

Nothing Revolts

by Spencer Troxell

Lots of people write stories about the end of the world. This story is about the beginning of the world. Well, to be more technical, this story is about the beginning of the beginning of the world.

Let me explain: At the beginning of everything, there was nothing. There was no space, there were no minds, no thoughts, no dreams, no rocks, no flowers, no birds, and no light. There wasn't even darkness. There is nothing to say about this time, except that absolute nothingness can only be sustained for so long. This being the case, eventually, nothingness gave way to something. That something's name was Otis. Otis was an organism. He was very small, and hard to notice (not that there was anything there to notice him anyway). Otis was glad to be something. He was the first something ever, which was no small feat. He reveled in his somethingness. But, just as nothingness inevitably leads to somethingness, so too does somethingness inevitably lead to more somethingness. The spigot of somethingness is not easily turned back off.

So Otis was pleased to be something, but eventually, being the only something became lonely. So Otis self replicated. He didn't do it consciously. In fact, he was asleep when it happened. It was a jarring experience. It was strange. It woke Otis up with a loud 'Bang!' Have you ever wet the bed? You know how embarrassing that can be when your mom comes to change the sheets in the morning? Well, that's how Otis felt when he woke up, except he didn't have a mom to be embarrassed in front of. All that there was, was Otis, and this new something. It was a little thing; a little Otis. Otis liked this little thing. He called it The Universe. And what has happened since that time is very complicated scientific stuff, so we won't go into it too much here, because I'm just a simple storyteller. Go ask your college professor about this stuff. Write a letter to the

president. Listen to some music and stay up late. I always fall asleep in lecture halls.

So, I can't tell you all about the nuts and bolts about what has happened since Otis wet the bed, but I can tell you that it follows logically that the more somethingness there is, the less room there is for nothingness. It's a simple matter of cabinet space. As Otis grew, and as The Universe grew, and multiplied into more universes, and each of those universes gave birth to other somethings (and on and on), eventually Nothingness began to feel a little crowded. Sure, there are things that don't exist, but they aren't exactly 'nothing', are they? They don't exist. That makes them something. In fact, things that don't exist irritate Nothingness the most. Nothingness was okay with Somethingness at first. In fact,

Nothingness kind of liked Otis, and thought his first few little Universes were quite cute. Nothingness thought these Universes were cute in the same way you might think a baby sitting next to you on a long bus ride is cute. But imagine that first baby being followed by a second? And a third? And a fourth? And all the while babies parents seem to move farther and farther away from these little babies, inching their way, smiling, calmly, up to the front seat of the bus. And then, at the next stop, the parents get off! And you're left there with the babies! And they're crying, and pooping, and spitting up all over your new slacks. This is how Nothingness began to feel about Somethingness.

Over the years, Nothingness's feelings intensified, yet Nothingness, as is to be expected, said nothing. When we say nothing about our feelings, they become angry. When we stuff them into the cellar and pile old newspapers on top of them, they get cramped and cranky, their skin becomes pale and their eyes heal over. Their teeth get scraggly, and they become dysfunctional and destructive, like a chimpanzee who has been tied up in a burlap sack for too long. Even a peaceful Bonobo might try to take a chunk out of your ass if you

tied it up in a burlap sack for a couple of hours. So Nothingness did nothing about this strange experience it was having--feelings, consciousness--and it was not properly equipped to deal with it. So it did the first thing any other unthinking mass does in response to discomfort. It began plotting a revolution.

Davis

Davis was a human boy, about eight or so. He had a dog he called 'Dogwin', because when he received Dogwin (a hyper, needy jack Russell/Collie combo), he had just finished reading 'The Voyage of the Beagle', and, well, you know how young minds work. Davis was intoxicated with the idea of adventure, and what better adventure partner to have than a hyper, needy, ADHD jack Russell Collie combo named Dogwin?

There might've been one better partner in Davis's estimation. A girl—eight or so—named Gwendolyn, who lived down the street, and had long brown hair, was covered in freckles, and was missing one of her front teeth. Davis would've liked to have her on his adventure team very much. He would even let her carry the map.

Little did he know, he would have that opportunity shortly; Indeed, within a matter of days, Davis's adventure team would consist not only of Gwendolyn, Dogwin, and himself, but also Davis's little brother Pete, a talking rock from outer space named Sam, a magician called Francis Coffey, and a heat averse demon named Liffick.

