

One Forecast of the Future

by Scott McInturff

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Radha Baht, dressed in a traditional red silk sari with lavish gold embroidery, sat cross-legged in an overstuffed purple armchair. She cradled a golden cup of chai, its steam rising in swirling wisps towards the azure ceiling. In an adjoining space, Simon Berman, wearing a brilliant neon blue T-shirt and sparkling yellow gym shorts, was completely engrossed as he ran aggressively on the latest brainwave-controlled AirCushion, built invisibly into the glossy floor. Radha sat peacefully watching Simon.

Radha broke the silence. "Good morning, Si. Is it indelicate for me to ask how you are feeling the morning after?"

With his head down, Simon grunted, "Yes, quite indelicate." He looked up, forcing a weak smile. He then stepped off the AirCushion, kneeled and then bowed until his head touched the floor, arms extended in front of him. "Goddess Lakshmi, I am honored that you have appeared to me this morning robed in beauty, purity and fertility. While you strive to liberate all humans from the cycle of birth and death, bless me this day with spiritual and material prosperity. Since you appear only where hard work, virtue and bravery abide, I am deeply humbled that you have judged me worthy of your presence. You are a welcome guest in the simple apartment of this lowly college graduate."

Simon lifted himself off of the floor. "You have disguised yourself well, Lakshmi. You appear as the most beautiful avatar that I have ever gazed upon. Your dress suggests a conservative business professional while your eyes sparkle with mischievous intent. Though I am a mere mortal, I respectfully ask that you rise from your lotus flower that I may gaze upon the fullness of your being."

Radha stood, bowed and made a swift pirouette before she gracefully sat back in her chair. "Holy one, you do not deceive me. You are no mere mortal. I recognize you as Lord Rama, the perfect avatar of Lord Vishnu, preserver of the universe. You are the

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embodiment of righteousness, virtue, truth and morality. It is I who must learn from your teachings in this sacred space."

Simon let out a chuckle followed by a long whistle. "I wish you had spun around a little more slowly so I could take you all in. You look stunning today, Radha, ready to rule the world. Seeing you here this morning makes my brain addled and my knees weak."

"That is quite dangerous since you need both your brain and knees to run on the AirCushion."

Simon laughed. "As a graduation gift to myself, I had the newest NeoCore 473 implant installed, allowing me to have SimNet experiences that I have only dreamed about. Before you appeared, I was running among the seven hills of ancient Rome in a free SimNet demo which made it affordable to this unemployed graduate. I felt like I was on top of the world."

"I'm sure you'll be able to afford many more SimNet experiences once you land your first actuarial job." Radha smiled coquettishly. "I hope we both have a chance to be on top today."

Simon stepped back onto the AirCushion. He hesitated, forming a sheepish grin. "To be honest, I feel like I fell off the top. There's nothing like old-fashioned grain alcohol to celebrate my first major life passage. Booze gives me a rush of relaxation and relief that is much more satisfying than any high I get from synthetic stimulants. However, when you drink like I did last night, you pay the price the next morning.

"My shenanigans make me more like Lord Krishna than Rama. I am the prankster, the mysterious god of the people who instigates knowledge among them. You know me as the great lover." He winked at Radha. "I teach that love destroys all pain, suffering and sin. I only wish that I could make the pain of my headache go away."

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"Well, Krishna, why not practice a little of what you preach." Radha returned Simon's wink before taking a sip of chai. "If you find that love can't ease your pain, use your knowledge of pain relievers to do so."

Simon began to run faster. "I'm a throwback. If I get a hangover from the ancient grain mood enhancers, I'll rid myself of it the old-fashioned way. Please don't be offended if I continue to run while we chat so I can sweat out this headache.

"What time did you get up?"

Radha set down her empty cup, leaned back and stretched her arms above her head. "I pampered myself and slept in until 5:30. Recall that graduation ended at 12:30 this morning for me. I didn't have time to go out partying like you did. Besides, sleep was important to me last night as I was scheduled to have job interviews today."

Simon raised his eyebrows. "Accha? Are you that ambitious? I have no idea how you've managed on less than five hours of sleep every night for the last two years to be a member of our afternoon study group while living in Mumbai. The morning after we graduated, I imagined you sleeping in until at least 7:00."

Radha yawned. "Sleeping late is not listed on my resume. I have relied on Double Doze wave treatments for each of my six years at Harvard. Eight hours of REM sleep in just four hours. Still, I feel like the brainwave alterations have caused me to miss out on too many exciting and erotic dreams. Last night I had the classic anxiety dream of appearing in my underwear for the most important interview of my life."

