

ROBERT SHECKLEY

EMISSARY FROM A GREEN AND YELLOW WORLD

Of late, Bob Sheckley has been writing mostly mystery novels, including *Soma Blues* and *Draconian New York*. He's currently finishing up a new fantasy entitled *Godshome*. Of course, Bob has also been entertaining us with skewed short stories for four decades now, and it's nice to see he's not letting up. Witness this story of a visit to a blue and white world.

ONE THING ABOUT PRESIDENT Rice. He was able to make up his mind. When Ong came to Earth with his contention, Rice believed him. Not that it made any difference in the end.

It began when the Marine guard came into the Oval Office, his face ashen.

"What is it." said President Rice, looking up from his papers.

"Someone wants to see you," the guard said.

"So? A lot of people want to see the President of the United States. Is his name on the morning list?"

"You don't understand, sir. This guy -- he just -- materialized! One moment he wasn't there and the next moment, there he was, standing in front of me in the corridor. And he isn't a man, sir. He stands on two legs but he isn't a man. He's --he's -- I don't know what he is!"

And the guard burst into tears.

Rice had seen other men cave in from the pressures of government. But what did a Marine guard have to do with pressures?

"Listen, son," Rice said.

The guard hastily rubbed tears out of his eyes. "Yes, sir." His voice was shaky, but it wasn't hysterical.

"What I want you to do," Rice said, "is take the rest of the day off. Go home. Get some rest. Come back here tomorrow refreshed. If your supervisor asks about it, tell him I ordered it. Will you do that for me?"

"Yes, sir."

"And on your way, send in that fellow you met in the corridor. The one you say doesn't look human. Don't talk to him. Just tell him I'm waiting to see him."

The fellow was not long in coming. He was about six feet tall. He wore a silver

one-piece jump suit that shimmered when you looked at it. His features were difficult to describe. All you could say for sure was, he didn't look human.

"I know what you're thinking," the fellow said. "You are thinking that I don't look human."

"That's right," Rice said.

"You're correct. I'm not human. Intelligent, yes. Human, no. You can call me Ong. I'm from Omair, a planet in the constellation you call Sagittarius. Omair is a yellow and green world. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you," Rice said.

"May I ask why?"

"It's just a hunch," Rice said. "I think that if you stayed around here and submitted to an examination by a team of our scientists, they'd conclude that you were an alien. So let's get right to it. You're an alien. I accept that you're from a green and yellow world named Oreair. Now what?"

"You're asking, I suppose, why I've come here, at this time?"

"That's right."

"Well, sir, I've come to warn you that your sun is going to go nova in about one hundred and fifty of your years."

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Why'd you wait so long to get around to telling us?"

"We just found out ourselves. As soon as it was confirmed, my people sent me as emissary to give your planet the information and offer what assistance we could."

"Why did they pick you?"

"I was chosen at random for off-planet service. It could have been any of US."

"If you say so."

"Now I have delivered the message. How can we help?"

Rice was feeling very peculiar. He didn't understand it, but he really did believe the emissary. But he also knew his belief was futile in terms of saving Earth's people. Ong's contention would have to be submitted to scientific proof. Before any conclusions could be reached, the Earth would vaporize in the

expanding sun. Rice knew that if he wanted to do anything about it, it would have to begin now.

Rice said, "Some of our scientists have made similar conjectures as to our eventual doom."

"They're right. Within approximately one hundred and fifty years this planet will no longer be habitable. May I be blunt? You're going to have to get off. All of you. And you must begin immediately."

"Great," President Rice said. "Oh, that's just great."

"Is something wrong?"

"I'm just having a little trouble assimilating this." Rice put a hand to his forehead. "This is a nightmare situation. But I have to deal with it as if it's real. Because it probably is." He wiped his forehead again. "Let's say I believe you. How could we do anything about it?"

"We of Omair are ready to help. We will give you detailed plans explaining what you must do to make starships for all Earth's people. There will be further instructions for getting all the people together and into the ships in an orderly manner. Please understand, we're just trying to help, not impose ourselves on you." "I believe you," Rice said, and he did.

