

Unplanned-for Flying Object

by Edward M. Lerner

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The extraterrestrial object soared silently around the curve of the expressway, spewing intense radiant energy. Powers uncontrollable by mere man kept the object hovering just above the horizon.

As a wave of red tail lights flashed towards him, Don Shaw stepped firmly onto his brakes. The crunch of metal and tinkle of headlamps somewhere to the rear announced the presence of a driver with reflexes slower than his own.

In the intensely bright light, buildings and lampposts cast long, knife-edged shadows onto the road. Reflections from the glowing entity glinted off the chrome, paint, and glass of the river of cars before him. Heat from the distant orb struck at him through his windshield. An unseen convection current caught a weathered sheet of newspaper, lifting it over Don's car.

He glanced into the pickup truck stuck beside him. The yahoo behind the wheel squinted, gape-jawed, into the glare. The bill of his backwards baseball cap threw its shadow uselessly behind him. On his other side, a well-coiffed, well-dressed businesswoman tried in vain to ward off the light with a well-manicured hand.

Don pondered the other-worldly object that floated so effortlessly before him. Some of the finest minds in the world had studied it closely. Indirect evidence suggested, he'd read, that the visitor was fusion powered. Federal authorities had tracked its course and extrapolated its appearance with great accuracy, even forecasting its arrival through the local media.

Their warnings had fallen upon deaf ears.

Trapped between exits, there was nowhere to go now but forward. Nowhere to head but straight towards the luminous apparition. He waited for those ahead of him to reach the same decision. They were slow to do so: in ten minutes, he crept forward by less than a mile.

Finally, Don could bear his entrapment no longer. He rolled down his window and stuck his head through the opening. Harmful actinic rays from the distant object struck at his unprotected face.

"Idiots!" he shrieked. "Imbeciles! Buy yourselves a pair of shades.

"The sun is going to keep rising *every* morning."