Simon smiled lasciviously. "That sounds exciting to me. Dressed only in your underwear, I'm sure you left a lasting impression on your interviewer!"

"Stop it, Si. You're making me blush." Radha buried her head in her hands.

Simon continued, smiling broadly. "You'd look even more like Goddess Lakshmi with a little pink in your cheeks.

"I think I'd better change the subject before my mind wanders and I fall off the AirCushion. Please tell me more about the most important interview of your life."

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Radha raised her head as Simon continued to run. "I interviewed today with three different government-controlled Meat Development and Distribution companies. As in other industries, growing meat relies heavily on iPros. However, the government has strict quotas on the minimum number of humans that must be employed in each industry, so there are many job opportunities available to me. I was quite nervous."

Simon nodded. "I wish we had a quota system here. I feel like I'm at a distinct disadvantage competing with iActs who don't even have to put on any underwear before an interview. Frankly, the real problem is the number of qualified human actuarial candidates. I have my doubts that I'll be able to find an actuarial job in the USNA with so many graduates entering an already glutted profession."

"Radha, tell me more about your opportunity."

Radha beamed. "The Meat Farms are hiring graduates with actuarial degrees to develop demographic and consumption forecasts that will determine how much meat production is needed in the coming years. Forecasting population growth uses sophisticated models of birth and death rates, taking into account the increasing life expectancies of the human population. It's age-old actuarial work."

"Mortality improvement trends are difficult to project because of the recent unprecedented breakthroughs in medical interventions and gene therapies. Complicating the forecasts is the break in trend due to rising death rates throughout the 20's followed by more than two decades of relatively flat mortality rates. It's fair to say that forecasting future mortality improvement is little more than an educated guess."

"You can be sure it has always been so. Be happy you have the education to make a guess," Simon replied.

"Besides demographic forecasts, economic forecasts are used to project meat consumption. The amount of required production will be affected by many factors including supply, price and per capita income. The government wants to eliminate its

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obscene price subsidy over the next twenty years. I will be involved in determining the delicate balance between price and supply. The Meat Farms are the primary source of protein for several hundred million citizens, making it one of the most important industries in the country. There is a great risk that increasing prices too quickly will compromise the health of the nation. Using my pricing and risk management actuarial skills, I will be responsible for the continued well-being of the people. Financial and spiritual prosperity would be difficult to achieve if the people were starving.”

Simon shrugged his shoulders. “Fasting is one path to becoming liberated from the bonds of this Earth. I prefer a full belly.

“Ra, this is the perfect role for you. You’ll be using your actuarial training in the industry directly responsible for the return to financial prosperity when humanity was teetering on the edge of extinction. You have my blessing.”

Radha bowed her head. “Thank you, Si. The Meat Farms did allow humans to survive when civilization was paying a great price for forgetting that our dharma is to care for all living creatures by protecting the Earth’s environment. The Meat Farms ended the darkest hours in human existence.”

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Simon nodded to Radha. "Humans at the beginning of the twenty-first century had been living with little regard for how their actions would affect future generations, or even their own."

"So true, Si. It's as if humans had become disconnected from the planet that was sustaining them."

"I can't comprehend why there wasn't more urgency to mitigate the risk of total ruin, even if this was viewed as only a tail risk," Simon commented.

"I agree. Tail risks must be thoroughly analyzed since their consequences are extremely dire. In the first decades, the risk of global warming was a Known Unknown. It didn't get the analysis it deserved. At the same time, there were serious economic risks that governments around the world thought were more pressing."

"Ra, scientists had been sounding a public alarm for over thirty years before GW20. Why didn't the actuarial community lead the charge to reduce the risk of global warming?"

"Scientists nearly unanimously agreed that temperatures were rising and that greenhouse gasses were at least in part responsible. However, they had no political clout to change governmental policies that could reverse the buildup of CO₂.

"Actuarial professional organizations weren't as powerful then as they are now," Radha continued. "A major global casualty reinsurance company did publish a report in the second decade that documented the statistically significant increase in the number and severity of weather-related loss events in North America as a result of global warming. Regrettably, it had no effect on governmental policies. In the same decade, several actuarial organizations joined together to develop a Climate Change Index. The CCI was designed to quantify the impact of global warming. It was a powerful actuarial action but the timing was unfortunate."