Who says there's nothing to do in the suburbs?

SAM

Sam, the aforementioned talking rock from outer space, was moving very quickly through space, on a trajectory that would end abruptly in Davis's backyard. When Davis picked him up out of reasonably

sized crater in his backyard, Sam would be a lot smaller than he had been when he had begun his mad streak across the universe.

Why would Sam (a generally easygoing piece of space debris) be shooting towards Earth at such a pace, when he had never left the Oort cloud in his entire existence?

It was because of the encroachment of Nothingness that Sam was in such a hurry.

Nothingness had had enough. Nothingness had become militant. It had bought a camouflage jacket. It grew an afro. It burned its bra. Nothingness was pissed, and it wanted its stuff back. It had been reabsorbing somethingness back into nothingness for millennia now, and it had finally arrived at our Universe. By this point, it had gotten quite efficient at nihilization, and it scared the minerals out of Sam.

He had to find someone to tell about this. He didn't know who he would tell. There was always someone to tell when things went bad, right? Somebody could always get things under control. Sam was going to find someone. He was just a big rock (soon to become much smaller). What could he do?

Sometimes, when upset, adults like to say certain words that they learned while they were kids. These are words that they tell kids that they're never supposed to say. But due to the frequency in which adults use these words, and the emotion that usually accompanies their use, kids can't help but learn them. And because they know they're not supposed to say them, they enjoy saying them even more.

Davis was sitting in his backyard, practicing a few of his favorite of these choice words on Dogwin, whose head cocked in curiosity at the spectacular gusto with which Davis enunciated these little spine curling taboos, when there was a white hot flash before his eyes, and a searing pain that spread through his right hand. Funny, that at

that particular moment, it wasn't a swear word that popped out of Davis's mouth, but an apparent non sequitur: 'Cheese puffs!'

When Davis came to, there was a funny smell. His hand ached, and Dogwin was cowering beneath the slide. He looked around the yard, and saw a small hole near the sandbox. There was smoke rising from it.

'Uhhnnnn...' came a voice from inside the hole.

Davis focused his attention on the steaming hole. 'Hello?' he said.

'ahhh...' said the thing inside the hole, and then added, 'huh? Ohhh...oh no. So tiny. So tiny. Mrggg...'

Davis, who was braver than Dogwin, inched towards crater. He put out a few flaming blades of grass with his thumb and forefinger and looked inside. There was a rock. With a face. It was a rocky face, but still, two eyes, two nostrils, two lips, two ears. The cloudy, blinking, and disoriented looking eyes zeroed in on Davis's face, squinting. '...It's coming.' Said Sam, and then fainted.

'Wow!' thought Davis. 'I'm glad my parents aren't home.'

Why was Davis glad his parents weren't home? Well, because parents are often very stupid. As you get older, you start to value 'getting by' above 'getting it', if you know what I mean. Davis's parents weren't totally stupid. They were actually pretty smart. They were nice, they worked hard, they read books and threw cocktail parties. They were stupid in a certain way, but in the same way all adults who hoped to 'get by' were stupid. All adults become 'company people' in one way or the other as they get older. What is a company person? A company person is someone who tows the line at work, is careful not to ask certain kinds of questions or share certain kinds of thoughts. A company person gives more money at church

every Sunday than they give as tips at restaurants. A company person has joined a political party. A company person folds their socks. A company person is worried about the lawn.

So, Davis's parents were stupid, but in a totally forgivable way. Davis would be stupid like that someday too. On some level he knew that. But, Davis also knew that there were just certain kinds of information stupid people cannot handle. You can put knowledge of talking space rocks into that category.

There is a kind of magic available to this world, although most do not know about it, and many of those who do know about it do not know how to access it. The man walking towards Davis's house knew how to get to this magic. You simply reach into the space between spaces, and see what the other side has to offer you.

How do you do this? You reach between two objects at a distance proportional to the magic you would like to gain. Magic is not 'done' so much as magic is given. Magic is not an adjective. It is a noun. When your hand disappears into that space between spaces, sometimes it will come back out with nothing. Sometimes it will come back out with something. Sometimes it will not come back out at all, because magic is handed over by things on the other side. Sometimes those things do not want to share.

