

Parsing Xhactu's Teachings ...

We have already noted that, after his lengthy disquisition on *desire*, Xhactu fell sound asleep. The fact is that Xhactu had a remarkable gift for *falling asleep instantly*. In this, he was unlike so many Earthlings, who squandered their meager space-time allotments by constantly fussing and fidgeting over endless preparations for slumber—their travel to the “Land of Nod.” (Our thanks to Herman Melville, Ishmael, Captain Ahab, and *Moby Dick* for that felicitous expression).

The short version is that Xhactu simply curled up in the back booth at the Bucket O' Blood, heaved one long, whistling sigh of relaxation, then dropped like a black onyx marble into the deep well of sleep. The two observant bird-men noticed that Xhactu's sleeping posture resembled that of a field-mouse—tucked up to form a largish ball of fur, as it were, with his nose slipped under his front “paws.”

Snoring came so easily to Xhactu, that his two feathered booth-companions—Owl and Heron—were driven to this conclusion: *Snoring must be a widespread feature of the universe, throughout its deepest reaches. Therefore, snore proudly!*

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Xhactu woke up when Jinny O slid into the booth next to him. She wanted to join them, maybe talk to Xhactu, and she had brought a fresh pitcher of ale for refills, with Imperial glasses for the four of them. Hearty toasts were raised into the air, followed by clinking glasses and refreshing sips. A general mood of fellow-feeling rose up, as it were, from the damp, slightly swamp-like, saw-dusted floor.

Jinny O gazed at Xhactu in his corner. His eyes were open, and she beamed a warm smile in his direction. Though he was not really completely awake yet, Xhactu returned the warmth of her gaze.

“So,” she said, “you’re the wee alien that CedrosCM narrated, way back in the DCL day—and at my suggestion, I might add.”

Owl Man and Heron Man glanced at each other, wondering if Xhactu would respond with outrage, the way Arthur Compton did when he first found out about his being narrated as a prize. There was something different about Xhactu’s demeanor. What was happening? Was this his physiological response to Jinny’s offhand comment, perhaps?

Xhactu’s neck began to sparkle, as if someone had dusted a handful of gunpowder around the neck, and ignited it. His skin began to glow—it was almost smoking—then it was writhing and gliding in color, from *instant-pop orange* back to *iridescent green*. His two little eyebrows, heretofore barely visible on his forehead, wiggled faintly before diving down in an “interocular wedgie frown.” But Jinny O had tamed enough *wild men* in her years of service at the Bucket O’ Blood and other pubs, that Xhactu had a change of heart. He put away his *cara de limón*, i.e., his “lemon-face” frown, and soon the old grin was plastered across his Happy Face again.

Even though Xhactu was “Jinny’s fictive idea for CedrosCM,” she seemed happy to have met him in person. Before leaving the pub, she made a grand announcement, to the effect that she had made an after-hours appointment at a different pub nearby. She had scheduled a meeting with a literary agent who hinted that he might have a “hot offer” from a publisher interested in publishing her Lord Langhosen series.

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Luckily, except for the occasional black-painted, diesel taxi-cab burbling and rattling past in the street, the pub was quiet after Jinny left. Colin was content with less business rather than more. “After all,” he muttered, “a poor bloke needs a break now and again, don’t he?”

The Owl waved at Colin, smiling, pointing at the empty pitcher. Colin figured he could do that much, so he nodded, topped off a fresh glass pitcher, and brought it to the booth. Since these three blokes were his only customers, he dropped off the ale, went back behind the bar and got out the sports sheets again, to check the scores.

“My dear Xhactu,” began Owl Man, “we would like to ... ”

But Xhactu had *arrived at the station before Owl Man’s train*, so to speak. Xhactu only said, “I already know.”

“You do?”

“Of course, I do. It’s so elementary.”

