

## The Party At The End Of The World

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*December 31<sup>st</sup>, five billion years from now*

Every year since the rise of global human civilization, people on Earth have celebrated New Year's Eve—once a year for over five billion years. Customs have changed, the species has dramatically evolved, but the New Year's tradition has stayed intact. Another lap around the Sun. It never loses significance, not for the hardy few who have remained on the home planet all these years, these long, glorious years.

This year is different. This is it. The end of the world. The last party on Earth. In just two days, it will become physically impossible to live on Earth. Our orbiting sunshades will no longer be able to keep out the warming rays of the Sun. Without the sunshades, Earth would have become uninhabitable billions of years ago. In fact, most planets would have died out long ago. But Earth is not most planets. Earth is home. For two more days.

It boggles the mind to think that the entire civilized population of the multiverse once lived right here. All on one little planet. A beautiful planet, for sure, but still, just one little planet. Of course, the civilized population was tiny back then, just a few billion. Today's population wouldn't even fit on a few billion Earths. That's what billions of years of cosmic expansion will do. Those early humans did get one thing right—it is a small world after all.

It's crazy to think that we almost didn't make it. Yet here we are, stretched across countless galaxies, using most of their energy to power our lives. We'll surely outlive the stars. But we almost failed to outlive our own immaturity. That would have been horrible. Beyond horrible. A sleeping universe, with no one to appreciate its beauty, no one to explore it, no one to make the most of life. Completely worthless.

That is why we are celebrating on Earth tonight. We are celebrating our existence. Our blessed, beautiful existence. Without it, we would be nothing. Literally, nothing. We are celebrating quite simply because we can. Right here on Earth, right where it all started. One last time.

Some people say it's selfish to celebrate our own existence. Not me. I don't believe that one bit. They say we should be celebrating the stars that fuel us, or the planets we stand on, or the gravity that keeps us from floating away. Yeah, sure, those all matter. But we're why those things matter. We're what brings them to life. Celebrating our existence forces us to remember that.

Celebrating our existence also forces us to pay homage to those who made our existence possible. Our parents, of course. And our grandparents, and all our ancestors before them. They are why we are alive. Above all, we pay homage to the Heroes. Without them, there would be no ancestors.

The Age of Heroes was the turning point. Early civilization was almost destroyed by its own immaturity. The Age of Heroes was when we started to get mature. The ship of civilization was sailing on the wrong course. During the Age of Heroes, we set it right. All our successes, all the cosmic marvels we've achieved—they all started there.

The Heroes are our legends. They represent our highest ideals and aspirations. They had so little, compared to us, yet they accomplished so much more. Ever since the Age of Heroes, many of us have tried to be great. Some of us even succeeded. But try as we might, no one can be as great as them. They had the most important job in the history of civilization, no, in the history of the universe. And they succeeded.

We all know, it was a scary close call. The Heroes got off to a slow start. It took them a long time to recognize their mission. Almost too long. And some of them didn't accept it, at least not at first. It's no wonder why. I wouldn't want so much responsibility. I mean I would, but I wouldn't want it to sneak up on me like that. Everyone today has careful training for their work, honed from billions of years of experience. The Heroes had to figure it out as they went, for a mission no one told them they had. No wonder it was a close call.

But they made it. They recognized what they were up against, they stepped up to the challenge, and they made it. We made it. Civilization made it. Once and for all. Right here on Earth. The home planet. Where it all started. That's quite a lot to celebrate. One last time.

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The party preparations are all set. Actually, we've been planning this party for a few million years, when the sunshades started thinning. Those sunshades have been rebuilt and repaired so many times, we almost thought they'd last forever. But no sunshade lasts forever. Not even on Earth.

I still think we could have tacked on a few more patches to keep the sunshade going. I believe this sacred planet could still take us a few more laps around the Sun, if we really wanted. But the ride has to end eventually. We might as well end it now. And end it in style.

It's easy to celebrate a planet. You can tune into its highlight reel and bask in its greatest moments. You can dance the night away to its best music, if you enjoy wearing legs. But those things you can do from anywhere. Me, I like to lie flat on the ground, letting the planet's seismic vibrations massage my body as I admire its view of its galaxy. That, you can only do if you're on the planet. That's how I'm spending my last day on Earth.

Tomorrow, we hop in our ships and head out before the sunshades break. A lot of people are going to Mars or Titan. I'm going to wander the galaxy for a while, try to find somewhere else I fit in. Not sure where that would be.

A few people decided not to bother. They're going down with the ship, staying here on Earth to die. So be it. But that's tomorrow.

Tonight, we party.