The Crack in the Cosmic Egg

by Mike Resnick

Once upon a time there was this Primal Atom, or Cosmic Egg, or YLEM, or whatever you want to call it.

And one day (though of course they didn't really have days back then) it blew up.

Hence the Universe.

And since the Universe will continue to expand for all eternity, that's just about all she wrote in the way of cosmic phenomena on the grand scale, right?

No such luck.

Yeah, I know what you're going to say: that Einstein was right and gravity is the glue that holds everything together (which isn't all that profound when you sit down and really start to think about it), and that the various stars and galaxies are so far-flung that there's no longer a sufficient gravitic force to pull them back together. Furthermore (I hear you say), there's simply not enough mass in the Universe to give any credence to the old expansion-contraction theory.

Well, let me tell you about that. Old Albert E. was right about one hell of a lot of things -- and he wasn't the first, either. In point of fact, he was the 63rd to come up with a Special Theory of Relativity. I just keep mentioning him because he was the most recent to be proven painfully, tragically, terminally right.

Of course, in old Albert's case, he was just the theorist. The real culprit was Hector Apollo Throop.

Now, Throop wasn't really all that much of a theoretical mathematician, and as philosophers go he was pretty second-rate. It's doubtful that he ever truly understood Einstein, though it probably wouldn't have made much difference if he had.

What Throop set out to do was create a faster-than-light drive. Oh, it had been done before, here and elsewhere -- 62 times, in fact, many of them quite by accident -- but Throop had no way of knowing that. He just knew that he wanted to make a buck.

No major government would spring loose any funds for him -- after all, Einstein had said that you couldn't go faster than the speed of light -- but Throop found himself a little oil-rich Arab republic and sold them a bill of goods. He talked about international prestige, and full employment for a veritable army of semi-skilled workers, and the purity of science, and just about everything else he could think of except Einstein.

So he raised the funds, and he hired a bunch of scientific charlatans who knew even less about Einstein than he himself did, and he went to work -- and damned if he didn't come up with a prototype model of a faster-than-light spaceship in something under three years.

Wild, huh?

Well, the really wild part came next: the ship actually worked.

Oh, it didn't exceed the speed of light. Einstein had said that it couldn't be done, and he was absolutely right.

But old Albert never did say that you couldn't _equal_ the speed of light. He simply pointed out the

consequences of doing so.

And that was the kicker, the little bombshell buried deep inside good old E=MC2. You know the part: as you approach the speed of light, your mass approaches infinity.

Well, when you _reach_ the speed of light, your mass _reaches_ infinity.

Now, just pause for a second and pretend you're Hector Apollo Throop and think about what that means, other than the fact that your cakes won't rise and your souffles will fall flat.

Gravity is an inherent property of mass. And, in the instant or two of cogency that remained to him just before he equaled the speed of light, Throop finally realized what effect the sudden creation of an infinite mass would have on an expanding Universe.

Except that it wasn't expanding any more. All of its various parts were racing for Throop's ship as if Judgment Day was just around the corner.

Which indeed it was.

For the 63rd time.

-- The End --