“Wonderful!” said Owl. “Then maybe you could explain to us just why *intuition* is so bloody— I mean, so gosh-darned—elementary.” That little British daily vulgarity—*bloody*—just slipped out of Owl Man’s mouth “by accident.” Normally, the Owl was wont to eschew the use of vulgarities.

At any rate, Xhactu was more than happy to hold forth on a topic he’d studied as a novice at the Space Cadet Academy.

“Here’s how it all began,” began Xhactu expansively, settling into his role of Acting Galactic History Professor. He checked his *universal translator*, tweaked the dial a bit, to activate “mythic mode,’ and said:

“In the beginning was darkness. All was null and void, like a cancelled check. Then, from out of the darkness came a light. That light was *intuition*. Light out of darkness. Any questions?”

The two authors stumbled, metaphorically speaking. They didn't know what to say in response to Xhactu's bizarre declaration.

"Uh, do you mean—?" one of them began.

"Silence!" shouted Xhactu, his neck blazing once again with green iridescence.

[Author's Note: Oh, oh! Xhactu just lapsed back into his old emotional habits when in command of the space-ship bridge, with his back-up flunkies, Bradhu and Mixtak, standing by to carry out orders. What's happening?]

"Wait, Xhactu. We're trying to pick your brain here, as the Earthling expression goes. We want to learn from you, my man, more about *intuition*, but from your inter-galactic perspective. Frankly, Xhactu, we would be flat-out honored if you would bestow upon us the blessing of your profound knowledge, experience and wisdom!" Owl Man withdrew a large white silk handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his face and forehead with it, like Pavarotti after a performance.

Owl Man's burst of compliments was not displeasing to Xhactu, who lowered his head modestly. Then he raised it again, proudly, looked directly at the Owl, and said, "Gee, Owl Man, I usually don't do command performances, but since you asked me so nicely ... well, heck! Sure, I'll tell you about intuition."

"How should we think about it," said the Owl, "galactically speaking, let's say?"

Xhactu closed his eyes. "Think of it," he said, "as something like ... God's electricity, bolts of which He sends shooting in every direction, all the time, constantly creating this, our Electrical Universe. Or maybe think of the crystal-lattice-like structures that underlie the forms of everything that exists, everything that comes into being."

"Xhactu," said Heron Man, "are you saying that *every existing thing has a pre-existing intuitive pattern?*"

“Yes, exactly,” said Xhactu excitedly. “That’s the primordial cosmic assumption. The whole universe is a grand, complex intuition. Thus, the patterns are always intuitive. But they can change, as things evolve along intuited pathways of preferred possibilities. Take me, for instance.”

The Owl and Heron both looked at Xhactu in a kind of questioning double-take.

“Would you please elaborate?” said Heron, speaking for both bird-men.

“You want me to repeat what I just said?” he said.

“Yes, please. Or at least elaborate,” said the Owl, speaking for both as well.

“You’ve got to get your head into the right place,” said Xhactu. “Just imagine. All those spinning great balls of fire out there in the starry vastness, creating a *universal, creatural, diurnal, habituation to light and shadow*. Thus, our diurnal universes stand witness to the actions of sleeping, snoring, and waking, in virtually every corner of space-time, including yours and mine.”

“Go on,” said Heron, nodding eagerly.

“Well, you know that Earth is just a backward planet, but it resembles all the other “billions and billions” of extant planets, bathed in light, in this one particular respect: *light requires the evolution of eyes*, and those eyes must be *perfectly evolved to suit the nature of light*. Do you agree?”

Both birds nodded. Xhactu continued:

“Very well. There is one slight detail, though. It’s not a ‘glitch,’ exactly, but when light is intermittent, thanks to the incessant spinning of the stars and their planets, the periodic flashing light they give off also requires the *evolution of eyelids* ... so as to enable *sleep*.

“*Wake and sleep. Light and dark. Sensation and intuition*. Are you starting to see the picture yet?”

