

CERTAIN ZONES

by Cheyenne Nimes

Beard of Bees Press
Chicago, Illinois
Number 75
March, 2011

Contents

<i>Spaceguard: One mississippi, two mississippi. . .</i>	1
<i>No Hazard (White Zone) 0</i>	2
<i>Normal (Green Zone) 1</i>	3
<i>Meriting Attention by Astronomers (Yellow Zone) 2</i>	4
<i>Meriting Attention by Astronomers (Yellow Zone) 3</i>	5
<i>Meriting Attention by Astronomers (Yellow Zone) 4</i>	6
<i>Threatening (Orange Zone) 5</i>	7
<i>Threatening (Orange Zone) 6</i>	8
<i>Threatening (Orange Zone) 7</i>	9
<i>Certain Collisions (Red Zone) 8</i>	10
<i>Certain Collisions (Red Zone) 9</i>	11
<i>Certain Collisions (Red Zone) 10</i>	12

Spaceguard: One mississippi, two mississippi...

Elsie Marley's Grown So Fine

Elsie Marley's grown so fine,
She won't get up to feed the swine,
But lies in bed 'till eight or nine!
Lazy Elsie Marley.

No Hazard (White Zone) 0

“The likelihood of a collision is zero, or is so low as to be effectively zero. Also applies to small objects such as meteors and bodies that burn up in the atmosphere as well as infrequent meteorite falls that rarely cause damage.”

Settled down with our backs to wind and watched. It's where we're looking at, it's just that, the sky. Tied up with a big yellow silk bow. Bathed in a halo of light. Parasol. Long-handled pruning shears. Thank-you note. Copulations. Like so many sleeping drunks. Mill slowly. We're dressed in their living best, all held together by mutual gravitational forces, gently feeling the curvature of the earth. They say they don't know what it is and cannot see it. So even wild beasts could not see or smell him squirming around on its big yolk sac. The first postulate the most important one: make no assumptions about anything. Fringed with false-fronted buildings.

The Cock Doth Crow

The cock doth crow
To let you know,
If you be wise,
Tis time to rise.

Normal (Green Zone) 1

“A routine discovery in which a pass near the Earth is predicted that poses no unusual level of danger. Current calculations show the chance of collision is extremely unlikely with no cause for public attention or public concern. New telescopic observations very likely will lead to re-assignment to Level 0.”

To find any of these, you must know where in the sky to look- at the place no one ever thinks to look. Faint streaks of light in a long telescopic exposure... one glowing speck at the inside edge of the film. Like a knife fallen to the ground, or a sparrow, following light. Disappeared before she ever appeared. Like a child on an Easter egg hunt. The obvious places to expect. He was still standing there, smiling at the spacious sky. Children led us to still more eggs. Some in the light, some in the dark.

Little Nancy Etticoat

Little Nancy Etticoat

In a white petticoat,

And a red nose.

The longer she stands

The shorter she grows.

Meriting Attention by Astronomers (Yellow Zone) 2

“A discovery, which may become routine with expanded searches, of an object making a somewhat close but not highly unusual pass near the Earth. While meriting attention by astronomers, there is no cause for public attention or public concern as an actual collision is very unlikely. New telescopic observations very likely will lead to re-assignment to Level 0.”

Thoughts that creep up and are quickly dismissed before we even allow ourselves to think the thought fully. Its blade worn to little more than a sliver. Beautiful rock till it gets down here. Smiling and thrusts out her breasts. Slow stevedore. She has other things she wants to do. But I had a feeling and pointed. Émigré.

Little Boy Blue

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.
Where is the boy who looks after the sheep?
He's under a haycock, fast asleep.
Will you wake him? No, not I,
For if I do, he's sure to cry.

Meriting Attention by Astronomers (Yellow Zone) 3

“A close encounter, meriting attention by astronomers. Current calculations give a 1% or greater chance of collision capable of localized destruction. Most likely, new telescopic observations will lead to re-assignment to Level 0. Attention by public and by public officials is merited if the encounter is less than a decade away.”