"There's a lot to be done," the emissary said. "It's a big task, but you humans are just as smart as we Omairians -- we checked on that, no use wasting our time on dummies. With your present level of technology, and with our assistance, you can do this and be away within the next hundred years."

"It's a tremendously exciting prospect," Rice said.

"We thought you'd feel that way. You aren't the only planetary civilization we've been able to rescue."

"That is very much to your credit."

"Nothing to praise. This is how we Omairians are."

"I'm going to have to ask something that may sound a little strange," Rice said. "But this is Earth so I have to ask it. Who's going to pay for all this?"

"If it's necessary," Ong said, "we of Omair are willing to defray the costs."

"Thank you. That's very good of you."

"We know."

"So what will be necessary?"

"To begin with, you'll need to clear out the center of one of your continents for the launchingpads. But that's not too difficult, because you can distribute the people in the other continents. That will disrupt commerce and farming, of course. But we will supply whatever food is needed."

Rice could imagine it now -- the slow convening of experts from all over the globe, the quarreling, the demands for more and more proofs. And even if a consensus of scientists came to agreement after many years, what about the population at large? Before any sizeable portion of the Earth's people could be convinced, the Earth would long since have vaporized in the expanding sun.

"Simultaneous to the building of the starships," the emissary went on, "you'll have to get your populations indoctrinated, inoculated -we'll supply the medicines -- and in general prepared for a long journey by starship. During the transition period you'll require temporary housing for millions. We can help there."

"Is the indoctrination really necessary? Earth people hate that sort of thing."

"Absolutely essential. Your people will not be prepared for a lifetime of shipboard life. Hypnotherapy may be needed in many cases. We can supply the machines. I know your people won't like it, being uprooted this way. But it's either that or perish in about a hundred years."

"I'm convinced," Rice said. "The question is, can I sell it?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, it's not just a case of convincing me, you know. There are tens of millions of people out there who won't believe you."

"But surely if you order them to take the necessary measures for their own good..."

"I'm just the ruler of one country, not the whole planet. And I can't even order my own countrymen to do what you're suggesting."

"You don't have to order it. Just suggest it and show the proofs. Humans are intelligent. They'll accept your view."

Rice shook his head. "Believe me, they won't believe me. Most of them will think this is a diabolical plot on the part of government, or some church, or the Islamic Conspiracy, or some other. Some will think little gray aliens are trying to trick us into captivity. Others will believe it's the work of a long-vanished Elder Race, here to do us in. Whatever the reason, everyone will be sure it's a plot of some kind."

"A plot to do what?" Ong asked.

"To enslave us."

"We of Omair don't do that sort of thing. We have a perfect record in that regard. I can offer proofs."

"You keep on talking about proofs," Rice said. "But most humans are proof-proof."

"Is that really true?."

"Sad to say, it's true."

"It goes against accepted theory. We have always believed that intelligence invariably produces rationality."

"Not in these parts. Not with us."

"I'm sorry to hear that. We Omairians thought this was just a matter of one colleague calling on another and warning him of a danger, then advising him on what steps to take. I had no idea humans might resist believing. It's not rational, you know. Are you quite sure of this?"

"That's how humans are. And above all, they're conditioned from earliest age against taking orders from aliens."

"I wouldn't be giving any orders."

"You'd be advising the government. In people's minds, that would be the equivalent of giving orders."

"I don't know what to tell you," the emissary said. "Is there really no way you could convince people otherwise?"

"I can tell you here and now, it'll never work."

Ong gave a slight inclination of his head. "Well, it has been nice meeting you. Have a nice day."

The emissary turned to go.

"Just one moment," Rice said.

The alien paused, turned. "Yes?"

"What about just taking those of us who do believe, who want to go?"

"It's unprecedented," the emissary said. "In all our experience, races either can change their thinking and get away from their doomed worlds by their own efforts, or they cannot."

"We're different," Rice said.

"All right," the emissary said. "I'll do it. Gather your people. I'll be back in ten years to take those who want to go. We can't wait any longer than that."

