

The Astronaut Parable

An astronaut landed accidentally on a planet inhabited by humanoids who only moved by crawling around on all fours. When they saw him walking on his feet, the crawling humanoids became afraid and ran away. It took the astronaut a while to make them understand that he did not intend to eat them up, as the sky beings legends told.

When he begun crawling along at their side, he made contact with a group of humanoids who were curious and brave. The astronaut studied them and found out that physically they were just the same as him. Since their predominant work was gold mining in minuscule tunnels, he wondered if they had forgotten how to walk due to having spent so much time crawling about in the small tunnels. But he realized that they thought themselves incapable of standing, since they dressed their children from early ages in long, narrow and rigid skirts that protected them from being scratched when crawling, but prevented them from standing up.

When the rulers heard of the astronaut, they spread the usual stories of children-eating invaders and asked for everyone's collaboration to destroy him. But his new friends dared to hide him from the police.

By this time the astronaut had learned their language and he warned them that if they continued digging tunnels, their civilization would not withstand an earthquake. Soon he would learn that they already knew about this, but did not do anything about it. He was shocked when he heard them say that their society could not run unless gold was constantly extracted, and that they needed to keep at it until it ran out, without truly understanding what would become of them.

When the astronaut asked them what they needed the gold for, the crawling humanoids answered that they needed it to buy food and skirts, and to sustain the rulers who guaranteed their security.

The astronaut realized they extracted much more gold than the amount that circulated to exchange goods, and he realized that the rulers owned most of the gold. When he asked his friends why they had accepted to live as slaves, he heard them say that their system was the best possible one, since they could elect their oppressors every four years.

The astronaut could not understand any of it, so he kept searching until he found the key that made them accept their slavery: although they were quite peaceful, they had been taught to fear each other, and they thought they needed rulers that suppressed all of them to keep them from killing each other.

The astronaut did not trust the rulers, so he decided to find out for himself where all that gold ended up. He was able to sneak into the rulers' headquarters and listen to their conversations, thanks to his propelling backpack and his hi-tech spying devices. That is how he found out how things really worked:

The rulers earned much more gold than they would spend on their subject's security, and with it, they would control the supply of food and skirts, to make them pay much more gold than their production cost.

He discovered that only the highest rulers of the parties knew that the real purpose of the whole system was to provide gold to the real owners of the planet, and that only those who would keep the system would be allowed to rule.

The astronaut managed to take a look at the restricted areas and he learned that the rulers owned high technology that they did not share with their humanoid slaves. They even had spaceships with which they could travel through the cosmos, but they needed huge amounts of gold to make them work.

He saw the many spaceships that were ready to evacuate the rulers when the planet would collapse. But the worst of all was finding out that it was the rulers themselves who systematically caused violence and division among humanoids. When these incidents took place, the crawling humanoids became afraid and took shelter in their clan, so that none of them suspected the authorities.

The rulers controlled the level of fear of each area and they would spread diseases and cause riots to make the humanoids believe that they needed to be subjected to their authority.

The astronaut returned to his crawling friends and shared with them all he had learned. Most of them refused to believe him, because they were not ready to have their reality questioned. And those who believed him felt too powerless to face the rulers.

When the astronaut asked them why did they consent to being banned from certain places like the gold and spaceship hangars, and to have secret services that could do what they felt like with no need to inform them, he realized that their answers always had to do with some idea of "guaranteeing security". Which made him understand that their real problem was not that their rulers were despicable, but that the humanoids themselves were afraid.

The astronaut decided to try to solve things from a different angle and tried to teach them to stand, to increase their self-confidence. But even though they saw that he was just like them, it took him many efforts to persuade them to walk as he did. The few who tried found it very difficult, since the bones and muscles of their legs were deformed and numb from crawling.

After many weeks of attempts, he finally succeeded in making some humanoids stand, but they had huge difficulties in keeping their balance.

Weeks later he gathered the first group of humanoids walking on crutches, and some of them even ripped off their skirts to move more freely.

The rulers were furious to see the humanoids walk, so they doubled their efforts and they had the police arrest the astronaut and his followers.

The rulers killed the astronaut because he threatened their authority... but his teachings were to be kept alive. The crawling humanoids started to believe in themselves and they practiced standing. More and more of them ripped off their skirts and begun to squat and to move on all fours or on their knees. And that gave them the confidence to refuse to extract more gold and turn it down as currency. They decided to leave the name crawlers behind and call themselves standers.

The first standers learned to trust each other and gathered in self-sustaining communities where they would exchange goods and services with their own currency.

The rulers used their usual methods of placing bombs and attributing them to terrorist groups of standers, to persecute them and have them arrested. But this time the standers were not afraid, and since they would only react with passive resistance, repression just showed the crawlers that the enemy was not the standers, but rather it was the rulers.

The rulers tried their best to manipulate the population, but this time the majority of them realized it was just propaganda and they begun to stand, too. Some employees of the rulers came to the light to reveal the methods they used to scare them, and the true purpose of mining gold. All crawlers began to see gold as the symbol of their oppression and stopped using it, making the currency collapse.

In a desperate attempt to keep the power, the rulers used their advanced technology to control the dissidents, but it was useless, since most standers had ceased to obey them.

The rulers begun fearing retaliation and they fled away on their spaceships. In that moment standers became aware of their real power, because they finally realized that if they feared nothing, nobody could suppress them.

Standers created their own government made of the wisest ones, whose first task was to carry out the bracing of the surface of their planet to avoid collapses. The collective collaboration to undertake this task and the complete lack of riots and violence brought them together. They had finally learned to trust each other, and therefore have been living ever since in peace and freedom.