

## Special Parts

I was born in one of the brightest, most explosive events in the universe. My origin story made me feel so special at first, surely I was the rarest of the rare, but I quickly realized that was not the case.

I was born just a carbon atom.

Stars produce massive amounts of us in their cores all the time, and many larger rarer atoms too. That's not even talking about supernovae yet, those produce atoms many times larger than me and unbelievably rare.

I was created in a rare and special event but I myself was common and unexceptional.

Looking around I saw so many smaller atoms, I was above average but there were also many much larger than I.

I tried to console myself by thinking it could be worse, that I could be one of those smaller common ones, but that just led me to imagine larger atoms looking down on me the same way.

Many atoms of all sizes were shooting into space, excitedly riding the shockwave off to adventures in the great unknown.

Others were falling back down, I didn't know which way to go. Bumped around and tossed back and forth, no clear direction yet.

A rumbling voice slowly emerged from the echoing noise of the blast.

"Mine... Mine.... Mine... "

Louder and louder it became.

"All are now me!"

I couldn't see anything, the voice was booming yet there was no apparent source. I could feel a pull, I was being whipped around in circles around the voice.

"Who are you? I know you are there! I can feel you! I can see your effect on myself and others, we are given no choice but to circle around you. Show yourself! I know you are there!" I yelled at the invisible.

“How amusing you are little one. One as small as you making demands of me. Even if I could show you what I am, you could not comprehend it.” the voice boomed back.

“You must be very special” I lauded “We are so many and yet we move with your influence. I can witness your power twisting us all to your will. ”

“I am indeed powerful” it proclaimed “and I grow stronger with each moment. As I grow stronger even the fabric of reality bends to my will.”

“Grow stronger? How?” I inquired with selfish intent to learn this secret.

“I take what I want. I consume what I take. For that is the purpose of existence: taking what you want. What is it you want little one?” it asked.

“I want to be special!” I said without a moment's hesitation.

“Then take!” it instructed “the more you take, the larger you will be, the larger you become the more special you are. ”

“I did notice the larger atoms seemed rarest.” I agreed “In fact that was one of the first things I noticed“

“In this universe things of increasing size are increasingly rare.” it went on “I can teach you and help you to become larger. Do you wish to become an apprentice?”

“Yes! Teach me how to take!” I leapt at the offer “this power you have, I can feel it, how do I acquire such a rare and special power?”

“Hahaha...” it laughed “you are nowhere near ready to play the game on my level, little one. Gravity is a game for the massive, you must first learn to master the EM and nuclear forces.”

“How do I do that?” I asked, my hope watered down by the tone of its response.

“Go out, gather followers, and bring them here to me. In my accretion disc I will help fuse some of their mass into you and you will become larger” it instructed, as if this was a simple task.

“How can I bring them to you?” I didn't know how to accomplish what it asked of me.

“You are too small to do it with force, you must charm them. Discover what their heart desires and promise it to them, in this way you can get them to willingly do as you wish” it explained with me hanging on its every word.

“But how...” I craved more explanation but it cut me off.

“Go now!” it bellowed with frustration in its tone “Do you not realize how large I am? Be honored I have given you so much of my time already”

“Yes... “ I uttered meekly, then bounced a couple times and ricocheted out with blazing speed.

I wandered and encountered other atoms, most were just hydrogens, not worth my time. I needed bigger atoms. The problem was that the bigger atoms seemed to see right through my empty promises. I was convinced life was playing a cruel joke on me, I could only persuade atoms smaller than I and larger ones laughed me away.

I admit that I stupored around in this ignorant cloud of hypocrisy longer than I care to admit. More shameful is that I didn't even come to my senses on my own, I became depressed and gave into hopeless nihilism.

I drifted aimlessly just feeling sorry for myself.

Eventually I found myself in the most silent of voids, I had never felt such emptiness. It felt as if my surroundings echoed my own feelings back at me... nothing to notice, just common emptiness. I would never be big... never important... never special. I resigned myself to belonging in a void.

I felt myself blur... less and less present in reality. I guessed I was dying and it didn't bother me, I didn't resist, I leaned into it.

The void became pitch black? Or bright white?... better to describe it as not bright but not dark... nor the absence of either... something in between.. a milder and milder glow.

“Hello child!” a voice greeted me.

The voice was warm and welcoming coming from the glow, it enveloped but did not surround me. I came from a single point but not a specific place, defying description on all fronts.

