoubtedly you would like an explanation of why I have brought this matter to your attention. My experiment failed, of course, as you can see. Nothing but the most recently developed generations can be used in the race to perfection. The older generations were once adequate but cannot be entrusted with decisions anymore. They could not stand the strain of the Logic."

"But in failing I have discovered that there is now no alternative for our race. You see we have left out the control factor in our plan. Who is to tell if we are perfect or not, once the plane of perfection has been reached." Plackar could see that the Council was rapidly becoming disturbed by his thought; he hurried, he wanted to finish.

"The plane of perfection is a thin one, Esteemed Ones. Who is to say that we haven't already passed through, that we have not filtered out desirable elements in our selective breeding?" Plackar was approaching sacrilege,
directly in front of the Superiors! The room buzzed with anger. Plackar had to say it, "You see no one can tell us we are perfect under the present system, there is no one who can see anything differently. Except for a few of the antiquated generations, like Malthu... and myself."

The walls of the chamber resounded with anger. Plackar felt as if he were reliving a dream, a horrible memory. He felt strangely pleased with the irony in the situation. His experiment had been successful, only he had proved something that had never been expected. "You see, Esteemed Ones, even you cannot tell us. You, after all, are our equals. We are all equally perfect on the perfectly smooth road to perfection."

Plackar tried to concentrate on the pleasant whoosh of the transportation tubule on his way to Security, where his mind was to be cleansed. There was no use thinking of the incident he would never remember again.