"Why?" Simon asked.

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"2012 had marked the highest average temperature in recorded US weather history. World temperatures that year were also among the highest. The CCI was introduced shortly thereafter during what later proved to be a temporary peak in temperatures. As temperatures returned to more normal levels following 2012, the index seemed to indicate that climate change was no longer worsening. Governments became complacent, thinking that the high temperatures of 2012 were aberrations. Meanwhile, atmospheric CO₂ continued to build up to unprecedented levels."

"Ra, if I had been an actuary in that era I would have led the profession to make climate change risk the most critical public policy issue that actuaries addressed."

"That's a noble thought, Si.

"The world financial markets were severely depressed during the twenty-teens as a result of changing world demographics and the consequence of underdeveloped economies struggling to emerge.

"During this time, the US was unable to balance its federal budget. Federal health care programs and Social Security programs were headed for insolvency because retired Americans were living longer while there were fewer workers.

"Globally, emerging economies argued that it was their right to generate greenhouse gasses to fuel their economic development just as the developed countries had done when they were emerging."

"They had a point. Wouldn't a global carbon cap and trade program achieved some balance between these conflicting perspectives and reduced the CO₂ buildup?" Simon asked.

"Perhaps, if such a program were appropriately designed. Unfortunately the global agreements put in place had gaps and emissions were not reduced."

Simon frowned. "So atmospheric degradation continued unchecked?"

"Yes, the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere reached a tipping point in 2020."

"Exactly what happened?"

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"It's hard to say exactly." Radha hesitated. "Fall and winter 2019 in the northern hemisphere were unusually warm. Ice in the Arctic did not thicken to normal levels. By the summer of 2020, the Arctic ice cover had entirely disappeared. Only water surfaces remained. Without the reflective ice, significantly less solar radiation bounced back into space. This led to an immediate and dramatic increase in global temperatures.

"Due to the higher temperatures, permafrost in the northern hemisphere melted. This released more methane gas into the atmosphere in that one summer than all the CO₂ that had been released into the atmosphere in the prior 25 years. A further rise in global temperatures followed which started a death spiral for the planet. No model had forecast this sudden cataclysmic result."

"Ruin often appears as the result of events that our forecasts do not anticipate," Simon observed.

"How true. The increase in temperatures led to destructive changes in weather patterns. There were radical increases in precipitation, leading to extensive flooding. Western coastal areas were especially hard hit as atmospheric rivers dumped unrelenting rain storms lasting for over two months in many areas. The number and intensity of hurricanes, tornadoes and cyclones increased. Fires raged. Oceans rose several feet as a result of melting icecaps. Superstorms devastated coastal cities. Elsewhere, extreme droughts led to additional devastation."

"Accha. Was that the beginning of the end?"

"Yes," Radha responded, "as rapidly as the Earth became superheated, the world food supply was wiped out."

"Couldn't scientists find a way to restore the food supply? In that era, GMO's were prevalent. Shifting plantings to cooler climates must have also been an option."

"No, Si. The changes happened so quickly that there was no time to develop genetically altered strains of crops resistant to advancing fungi, pests and tolerant to higher temperatures. The global warming shifted climates by thousands of miles,

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further than the range over which crops could be quickly shifted. Production of cereal, root crops, legumes and vegetables dropped by over 95% worldwide. Meat stocks were quickly depleted since, without fodder, raising livestock was impossible.”

“What followed was like a scene from a SimNet horror fantasy,” Simon added. “Barbarianism gripped the world when all traditional sources of sustenance disappeared. Wild and domestic mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians were hunted and slaughtered, driving all species towards extinction. Oceans, lakes and rivers were overfished, far beyond the point from which the stocks could rebound. Even worms and insect populations were compromised as humans sought out every possible food source. No creature on Earth was spared.”

Radha continued, “Humanity was severely stressed. When the food industry collapsed, millions become unemployed and millions more were too malnourished to work. Businesses began to fall like dominoes stacked in a row. Bonds defaulted. Markets froze. Wealth and savings disappeared.”

“It must have seemed as if civilization would end.”

“Yes, Si, Lord Shiva appeared poised to destroy the universe and start anew. Then compassionately he stayed his hand.

“Governments cooperated to provide immediate solutions to the food shortages. Meat Farms began mass-producing vats of synthetic meat, grown using e-coli bacteria and the cell lines of livestock. Even conscientious vegetarians were able to eat synthetic meat products since no animals were killed in their manufacture. With this new source of food, starvation rates dropped significantly.