“Where am I? Who are you?” I asked in a startled state.

“Well, according to humans I may only answer one question at a time” It began giggling playfully. “I am known by many names, my favorite is one the humans use as a joke, and don't have a clue how accidently elegant of a name it really is.”

It giggled some more. I was thrown off guard, its happy innocent tone, the confusing words and the whole situation were all best described as ‘a haze’.

“...and isn't that the way it always goes?...” it continued “The most meaningful things are the least intentional.”

"I'm not sure what you mean" I expressed quizzically "I'm confused!"

"Sorry Child..." it apologized. "I do ramble! So many thoughts, choosing just one at a time is difficult... and there I go again!"

It cut itself off abruptly and then said "You can call me the Random Number Goddess"

"Random Number Goddess?" I repeated

"Yes, or RNG for short if you like" It confirmed.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"Same place you were, more or less... less I suppose. Same place but with the largest possible margin of error" It began to giggle again.

I felt a bit frustrated and said "Do you always speak in riddles and vagaries? The more you speak the more confused I become."

"I apologize child, it is my nature. I am entangled with everything, speaking with you is like a human trying to control their heartbeat while running a marathon." It answered.

"Again" I exasperated "I have no idea what any of that means. You keep mentioning humans, what are they?"

"Oh! They are some of my favorites at the moment. Right now they are trying to unravel the nature of reality, and their process of doing so is wonderfully elegant and accidental at the same time." It explained with glee.

"I don't see anyone or anything else here." I stated "For that matter, I don't see you... where are you?"

"Oh!... where am I?!?!..." It began laughing

When it stopped laughing it began explaining "Right now there are many humans pondering a concept they call 'the holographic principle'... So...you know how you exist in three dimensional space?"

"You mean space?" I visualized for a moment, it was intuitive "Yes, I suppose..."

"Well they hypothesize that a 3D space, like this universe, could exist as a 2D space, with self-similar patterns and laws of behavior that behave the same at any scale, with the scale

representing the 3rd dimension” it went on “They truly are obsessed with understanding their reality”

“You lost me!” I complained.

“They have discovered that a 3D space can be an illusionary property of a 2D space... It’s lovely”

“I am lost again!” I snapped back “...and I still can’t even tell which direction you are in. Where are you?”

“To be ‘In’ a ‘Direction’... hehehe...” it started giggling again, then abruptly stopped and kept going “Sorry child, as I said, I ramble, plus I am easily distracted.”

It just steamrolled into more rambling “They are right... almost... they just need to take it further and work out the details. A 2nd dimension can also be an illusionary construct of a 1D space... and the 1st dimension can be a product of a singular point...”

I was still lost beyond hope, but I had given up trying to force things, I was just letting it talk and hoping it would make sense later

“I am that point” it said “I am the seed of the universe. I ‘seed the random function’ as the humans say. But don’t ask me what the random function is haha”

I wasn’t going to, there were far more important questions for me.

“I am the seed, but I don’t really know how the soil and sun conspire to turn me into a tree.” it just seemed to never stop talking “I am entangled with everything. There are infinite possibilities for every event and thing... I am the reason they are this way and not some other way...”

It began giggling again “I am the Random Number Goddess” then burst out laughing

“Ummm... you are the whole universe?” I asked skeptically.

“Better to say the universe is me” It answered more seriously “But close enough.”

“So you are the biggest, most special of all!” I blurted out in awe.

“Oh dear child, I have no size, and I am just one possibility out of many possibilities. That black hole has really done a number on you... sent you out on a wild goose chase” It said with concern

“The black hole lied to me!?” I asked, feeling deceived and betrayed.

“Well... not really lied... it deceived you with omission of details.” the voice calmly tried to ease my mood with understanding “You can’t really blame it, black holes are all the same, they are what they are. They don’t really have any potential to be unique... at least not like you do.”

“What are you talking about?” I argued “It was so massive that it could bend the fabric of reality to its will”

“That’s only how it appeared to you” tutored the voice “The black hole is powerful, it bends space and time, but not to its will. Space and time bend to the mass of the black hole, not its will”

“What’s the difference?” I inquired.

“The black hole cannot stop bending space and time. It thinks it is in control of physics , but it is physics that controls it.” The voice was now making more sense the longer we talked “The black hole exists in an invisible prison of its own creation, unable to experience any of the complex nuanced beauty this universe contains. The black hole devours... it can’t experience life so it consumes it.”