Something like a stiff wind passed through the numbers of low probability. Flare of sun color; the weak glint of the tail. “We’ll keep an eye on it.” Doll clutched in one hand, she can feel it falling. A series of relations, a straggle of thunder sounding long after you thought it was gone. Particles in the ionosphere light up. Before hardening into fixed meaning. A single point on the sky. Looking for a way into this dimension. No bright rock had been there before. Was it real? He walked outside. It was.

Grandma’s Spectacles

These are Grandma’s spectacles,
This is Grandma’s hat.
This is the way she folds her hands,
And lays them in her lap.

Meriting Attention by Astronomers (Yellow Zone) 4

“A close encounter, meriting attention by astronomers. Current calculations give a 1% or greater chance of collision capable of regional devastation. Most likely, new telescopic observations will lead to re-assignment to Level 0. Attention by public and by public officials is merited if the encounter is less than a decade away.”

Something sensed for the first time. Prowling. At large. Asteroid swarm. Like an ever increasing flock of exhausted birds. Crosses mark their positions on images. Close shave. Vicinal. They could see what looks like a hand, but of course, they didn't say that. However, you are left to draw your own conclusions. A flare on the rise. More substantial than light. Open sore that grows. Images appear, new meanings occur. She is well along in years but there is something about the way she moves. Boils down to luck, luck, luck.

High in the Pine Tree

High in the pine tree,
The little turtledove
Made a little nursery
To please her little love.

“Coo,” said the turtledove,
“Coo,” said she;
In the long, shady branches
Of the dark pine tree.

Threatening (Orange Zone) 5

“A close encounter posing a serious, but still uncertain threat of regional devastation. Critical attention by astronomers is needed to determine conclusively whether or not a collision will occur. If the encounter is less than a decade away, governmental contingency planning may be warranted.”

It begins to go wrong. “The sky is low.” Built like a wrecking ball. Started to answer to a different god. He hurried to a back room and shrank. Each breath more labored than the one before. Places the picture face down. A red beam crawled to the edge of it. Light goes all the way up then all the way down. Moving faster than my eye could follow. Watching a ball game- and the large black smudge of the ball itself. With growing fear that darkness would catch us still out in the countryside. Needing definitions now. Target plane: A plane defined as passing through the Earth’s center.

Hark Hark the Dogs Do Bark

Hark! Hark! The dogs do bark,
The beggars are coming to town.
Some in rags,
And some in tags,
And one in a velvet gown!

Threatening (Orange Zone) 6

“A close encounter by a large object posing a serious but still uncertain threat of a global catastrophe. Critical attention by astronomers is needed to determine conclusively whether or not a collision will occur. If the encounter is less than three decades away, governmental contingency planning may be warranted.”

Testy. Red lithium flame. Firing range lights. Brightened to the threshold of human vision. Coagulating blood into a clot. A crystal globe as it breaks, shattering so continents are still recognizable? “It won’t really happen.” Sometimes the atmosphere temporarily steadies. Then comes screaming back. Long melancholy howl of a wolf. “Poorly constrained, uncertain orbit.”

I Don’t Want to Go to Mexico

I don’t want to go to Mexico
No more, more, more.

There’s a big fat policeman
At my door, door, door.

He grabbed me by the collar,
He made me pay a dollar,

I don’t want to go to Mexico
No more, more, more.

Threatening (Orange Zone) 7

“A very close encounter by a large object, which if occurring this century, poses an unprecedented but still uncertain threat of a global catastrophe. For such a threat in this century, international contingency planning is warranted, especially to determine urgently and conclusively whether or not a collision will occur.”

