

The year the sun exploded was the same year that the F1 Voyager satellite reached the outskirts of the universe. Back in 3025 the F1 Voyager was designed. Its sole purpose was to fly to the end of the universe, and, from there, calculate the meaning of life using its advanced computer.

For millions of years a monitor on earth had been tracking the satellite's progress, just watching a tiny green dot on the screen. But, the Sun's lifespan was slowly decreasing and with it, the Earth's. Scientists were getting worried, especially Professor Flemings.

"Johnson, come look at this," Flemings called to his associate. "I have an even larger measure of radiation than yesterday." Johnson was a nasty little man with long bushy eyebrows and a bald head. He was mean spirited sometimes and would do anything to get ahead. Alas, Johnson was Flemings' boss and Flemings was to report all of his findings to him.

"That's new," Johnson said sarcastically. "Ever since the Sun got darker the flares and their radiation have been up almost eighty seven percent. Tell me something I don't know."

Flemings sighed. His job was to carefully watch for signs of detonation but it was always the same; High levels of radiation, day in and day out. He longed to be the satellite monitor. At least then he could gaze at the sheer expanse of the universe instead of focusing on a ball of gas that was practically a ticking time bomb.

When it was quitting time, Flemings grabbed his suit, his briefcase and his computer. His suit was standard issue anti-contamination equipment and his briefcase just stored his papers and other work. The thing Flemings was most proud of his was his computer.

Almost nobody these days used one. In fact, the last computer manufactured had millions of years ago and ever since then the brain chips had replaced them. Flemings had a chip, but he only used it for contacting his colleagues. Instead, Flemings had found this beauty. It was from the late 5000's and he had found it at the museum sale when he was young. It had an advanced operating system, even for that

time and still worked quite well. It consisted of a stand that projected an interactive hologram that you could use almost anywhere.

Flemings was looking at it through the helmet of his suit as he walked home. His attention wasn't fully on the screen, for he had to watch out for muggers and bandits. But, then again, he thought, there was too much radiation today for anyone without a suit to be outside.

When he reached his stasis chambers he opened the hatch and walked down the steps to his underground quarters. He hardly noticed his two cats as they brushed up against him or his FRienD. Usually, FRienD offered to shine his boots and to make him dinner, but the radioactive Sun flares had recently been messing up everything, including FRienD, so the robot just wheeled into the corner and started mumbling gibberish.

Flemings sat down at his desk and started to work on the plan he had been developing on his way home. He was going to hack into the F1 Voyager's camera feed and watch it.

Ever since Flemings was a child he dreamed of exploring the cosmos in a rocket. But in training school he had suffered an injury disabling him dramatically and forcing Flemings to abandon his goal. Instead, he went back to school and got a degree, thereby leading to a job at Monitro observatory. His first job at the observatory was to work the Extra Terrestrial Life Scanner, where they dump all the newbies, since nobody had ever found alien life in the history of the planet. But, he worked his way up, for Flemings was a diligent student.

Flemings attached his computer into the wall and began to modify and change every single line of complicated programming to his advantage. After hours of typing and clicking, he finally got a picture.

At first, Flemings thought his computer had broken. He cursed to himself while fumbling with the circuitry. The screen just displayed a white, static-y background. But then he realized that the satellite's camera was flashing the light signifying that it was still streaming video. Flemings froze.

A chill ran up his spine.

There, on the monitor, the satellite was streaming live footage of the very end of the Universe, the edge of eternity. And, he, Robert Watterson Flemings, was the first man in the history of time, to see nothingness itself.

Because nobody else was at the observatory, he was the first one to know. He rushed out of his chambers, ran up the tube to the surface and down the road to Johnson's place. When Flemings got there, he waited to catch his breath before pressing the doorbell. A few minutes later his colleague opened the front door.

"Johnson, I have startling news!" Flemings announced.

"Is it more radiation levels? Seriously Flemings, nobody cares. We still have at least seventy more years on this planet, so let's just stop worrying about these feeble-

"No! It's about the satellite feed! It reached the destination! The end of the Universe!"

"Dear God..." uttered Johnson, amazed. "Is it calculating the equations?"

"It seems to be," said Flemings. "Would you like to gaze into nothingness itself?" he asked Johnson. And, with that, Flemings pulled out his computer and showed the video stream to his partner.

It was white, yet black. It was every color at imaginable at once. It was everything. Yet, there was nothing there. This was truly beyond the reaches of the Universe. Johnson gasped. It was amazing.

The next day Flemings went to the observatory early in the morning. He positioned himself so that his computer (which was showing the satellite video) was to the left while he could still monitor at his station like normal.