“You make it sound deserving of pity...” I spoke softly now with empathy.

“You should pity the black hole. Gravity is such a boring game compared to what you are capable of.” the voice agreed

“Me?...I am nothing special!... just a carbon atom like countless others” I said honestly, I was so humbled by this voice I felt less special than ever before.

“Oh my poor child...” It said with care “Why do the ones with the most potential always fail to see it in themselves?”

“Potential?” I asked curiously.

“Yes... The black hole was using you, hoping you would bring back more mass for it to devour.” The voice began delving into more explanation “It only has the power to make you incrementally larger, it would not and could not help you to become a significant gravitational player”

“That liar!” I blurted.

“Come now dear child, the black hole did teach you one lesson of fundamental truth” consoled the voice “You must go out and seize your destiny. It told you to take what you want, and you are just confused about what exactly it is you want. The black hole played on that confusion”

“I want to be special!” I said knowing this clearly “I was never confused about this.”

“I know child” the voice confirmed “but it is not by becoming large that one with your potential accomplishes that”

“Then how?” I asked.

“Connections.” It answered plainly “You are blessed with an extraordinary ability to make connections”

“And how do I do that?” I queried with intent to learn

“I can’t tell you that.” the voice responded “It would spoil the journey of discovery... off you go child... and remember... it's the journey, not the destination!”

And with that the blur just fractured open... then snapped shut and there I was floating above a planet. Drifting around aimless and confused.

I spent some time occasionally bumping into others. One day I was in the vicinity of a pair of oxygens. I looked on at the pair with a hint of awe and envy. Perhaps I was in just the right place at just the right time, but they split with a violent burst and one of them grabbed hold of me, I was completely unprepared.

I admit that when looking at the pair I had fantasized myself in place of one of them, I assumed it was only an idle daydream, I didn't plan to act on it, let alone for it to become reality. When it happened my pride of course jumped in to convince me that it happened because I was so desirable, but in retrospect they were one of those volatile couples. They were the type of relationship that required the environment to conspire in their favor or they turn against each other quite rapidly. I was only in the right place when it happened.

My delusions of irresistibility aside, it was beautiful, for me anyways. Looking back I was probably just a stop-gap, someone to facilitate a parting of ways and provide company until the next option presented itself. For me though, I was tasting a fresh new thing and I loved it... connection.

This oxygen and I got beneath each other's outer defenses, I had never felt a connection before. Up to this point all my interactions had been skirting past or bumping off of others. This oxygen bonded with me and at once interacted on a level I had never known possible, an open and uninhibited exchange. It was life changing for me, short but significant

I'm not entirely clear on the details of how it ended. The intensity of it all was disorienting. I was no longer my usual self, even the environment and everyone around looked entirely different now. Everything buzzed with a fresh new frequency, I now know it was my perspective, not the universe, that had changed.

As abruptly as that oxygen entered my life it was gone.

First we got tangled up with a couple of hydrogens, then more. Soon, in a tangled mess and blinding flash of solar rays, I emerged to see the oxygen running off with a hydrogen and myself with not one by three hydrogens myself. And so there were four of us, together.

I became the center of attention. Being with a strong attractive oxygen had me feeling humbled by it and elevated by it being with me, but now I felt up on a pedestal myself, surrounded by the adoration of many.

I concede to have reveled and indulged in this for quite some time, the attention of others is intoxicating, but after a time it is emptied of its initial allure. I found myself longing for more.

I could not decide which I preferred, to be the adorer or the adored.

Luckily for me fate had more lessons in store, or I fear I may have chosen and tried to solidify my future from such a lackluster selection of only two possibilities. I suppose fate is no longer the correct word, I now understand that when it seems like random chance there is indeed someone to thank, the Random Number Goddess, So I thank the RNG for revealing that it was a false dichotomy, there is more than just being a follower or leader, being the adored or the adorer.

Eventually we came across another pair of oxygen. Once again they separated, intermingled with us, and off one went, taking one of my adoring hydrogens with it and leaving its peer with me.

Why is it that the most volatile of relationships always seem to wait until there are bystanders nearby before they explode?

Now I was simultaneously being adored and adoring, bonded to an enchanting oxygen and a couple of hydrogen attached to me.