"We'll be ready."

TEN YEARS LATER, the emissary came to a small, hand-built house in a corner of the Oregon Cascade Mountains. A trout stream ran behind the house, and Rice was standing beside the stream, fishing. Rice said, "How did you find me here?"

"Once we Omairians have met you, we can always find you again. But I think you are not president any longer."

"No," Rice said. "My term ended and I didn't get reelected. I tried to convince people of the destruction that lay ahead. Nearly everyone thought I was a crackpot. Those who did believe me were worse than those who didn't. A crazy man tried to shoot me and killed my wife instead. My children hold me responsible. They changed their names and moved away."

"I am sorry to hear that," the emissary said. "But I think you'll have to admit that those other people, the ones who despise and disbelieve you, do not have your grasp, your intelligence, your intuition. You're probably the most unusual man of your century, Mr. Rice. You believed in us from the start. You didn't think we were sent by God or the devil. You accepted what we said. Evidently you were the only one."

"Evidently."

"Perhaps it's for the best," the emissary said. "Your people, in their present state, could never have made it out there. But you could."

"Me?"

"Your true place is with us, Mr. Rice, out in the galaxy. There is still time. You are not an old man. We have rejuvenation treatments. We can add many years to your life. We have women of our species who would be honored to mate with you. We have a civilization that would welcome you. I beg of you, leave this doomed Earth behind and come away with

"No, I think not," Rice said. "I can still look forward to living another thirty or so years on Earth before things get too bad, can't I?"

"Yes, but no longer."

"It's enough. I'll stay."

"You choose to die here with your people? But they will perish because of their own ignorance."

"Yes. But they are Earth's children, as I am. My place is here with Them."

"I find it difficult to believe you're saying this."

"I did a lot of thinking about it. It occurred to me that I was really no different from the other humans. Not fundamentally. And certainly no better."

"I can't accept that. Anyhow, what is your inference?"

"It seemed to me that if my species was incapable of believing in its own doom, it was not for me to believe in it, either. So I've decided that all that stuff you talked about is not going to happen. In fact, I'm pretty sure I've dreamed all this up."

"It is not intelligence," said the emissary, "to take refuge in solipsism."

"My mind's made up. I'll stay here with my trout stream. You've never done any fly fishing, have you, emissary?"

"Where I come from," the emissary said, "we don't fish. We respect all life."

"Does that mean you don't eat flesh of any kind?"

"That is correct."

"What about vegetables? They're living things."

"We don't eat vegetables, either. We convert our energy from inert chemicals, or, if necessary, we transform it directly from solar radiation. We can re-engineer you so you can do that, too."

"I'll just bet you can," Rice said. "I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me. Or rather, you heard my implication. The sort of life you offer wouldn't be human. It would be hellish. It wouldn't be worth living for a fellow like me, to say nothing of my friends. I refer to the rest of the human race."

"You mentioned hell. There is no hell."

"Yes there is. Hell is me talking to you. Now do me a favor and get out of my face."

The emissary left, and, outside, paused for a moment, looking back at the house. Would Rice change his mind? No indication of it. Ong shrugged and returned to his vehicle. With a gesture he brought it up to full visibility and got aboard.

Soon he was high in the air, with the green and blue planet receding below him. Soon he would put in the faster than light drive.

But just before he did, he turned back and took a last look. A Good-looking planet, and intelligent people. A pity to see it all lost.

He brooded for a moment, but only a moment. Then he consoled himself with the knowledge that this represented no real loss to the Cosmos. After all, intelligent life had evolved again and again on planets all over the universe.

But what had evolved was intelligent life much like that of Ong and his people. That was the standard, the norm. But intelligent life like Earth's? Intelligent irrational life? It had to be a fluke, a one-of-a-kind thing, this mating of intelligence and irrationality. The emissary didn't think the universe had seen Earth's like before. It probably would not again.

He looked down once more at the Earth. It looked like a nice place. But of course, there were more where that came from. Sort of. In any event, it was time to get back to his own green and yellow world.