Deep sense of something gone wrong in the air. “My god, it’s enormous.” There is no brighter object. Slanted at a precise angle. Close to touching. Can see the occipital ridge of us, footprints left in primordial mud. Kind of like returning to the scene of the crime. The last woolly mammoth. Then necklaces of primate teeth. Blood called to blood for blood down the ages. Bowing toward earth. Mountains are young in earth time, still forming as recently as 70 million years ago. There was a time before human time. Lateral gill slits. A new story is emerging but we don’t have a new word for it; the universal score is the same.

Dickery, Dickery, Dare

Dickery, dickery, dare,
The pig flew up in the air.
The man in brown
Soon brought him down!
Dickery, dickery, dare.

Certain Collisions (Red Zone) 8

“A collision is certain, capable of causing localized destruction for an impact over land or possibly a tsunami if close offshore. Such events occur on average between once per 50 years and once per several 1000 years.”

Suddenly, the whole world wants to be someplace other than Earth, or this Earth. We are here, nowhere else. Firebird. It's not going to stop for anything. The President speaks slowly. Visibly uncomfortable. Everything that is moving comes to stillness except that rock. We were encouraged to turn our attention to God during the day by reciting short, even one-word prayers. Full blackout wartime regulations in effect. It's practically in the backyard. And the question is not only when, but how. The earliest possible date it could arrive. Waiting room of the dead. Out-and-out. At some point these words ceased to have meaning: the future, next Christmas, safety. Someone is still selling tickets to something. Jersey Gumbo Draw. Protection schemes. To go off somewhere, can then be enclosed in a shroud preventing contact. Or chanting songs in a secret language, shaking coconut-shell rattles, to save your soul in another world. Those who are terrified and those who are dead from suicide.

One for the Mouse

One for the mouse,

One for the crow,

One to rot,

One to grow.

Certain Collisions (Red Zone) 9

“A collision is certain, capable of causing unprecedented regional devastation for a land impact or the threat of a major tsunami for an ocean impact. Such events occur on average between once per 10,000 years and once per 100,000 years.”

Has grown more and dramatically empty. Not quite yet, not quite yet, not quite yet. It is a given that it is between noon and midnight. A shadow of a stick; crude sundial. Even as you watch a second tick away, it's gone. Last minute shotgun weddings. White of the gown, dark of the cast shadow. The distance turning into a blue shadow. "Why us?" What we call ourselves now. Kind of a deliverance, in a way. Strange reports, underground news, fragments of a word or two. I think we're hearing the other side. "Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river..."

Cobbler Cobbler Mend My Shoe

Cobbler, cobbler, mend my shoe.

Get it done by half past two.

Half past two is much too late!

Get it done by half past eight.

Certain Collisions (Red Zone) 10

“A collision is certain, capable of causing global climatic catastrophe that may threaten the future of civilization as we know it, whether impacting land or ocean. Such events occur on average once per 100,000 years, or less often.”

We stepped out onto the top of the world. Done for. Turned the radio on and off quickly; we can last for just a sentence. Into the glowing cave of its wide open mouth. Shocked forward into the cloud of dust. Fleshy hands flew apart. Leftover hands. Sprawled facedown, hands and feet askew. Their last words. The dead zone.

How Many Miles to Babylon?

How many miles to Babylon?

Three score and ten.

Can I get there by candlelight?

Aye, and back again.

If your feet are nimble and light,

You'll get there by candlelight.

CHEYENNE NIMES is currently residing in Iowa City. A hybrid manuscript on American rivers & the world water crisis — which received the Edwin Ford Piper Scholar Award — is looking for a home. She was an Iowa Arts Fellow in the MFA nonfiction writing program at Iowa. An NEA fellow and writer in residence at the Iowa Art Museum, she was the 2009 winner of DIAGRAM's hybrid essay contest. Her work has appeared in *Sonora Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *kill author*, *Full of Crow*, *Nano Fiction*, *Abjective*, and others, and can also be found at strangeh2os.wordpress.com.

Beard of Bees books are freely redistributable, and are produced with Free Software.

Copyright © 2011 Beard of Bees Press
Chicago/Oak Park, Illinois

www.beardofbees.com