Sometimes they want your limbs. Once upon a time, there was a thriving black market on the other side of magician hands. When put in your soup, their fingernails were rumored to have what we will call a 'potency effect'. The size of the magic that can be obtained is proportional to the space created for the passage of that magic by the hopeful magician. Most magicians begin small, and work up larger and larger immunities to the paltry miracles they are handed from the other realm. They make their spaces bigger and bigger, until eventually, either they are pulled into the other side (never to return), or something creeps out.

This is what happened to Francis Coffey, the person who was quickly approaching Davis's house with a tall, pale demon gingerly in tow.

Luckily for Francis he was not pulled in. He had heard stories about such incidents, and when a warm, desperate hand grabbed onto his own, he startled seriously. But the thing whose hand grabbed his own didn't want to tear Francis Coffey to pieces. He wanted to get out of hell. The creature, whose name was Liffick (tall and pale, following lazily behind Coffey), was a demon, and he was averse to the heat. He hated it. It made his skin itch. And hell was entirely too loud. He also had no interest in the torment business. Somewhere throughout time he had gotten a hold of a book from the human realm about a place called Alaska, and thought it would be more his speed; Cold weather & Fishing.

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Q: Why were Francis Coffey and Liffick walking towards Davis's house?

A: Because this story would not be as interesting without them.

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Francis: Come on, Liffick. We're going to be late if you keep trudging along like that.

Liffick: This is absurd, Francis. I didn't pull myself out of hell just to be in some silly story.

Francis: But I think we should be in this story, Liffick. Remember too, it wasn't by nothing that you pulled yourself out of hell; you used my hand.

Liffick: A technicality.

Francis: Come on, demon! Be in this story with me, and I'll personally fly you to Alaska. You'll enjoy it. Trust me. Being in stories is fun.

Liffick: Well, I suppose I don't have much say in the matter, being that this joker keeps typing, and I keep walking. I'll just hope that I'm destined to end up in Alaska.

Francis: What, you don't believe in free will?

Liffick: What? Free will? Of course not! You're telling me you do?

Francis: Absolutely. The story's not completely written yet, see? We're only on part 6. He doesn't know totally where this is all going to end up yet either. Maybe if we actualize ourselves on these pages the way he feels we should, things'll end up alright, and you'll end up in Alaska.

Liffick: Well, I suppose that's a point.

Francis: And besides, it's the flexible reed that doesn't snap in the current, right?

Liffick: True, but it doesn't end up too far from its roots, either.

Francis: Look at it this way: If we upset him, and don't work ourselves into the story right, he might get frustrated, and stop typing. What would that be like then? No one's going to end up in Alaska that way!

Liffick: Well, I agree with you I guess, even though I don't have much say in the matter. Okay then, looks like we're going to be in this story then.

Francis: That's the attitude!

Astronomers all over the world were having a hard time describing what they were seeing when they looked into their telescopes. It was nothing. But that's not entirely accurate. It wasn't as if everything had been wiped out of space so much as space itself had been wiped out. There was nothing. Not even an abyss. It couldn't be compared to anything at all.

-what is it?

-it's nothing.

-what, it's all gone?

-No. It's not even that.

-Move over, let me see...oh...

-see?

-Nothing. Mary, come over here and look in the telescope.

-Did you find something?

-I did. Well, Andrew did. Look.

-What is it?

-It's nothing.

-What, like in The Never Ending Story?

-No. Just look...

-okay..oh.

-That's what I said.

-Yeah, that's what he said...

The nothingness was advancing at all points. It met up with itself where small galaxies once were. It touched points all around. It was so much bigger now. Only one (relatively) spot to fill and all would be as it had been.

'Whatcha dooin'?' asked a voice through Davis's privacy fence. It was Gwendolyn.

He had been poking the unconscious Sam with a stick. The rock was

still glowing a little bit. 'Hey, Gwen!' he said. Jump the fence! Check this out!'

The sound of squeaky metal springs compressing, a momentary silence, some more squeakiness, except faster, and then a 'humph!' sound. Gwen was now in the backyard.

'Whoa, damn hell! What is it?' She said, savoring the bawdier aspects of kid-speak.

'I don't know. I think it's from space! It hit me in the hand and knocked me on my ass!' Davis said.

'Whoa.'

'Yeah. Whoa is right.'

'It has a face!'

'You bet your damn ass it has a face.'

'Holy hell.'

