

What's an Ocean, Grampa?

by Stephen M. Golden

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"What's an O-cee-ann, Grampa?"

"Wha . . . wha . . . (snort)?" Grampa, just being awakened by one of his darling grandchildren, was still trying to piece together reality. He squeezed his eyes tightly shut, and finally, opened them and smiled at the youngster.

"Whadja say li'l fella?" he replied cheerfully.

"leee saaaaid, 'what's an oooo-ceeee-annn'," responded the little guy melodically.

"An oooo-ceee-annn -- ? Where did you hear the word, my little creed-crod?"

The little guy's eyes cast themselves sheepishly down to the ground. "I dint hear it, I read it -- in your labertory, on the little plastic square things," he said with a sheepish smile, and peering up at his Grampa.

"Oh, you mean O-shun! You must have read it on one of the boxes that came back from the archaeological find." Grampa went on, "An Ocean was a great body of water all in one place, and flowing together."

"Bigger than the house?" the little one queried.

"Oh, much much bigger! Do you remember the pictures of land's edge I showed you a while back?"

"Yeah! It was a big deep open place on the other side!"

"Well, imagine that big deep open place all full of water right up to land's edge. That was an ocean."

"Is there an O-shun today, Grampa?"

"Oh, no, my son. Not for many many millennia! There's not so much as a thimbleful of water in one location in all of the Cooperation Principles, much less an Ocean!"

"How did it all stay together, Grampa?"

"Well, my boy, things were different a long time ago. Life was different, the forms of life were different, and the world itself was different." A moment of contemplatory silence passed while Grampa reflected.

"Come with me, li'l' fella, I'll let you hear the Ocean!" And he led the little tyke back down into his 'Labertory'.

Grampa, or Solomon Longlegs, as he was known to others, was a scientist. Part Archaeologist, part Physicist, and part Engineer he was a creature of many talents and interests. His main function for the Cooperative was to investigate the items retrieved in the archaeological finds and discover their purpose. The civilizations of ages ago had made many technological advances, especially with machinery, electronics, and optics. Unfortunately, they could not prevent the changing of the world that eventually destroyed them. There must have been some great catastrophe that led to the world's antithetical change, and subsequently to their extinction. Perhaps a great meteor crashed into the planet, or a strange comet flew too close and left a fatal legacy, perhaps they led themselves to their own demise by one of their own creations going awry.

This was all hypothetical, of course. Conclusive evidence was so difficult to obtain, and even what little there was left room for much doubt. Though he may never know how or why they died, he, and others like him, could piece together some facets of how they lived.

The Cooperation had long since discovered their language: how to read it, and how to pronounce it. The Cooperation had uncovered many sealed containers of devices and documents. It was as if the ancient race knew they were dying, and wanted to leave as much about themselves behind as possible to mark their existence.

Solomon had contributed to the discovery of the application of many of the devices found in such archaeological efforts. His most recent breakthrough was in the area of sound reproduction. He never ceased to be amazed by the ancient race's attention to detail and concern over replicating things that had existed in their time. It turned out to be a great benefit for the Cooperation, and for himself, for through these replications much could be known about their time. Pictures of "their world"; two dimensional silver emulsion representations of themselves and their civilization -- of everything, living, nonliving, and dead. They seemed to document everything also! Accurate and drawn-to-scale diagrams of seemingly the most useless things! Solomon often thought their own civilization could learn from this.

But, back to Solomon's most recent discovery. The last Archaeological find had revealed many cases of clear polymer (which the ancient race had called plastic) containing aluminized plastic circular disks. A device that had also been found seemed the obvious receptacle for the disks.

After much time investigating the physical properties of the device and the disks, and with the knowledge that had been previously discovered by the Cooperation, Solomon had discovered how to use this new device and its associated disks. He found a narrow light inside the device was aimed so as to strike the disk while it was spinning very fast, and produce a stream of pulses which was then translated into electrical signal that could be amplified into sound in the air.

This discovery was so recent, it had not even been presented to the Cooperation. But Solomon was usually slow about such things. He knew as soon as the announcement was made, the Cooperation would remove the device and the disks from his possession, and he would no longer be able to

enjoy his discovery at his leisure. Therefore, Longlegs took as long as he wished in identifying the reproductions on each disk.

Many of the disks had strange throbbings and violent vibrations that could not possibly be identified as any discernable sound. They seemed to have no relationship with knowledge whatever. But there were a few -- that, from reading the language impregnated into the fiber medium of the case, seemed to be reproductions of naturally occurring sounds. Solomon Longlegs was convinced this was the case. It thrilled him immensely when new such disks were found and brought to his laboratory.

One of the newest of these was the sounds of an Ocean. This is what his Grandson had read. This is what he was going to play for his Grandson.

"Ok, li'l' fella, you just sit right there, and I'll let you HEAR the ocean!"

It took a few moments for Solomon to prepare the circuits, and set the device in motion, and then all at once, fading into aural reality was the crashing of waves on a rocky shore; the slowly pulsating swell of great masses of water being thrown onto the base of land's edge.

The little one was frightened at first! Surely, he thought, no one could live where such noises were. Then, as he became accustomed to their sound, he was entranced by their subtle regularity, and comforted by the gentle variations within the crashing waves.

They both relaxed and enjoyed the vibrations of air which were recreating the ancient sound of an Ocean.

The young one's mind began to wander, his eyes tracing the shapes and patterns about the room, another of the cases caught his eye, and his inquisitive nature led him to ask, "Grampa, what's a thun-der-storm?"

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"I don't know, my little scientist. I don't know . . . ," and Solomon Longlegs raised a leg to scratch his head while he contemplated the question, dangling from his web thoughtfully.