

# THE GAIA ALIGNMENT

A short science fiction story

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I woke up much too early to start the day with a strange combination of feeling void and euphoria. The shallow winter sun was shining right through my face and into my brain; I began to see clearly the unlikely events of last night. The pulsing patterns emerging on the screen would be such strong evidence for the ‘non-biology-hypothesis’, the culmination of the incredible motivation that has driven me for the last three years. I held on to that thought (or was it hope?), as I stumbled through my morning. Strong coffee told me that it probably wasn’t just a dream. The fresh winter air outside told me it wasn’t a dream. The delivery drone almost hitting me – as usual, and despite my repeated complaints, hovering too low in front of the main entrance – told me it wasn’t a dream. The bike-ride to the institute did not relieve my worries and as I went through the lab and to my desk I could still see the 3D models that I had printed the night before.

This was going to be one of the biggest discoveries ever made. I should have left it as it was; proceeding on track as I was supposed to, getting tenure at some world class institute with good surf and sun, like the College of Systems Biology Toamasina.

Instead, I went looking deeper, and as it turns out darker, into life as we knew it. Our institute had finally gained access to the Gaia Genome Database (GGD), an attempt to sequence the genome of every species still left, or not dead for too long, on this planet.

Since this 'Earth genome' was not published yet (and probably never will be between the viral outbreak at the institute that was leading the study and killing the entire scientific staff and the seemingly infinite arguments of the list of approximately 100,000 remaining co-authors) it was very hard to get permission to work with the GGD.

Fortunately our Nordic institute director had taken things slowly and surely; tenaciously convincing not just one of the 97 phyla decision committees (as many other institutes had been content to do) but every single one (with countless sauna sessions, greenhouse parties and honorary symposia) that we are the best of the best, the crème de la crème in genome-structure modelling and that we – and only we – should get full access to the entire raw GGD. And it worked!

So I had swapped my 6D-ribosomal cluster algorithms for the protein-light-cycler and started working on the GGD data.

After several months I finally managed to make the defH (def-Mochizuki) algorithm work, which enabled me to complete the ultra-comprehensive (UC) alignment.

And when I played around with the raw data in our virtual oculus cube enhancer (VOCE), there was a very subtle footprint in the deep transposon section.

And this footprint looked like some kind of triple leg track, meaning it was probably caused by a triple-stranded nucleic acid.

This was three years ago, and it was spectacular. Could there be a triple stranded nucleic acid biology secretly living under the nose of our PCR dependent sensors? Was the forgotten biochemistry of Pauling and Corey correct after all?

Since then, I had resampled about 30 habitats across Central Europe and managed to engineer (with the help of the well-running protein-lightcycler) polymerases that were able to amplify triple-stranded nucleic acids; with this I could crystallise them, print them,

and look at them in the VOCE. That was last night.

The emerging three-stranded structures looked crystalline, fragile, incredibly articulated, and responsive to the smallest environmental disturbances. They remotely resembled pulsing, transparent kraken tentacles.

Furthermore when I wanted to make a picture, to send it to the 'secret tripleNA'-group, they first contracted and then exploded as I was taking out my mobile. This must have been caused by the density of charged phosphates reacting to the magnetic field of my telephone.

On the bike-ride home, it struck me: these things left footprints on transposons because they inserted them, and the explosion indicated that they could be controlled by fluctuations in magnetic fields.

Today I will have to do lots of testing! Weird as it sounds, but this is probably a remote-controllable transposon injection machine! And small strings of it are everywhere, wrapped tightly around each single DNA molecule of the entire Gaia Genome!

If my hypothesis is correct we will have to start thinking very differently about 'biology'. What are these things? How are they controlled and what is controlling them? Do they represent a consciousness? Are we in fact,

controlled by them? Do they shape our brains by directing the differentiation of neurons? I am getting dizzy, what are they? What do they want me to do?

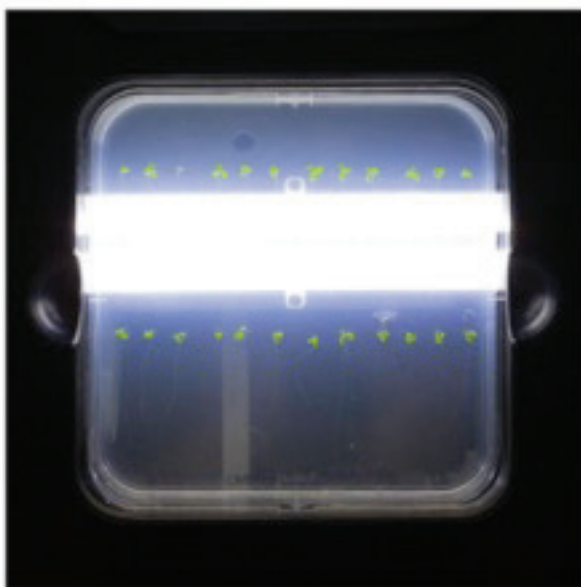
'Are you all right?' my PI asks. I turn around; there she stands in front of me, holding a chocolate bar in one hand and offering me a piece;

'You look pale, was the beer-hour long last night?' she smiled, while I grasp for air.

'And what are these pretty prints on your desk? Looks like a triple stranded DNA. Is that for your art class tonight?' She smiles even more.

'Yyyes' I say, 'They are in fact for my art class.'

I take the piece of chocolate she offers as she walks back out the door, and while crunching on it I begin to delete the alignments from my lab drives.



\* Image by Ruben Gutzat.