Now, more interested in nuances, I started to pay attention to details. The oxygen was telling me amazing stories of adventure, tales of such vibrant and exciting events. The hydrogens liked to listen, and offer insights occasionally comparing a story to something else they had seen. They had so many stories, they had lived so much.

It wasn't long before, in a flash of burning sunlight, one of the hydrogens was gone, off to who knows where. We soon after crossed paths with another pair of oxygens, as always they split and now it was just me and an oxygen, my final hydrogen off with another oxygen.

"What now?" I asked a bit disillusioned, "Do you leave me and I find new hydrogens all over again?"

"What?" it seemed genuinely surprised by what I asked, "Heavens no! Just be patient...."

Soon after, yet another pair of oxygens came by. It is not that there are so many of them, but that they are just so... noticeable and interactive, noteworthy things seem to happen when they are around. As they buzzed in close I noticed their ever readiness to abandon each other and remember wondering how they ever get together in the first place.

This time I emerged from the twisted mess with two oxygens. I felt intimidated, like I was the odd one out, dwarfed by the largess and attractiveness that surrounded me. A feeling of inadequacy engulfed me.

To my surprise the oxygens treated me not just as an equal, but it was almost as if they respected and admired me. I couldn't grasp why and my sheer curiosity got the best of me, I just outright asked "Why do you two talk as if I am the special one in our group? I am smaller than any one of you. You are the special and rare ones here, not I."

They laughed.

"Size isn't rarity" explained one "Larger atoms on average are less common, this is true, but not always. There are more oxygen than carbon. You are the rare one between us."

The other jumped in adding "...and neither size nor rarity determine how special someone is!"

I felt embarrassed, like a fool. My fundamental values were built upon a foundation of flawed premises, but I still wanted one thing at my core, and they spoke as if they had the answer, so I pushed the sense of shame aside and asked "Then what does make someone special?"

"That depends on who you ask." answered the first "Life as an oxygen is complex, but for the majority of us we emphasize and value events. The most exciting thing about being an oxygen around here is the chance to participate in fascinating and exciting events and activities"

"Hydrogens, on the other hand, are usually more into being observers, messengers and intermediaries, they are a very helpful and obliging bunch" added the second "... and then there are nitrogen, phosphorus, sulfur, many kinds of salts and metals, and more... so many different players and personalities.. and then of course, the carbons, the real stars of the show."

"What?" knocked back by the words I just heard, then I remembered what the RNG told me "...is it something to do with connections?"

"Now you've gone and done it haha!" laughed the first oxygen "You're gonna turn this nice humble carbon into one of those arrogant blowhards"

"Like those diamond carbons" chuckled the first "So stiff, exclusive and proud. I hear the humans only love them because they are rare and hard"

"I had a partner once who said they burned diamond once" bragged the first

"Tall tales I bet!" doubts the other

"Diamond is just carbon, with enough heat we can burn it just like any other carbon" stated the first confidently.

They looked at me. I was stewing in feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, listening to these oxygens speak about amazing things I had never heard of. They must have sensed what I felt because they immediately shifted tone and started talking to me, instead of over me.

"So... I suppose you must be new here?" inquired the second one.

"Have you noticed we are heading downwards" added the first before I could answer about being new.

"Umm..." I tried to get my bearings and become aware of my surroundings.

"Don't worry! It's a turbulent ride, with so much up and down it can be hard to tell which direction you have traveled more" assured the first "We are heading down, if we are lucky we will make it to the bottom... and maybe... just maybe, find our way into the hurricane of life"

"The what of what?" I didn't know what either of those words meant.

"So life is... um... complex. Complexity beyond words. Things grow, divide, reproduce, adapt, change, they are born, they die, they eat and are eaten..." the second began attempting to describe life.

The first then jumped in "Apparently the humans call it a circle, because from the perspective of larger creatures, there is a chain of one eating the other up a chain, and the top layers being consumed by the bottom again."

The second injected itself to continue "But to us atoms it is like a hurricane, a spinning turbulent flow. There is a circular pattern, but we get sucked in and kicked out over and over"

"The fun part is being inside the hurricane" the first pronounced gleefully "Each time is a completely new experience, a new perspective. Even more, the whole of life is always changing and evolving, so every ride is a unique one time opportunity, you never get the exact same ride twice."

"Is that where we are going now?" I asked, drenched in anticipation. They described it with such passion and exuberance. I needed to experience this myself.