In the course of his rambling lecture to the Owl and the Heron, Xhactu had arrived at the footsteps of the *temple of love*—a topic of considerable import to Earthlings. To aliens like Xhactu, however, love was just a “silly indulgence.” And he said as much to his interlocuters.

“But what about Irma?” queried the Heron Man quietly.

For a shocked moment, all was silent. Then, Xhactu came unglued. His cynical galactic notions imported so much energy from old, ingrained attitudes, that he scarcely knew which way to direct this latest wave of spontaneous anger. His neck—the green neck—began to smoke and sputter again.

The Heron looked at the Owl.

The Owl looked at the Heron.

Then both birds looked at Xhactu,

Whose eyes were wide as frisbies.

Xhactu's Fear

Owl Man's tips for Jinny O had reached a princely sum. When she collected, she blew the Owl a kiss, a sweet smile, and announced that it was closing time.

The bird men had lost all track of time and all track of what they had drank up, lost as they were in peppering Xhactu with endless questions and responding to his replies with excited commentaries.

So, here they were, at closing time, two drunk birds, and one stoned alien. Xhactu, in trying to stand, managed to fall off the chair and disappeared under the bar table. It took Owl and Heron a while to notice, as they were concentrating in trying to stand themselves with some grace, which seemed to have gone missing. In rather ungainly fashion, they managed to pluck up Xhactu from the saw dust covered bar floor, brushed him off, and helped him stand erect.

To their dismay, they found Xhactu trembling. He'd lost all color. White as the proverbial sheet. They were aghast at Xhactu's expression which seemed to be a full-on attack of terror. But was it? That is, does such expression on a human translate as the same thing as on an alien face?

"What is it Xhactu? What is happening to you?" Owl Man was holding Xhactu by the shoulders trying to steady him.

"Tell us, Xhactu. Let us know so we will know what to do for you, if such is possible."

Both birdmen's speech was a bit slurred, and Xhactu was not responding and not coming out of his look of terror."

A screech from Xhactu shattered the closing time ambience of the Bucket O' Blood and brought Colin and Jinny O running to the scene. Everyone except Xhactu had their ears

covered as if the sound was piercing everyone's ear drums. It was an incredible sound, far beyond anything the bagpipe was capable of.

Then it stopped as suddenly as it started.

Xhactu collapsed in a heap, caught at the last moment by Heron Man and Owl Man.

"Jinny O, get Xhactu a glass of water." Owl Man's instructions were quickly followed and Jinny O gave the glass to Heron Man as Owl Man righted Xhactu. Heron got Xhactu to drink, though in sputtering fashion. It seemed to work, as Xhactu's natural color returned, not all at once, but with a gradual change from Xhactu's three lower extremities and proceeding until his head was back to normal. Xhactu's eyes were still closed, and the trembling had stopped. But the expression of terror did not change.

"Should I call an ambulance?" Colin was eager for this scene to come to an end. He wanted home, his bed, and his night cap.

"Let's hold a bit, Colin. He seems to be coming 'round." Owl was still holding Xhactu by the shoulders but let go when Xhactu's eyes popped open and revealed bright red fields staring at him without movement. But Xhactu did not fall.

Xhactu began speaking, just more than a whisper, but no one could understand as Xhactu's Universal Translator was off.

"Xhactu, turn on the translator, we can't understand what you are saying." It was Heron who had called out the instruction in response to the incomprehensible stream of sounds.

Xhactu, fumbled with his fingers at his throat while still speaking alien-speak. It took him quite awhile and still the speech did not stop, but then as if a hidden switch clicked, and the garbled words suddenly became English, at least sort of:

". . . and that's why I'm afraid, deathly afraid, afraid beyond anything I have ever experienced. That's why. Do you understand?"

No one spoke, everyone trying to take in what Xhactu was saying.

“But what is why?” Owl Man put the question.

Xhactu rose to his full height, no trace of the stumblings of drink, and spoke clearly:

“I am afraid you will write me out of your novel.”