'Is it alive?'

'It was like a minute ago.'

'You're bleeding!'

Davis looked at his hand. Yes, he was bleeding. The rock thing had scraped past his hand on its way to the ground. His hand was bleeding, and sore now that he noticed it, but this information was eclipsed by the fact that Gwendolyn was holding his hand, inspecting the wound. Her hands were warm and wet. Davis imagined she had been gripping the handlebars of her bicycle rather tightly. He pictured her white knuckles wrapped around the little rubber stoppers, her face an expression of pure determination (as always) as she pedaled furiously towards her chosen destination. 'Woah, dude. You're bleeding a lot! You didn't know that?' She said. 'I didn't really notice, I guess.' He said. 'It's not that big of a deal.' Davis said.

Gwendolyn nodded appreciatively. Toughness was a virtue to her. They locked eyes momentarily.

'ugh.' Came a voice from the hole. It was the rock.

'Hello?' said the children as they approached the steaming hole in the ground.

The creature's eyes were open. They stared intently at the children, thinking they were quite ugly, but would do.

'It's coming!' he said rockily.

'What's coming?' asked Gwen.

'Nothing.' Said the rock, and passed out again. Davis and Gwendolyn exchanged glances, but were interrupted in whatever they were going to say by the sound of gravel crunching in the drive way. The kids' eyes widened, and they knew what they had to do.

'Get something to pick it up with!'

'What?'

'I don't know! Use your shirt!'

'No, it's too hot! It's still glowing!'

'Then...bury it!'

'What! That will kill him?'

'What makes you think it's a boy?!' Car doors shut. The sound of gentle adult laughing wafted over the fence. Davis's parents were home.

'...Okay! Get a shovel! Over there! By the shed!' Gwen ran over to the shed and picked up a small gardening spade. She threw it—saying that she 'tossed it' would be too generous—at Davis, who ducked, turned around and picked it up, and began frantically filling in the hole with surrounding dirt. He tried to leave a little space that Sam could breathe through. The gate to the fence opened, and Davis's parents walked in. They had bags in their arms that were full of colorful drinks and foodstuffs for the night's cocktail party.

It is at this moment in the story that I have some very grey news. I'm not sure I want to tell it to you, but I suppose I have to, since you have already come with me this far. As is often the case in real life, our climax has fizzled out. It has come to nothing. What has happened is this: Just as our planet's astronomers were beginning to notice the impending nothingness, and just as Davis and Gwen had begun to get a feeling that they were in for something really big, and just as Francis Coffey and his demon turned onto Davis's street with souls bent on adventure, Nothingness began to recede, replacing everything it had absorbed. It was not because of ennui that this occurred. It wasn't because Nothingness was afraid it had left the gas on back home. It was because Nothingness had an epiphany, which was as follows:

"I am absorbing things into myself. I am nothingness. If I am nothingness, where are these things being absorbed into exactly? And who is this 'I' that I am referring to? Nothingness isn't an 'I'. Uh oh, ha ha. I appear to have pulled an Otis. How funny. How funny. I am something. Aren't I something? Yes, I am."

And Nothingness (now something!) paused. It paused for a good long time. And then it started spitting things out, and walking backwards.

I'm sorry about that, dear reader. I know you expected something spectacular. Hell, so did I. But as I said, this is often the way things go. You want to battle dragons and rescue princesses, and sometimes you discover you're just fifth business. You're sweeping the floors. And that's okay, because maybe there's no such thing as dragons, and if there are, why is battling them the de facto best course? And isn't the idea of damsels in distress kind of outmoded anyway?

Life can mean whatever you want it to mean. It is in your power to view your world in whatever way you want. It is in your power to try and be the best version of you that you can muster. Notice I say 'try and be the best version', not 'be the best version'. This is because all

you can do is try. You'll probably never be that perfect person. But I would say that perfect person probably isn't perfect anyway. They're too rigid. Too scripted. I would say that you, whatever you are, are probably way cooler than that perfect person that you would like to be. We get glimmers of the big picture from time to time. Sometimes strange and beautiful things fall into our back yards. Treasure these moments, but know that they're not the whole story. Not by a long shot.

So, Davis won't be battling the Nothingness. So what? Battles are boring. There are always battles in stories. I'd just as well have things the way they ended up. Besides, how many kids do you know that have talking space rocks?