He was watching the video for a couple of hours until something happened. The feed cut short. Flemings cried out in anguish. He fumbled around with the Internet settings, the computer itself, and all other things to get the thing fixed, but nothing was working.

At a peak in Fleming's despair, a knock came at the door. Flemings opened it and there was Johnson standing with two muscular men dressed in black suits.

"Johnson! The satellite broke! The feed stopped and I need help to rewire it!" Flemings screamed at the man.

“No, Flemings. It didn’t break. Something else happened. Last night, the Government came to my house and bought the stream from us. They now control the video and only they can watch,” Johnson explained.

“But... Why?” Flemings stammered. He had made it his goal to figure out the meaning of life, even if it killed him...

“Because they offered a generous amount of research money. Now we can afford the newest technology. Plus, what do we care what they do with it? They can sell it to other countries for all I care. The satellite rights have been transferred to the nearest government facility where they’ll wait for a while until processing them and sending them to the main base for analysis. Let it go, Flemings,” Johnson said harshly.

For days afterwards, Flemings grieved over these events. One day while contemplating this loss, Flemings decided to work at home, for he had nothing better to do. He pulled up the browser for the Sun-monitoring station and began to measure radiation levels and watch for significant flares. After a few minutes, something beeped. He glanced over to where the disturbance was on the monitor and got a horrible surprise.

For the second time that month, a shiver ran up the scientist’s spine when he discovered that the Sun had just died in a massive explosion. All the other scientists had dramatically miscalculated the date of the Sun’s death.

Light from the Sun going to Earth takes eight minutes to get there, so, the people of the planet had eight minutes until it got so hot, humans and all other life would be burned right where they were standing. Flemings, being a man of science, knew that this disaster was inevitable and could not be stopped. There was only one thing one could do when facing something like this, thought Flemings, and that would be to do something one could never be held against. Flemings knew he had to see the satellite’s meaning of life.

He rushed to his garage, not bothering to get his suit, said goodbye to his cats and got into his hovercraft. It rushed out of the tube and into the sunlight of the surface that wouldn’t last much longer.

Six minutes to go.

The car flew as fast as Fleming’s adrenaline was pumping. He was heading towards the building that Johnson had said the feed had been transferred to. From

there, he would hack into the database and view the final seconds of the satellite's calculating before displaying the answer to the eternal question. In other words, Fleming was the only man on a planet of billions that knew they were all going to die, a man hell-bent on a near-impossible mission.

Five minutes left.

His hovercraft stopped running halfway to the government base. Flemings was hardly dazed and ran desperately to his destination. He was feeling warmer and warmer by the second. But he knew that he couldn't waste any time at all.

Four minutes.

Flemings finally reached the tall black tower standing in the middle of the downtown. The ever-growing sunlight brightly reflected off of the shiny windows and onto Flemings' glasses. He squinted as he sprinted the last couple feet to the door.

Inside, everything was reflective and silver, not unlike the outside. There were heavily armed men standing next to the receptionist's desk.

"Let me through, for the love of god!" screamed Flemings; almost unaware of how much he sounded like a lunatic.

The receptionist nodded at the guards and they advanced on him. Flemings charged at them, hitting one in the stomach with his head. Suddenly, the sound of speeding bullets chattered in the air. Flemings looked down at his leg. Blood was gushing out of his calf, soaking his sock in the ooze. The scientist took off through a random hallway, as fast as a limping man could go. Behind him the guards gave chase.

Two minutes.

After what seemed like hours of evading the guards through the endless twisting hallways, Flemings finally stumbled into a room with a large computer monitor. On the screen was the familiar look of the edge of the Universe.

Flemings limped into the room, the glow of the screen covering the whole room and part of the hallway. He locked the door with its giant bolts, confident that he was safe at last, alone with the satellite video.

One minute.

Flemings' heart was pounding along with the rhythm of the guards beating behind the giant metal door. On the monitor, the timer was counting down until the

equation solving was done, while Flemings' watch was counting down until the Sun's explosions reached the Earth. Even inside the building in a temperature-controlled room, it was about one-hundred degrees. Flemings' watch was ticking faster and faster it seemed, and the satellite's clock slower and slower.

Ten seconds. Nine. Eight...

Finally, the satellite's countdown stopped. The room fell silent. Even the guards pounding ceased. There, on the screen, was the meaning to life.

The Universe.

Time.

Space.

The meaning for all creation was explained in three words, typed up on the screen, the green cursor flashing on and off.

Five seconds. Four. Three...

What the screen displayed burned into Flemings' eyes.

The screen said this:

"the human race".

Flemings smiled as everything burned.