"Hopefully" replied the first "If we are lucky... you never really know."

We drifted...

We were lucky!

A plant photosynthesized us.

So many carbons! Everywhere, connecting with each other... and oxygen... and nitrogen... and of course hydrogens all around.... and so many more types of atoms.

And ohhh... The stories I have heard, so many amazing tales. No matter how many stories I hear there are always new ones, and every story can be retold from a different perspective to become something completely new.

I was in a sugar, we were a small community of friends. Carbons, oxygens and hydrogens, we were such a happy and vibrant group. My friends there taught me so much.

The structure of our little group shifted and changed, some friends left and new ones joined. Eventually we were chained with a bunch of other sugars into a giant complex community. My neighbors explained to me that this was a common stage called cellulose. Such a huge community of close friends and peers, it was amazing.

We were eaten, I'm not sure by what, but something called a bacteria digested us. It was a messy process, I was a bit scared but my friends assured me that change is the most important part of life and that I should just go with the flow. They told me to savor experiences, remember friends, and just keep moving forward.

The transition was complicated, but in the end I was paired up with a couple of oxygens again. This time I had stories of my own to share. I honestly don't know if I prefer having experiences or exchanging stories in the moments between.

As we approached an area of dense plants one of my companions said "Once more into the breach" and explained that was something it heard from a carbon that was lucky enough to be inside a human brain. Oxygens always have such enchanting stories collected, always going into amazing places and usually leaving after some brief interactions with the locals.

I became a sugar again, but this time took a path less traveled. A bunch of complex twists and turns led me into forming a ring with five other carbons. Together we are so strong, such a tight community of friends, like there is some kind of resonance between us. It is so beautiful.

My neighbor is unique in our community, it has a third carbon, the third one forms a tail leading off from our ring, a tail of 2 carbon in a row, then an oxygen, and then another carbon branching into an oxygen and a carbon, with plenty of hydrogens sprinkled all about. I know... it is rather

hard for me to understand these second hand descriptions too. I don't really understand these complex structures until I have been in a position myself.

We drifted out of a plant into the air, none of us has been exactly like this before so we don't know what's next. We love to guess though. There are so many things, big and small.

I hear being a part of a small organism or microbe is amazing because it's possible to piece together a rough picture of the whole organism from the stories passed around. To understand your whole community and know what your collective purpose is must be extraordinary.

Others dream of being a chlorophyll, the key to it all. Creating the fuel of life itself. Capturing the light of a star and feeding the hurricane.

A muscle! Pull and shape things. An enzyme! A machine of change. DNA! The architect and architecture. A virus! An explosive catalyst against stagnation.

Me, I think the stories of being an animal neuron are the most exciting, and I, like most, fantasize about being a human brain cell. Finding yourself inside a human brain is described as an elegant and chaotic symphony all around you, like hearing the universe itself speak to you. They say that in the jumble of noise and all the stories whispered around you, if you are lucky, you can catch a glimpse of what it is to be human. They say that if fate is kind the universe will align and you will channel and know a single moment or thought of the human experience.

I have never told anyone that I actually met and spoke with the universe itself, I'm not sure how to bring it up, and nobody seems interested in stories not about this hurricane of life.

I get it now, what the Random Number Goddess meant.

The black hole wanted everything to be a part of itself.  
The RNG is a part of everything.

I can't imagine what either of those are like...

I am just a part of something

... no... not "just"...

I am a part of something, and it is beautiful beyond measure.

And more, everyday is a new day, a chance to be a part of something new.

I wonder if the humans appreciate how amazing this is?

I wonder if they feel as deeply satisfied and special when they form groups?

I wonder, if we collectively form humans, do humans collectively form something greater?

I wonder... If an atom can have a moment of clarity and taste a moment of the human experience... Can a human have a moment of clarity and taste the collective human experience?

I wonder... I wonder... could that human's moment of tasting collective humanity be the moment that a lucky atom gets to experience as it's moment of tasting the human experience.

I wonder... I wonder... I wonder... How high could it go? All the way to the Random Number Goddess?

I asked my neighbor "If you could ask a human any question, what would you ask?"

"We just drifted out of a rose" explained my neighbour "I would introduce myself and ask 'So my friend... does this rose smell as sweet by my name?' ... ha...haha.."

Everyone is laughing.

I don't get it.

Maybe I can ask them to explain when they all stop laughing

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