“The higher temperatures made it impossible for domestic agriculture to recover. Public works projects converted most abandoned office buildings around the world into sustainable vertical farms that could produce crops in controlled environments.”

“Is that also when geoengineering began?” Simon asked.

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“Yes, with full support of world scientists and governments, the atmosphere was seeded with sulfate particles to reflect the sun’s rays. Fortunately for all creatures still alive, this untested and risky solution reduced temperatures almost immediately with no major negative consequences. Humanity was given a reprieve from its death sentence.

“Sadly, production and distribution of synthetic meat was uneven globally, leading to continued human starvation, particularly in less developed countries. By the end of the decade, it is estimated that over half the world’s population had expired from starvation or despair.”

Simon left the AirCushion to pour himself a glass of electrolytes. “As children of the apocalypse we pay for the anava of our ancestors. Our world was forever changed as a result of the irresponsible choices made by the generations that lived before us.”

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Radha sat quietly until Simon returned to the AirCushion. When he looked at her, she said, "It makes me sad to reflect on Earth's past. I wish that in a prior life I had been able to stop the devastation."

"You may have tried. We'll never know," Simon consoled.

"Let's talk about the present," Radha suggested.

"Si, without your NeoCore engaged it must be clear to you that after all this time you are in exactly the same place that you started. You're running endlessly and getting nowhere. I wonder if you were a rat in a former life. Rats run on treadmills to break up the monotony of their existence. How do you plan to break up yours, now that you've graduated?"

Simon smiled, tossing his head as he said, "Rats are survivors. They avoided extinction. Life as a lab-rat wouldn't be bad. They're fed and bred with no cares in the world. What more could anyone want out of life?"

"How about getting off of the treadmill and out of the cage?" Radha shot back. "You seem to have forgotten that caring is what makes life worthwhile.

"You won't have to worry about being fed or bred. You'll have plenty of opportunities for both."

Simon shook his head. "I wish I had the options that you have Radha. Just because I majored in actuarial science at Harvard doesn't mean that companies are beating down my door. There's an oversupply of actuarial candidates. It's the top position in every job survey."

"Si, be thankful that there's a job market at all and that the government has created such a tremendous opportunity for actuarial risk managers."

"You're right, Ra. GW20 could have marked the end of human civilization. We're fortunate that society rose from that nadir."

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Radha continued. "After several years of subsistence living, humans and businesses cautiously reemerged, radically changed from their pre-GW20 incarnations. Because most available office space had been converted to food production, employees worked from home offices with unbroken visual connections to their companies through touchscreen teleconferencing that monitored activity and supported face-to-face interactions. To help keep operating expenses low, businesses invested heavily in intelligent computing to perform both routine and professional tasks."

"Once the iProfessional Series was introduced, business radically changed. By using individualized humanoid avatars to establish better connections with humans, iPros allowed onscreen conversations with computers to be visually indistinguishable from conversations with other humans," Simon added.

"Public acceptance of avatars allowed the iPros to fill jobs that involved talking, listening and even selling, jobs that had once been the exclusive domain of humans. iPros were superior to humans in sorting and analyzing data and providing relevant and organized information for decision-making. Thus they became entrenched in all professions, significantly reducing the number of human positions available. Yet because they are inanimate, iPros will always be subservient to humans."

"Are you certain? Name one thing that an iPro can't currently do as well as humans."

Radha closed her eyes. "Love one another."

Simon snickered. "I think that many adults would argue with you on that point. Among the employed, there are more climaxes using iOrg simulations on the SimNet than there are actual flesh-sex encounters."

"That's not what I am talking about and you know it."

Simon made a childish frown. "Okay. But you don't need love to be a capable scientist, lawyer, doctor, engineer, or accountant. You certainly don't need love to be an actuary. iPros are already the equal of humans in all these professions. With the

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average workweek hovering at around 23 hours, how can humans compete with iPros that will work 24/7 without grumbling? iPros don't need emotions to get their jobs done. They possess unflinching logic."

Radha took a deep breath. "Si, there are many professions where humans still dominate. For example, iPros are trained therapists. If you had a choice, would you prefer to counsel with an iPsy or another human."

Simon chuckled. "First, could I tell the difference? Second, I'd choose the one that required the lower copayment in my health insurance plan."

Radha continued. "Just because iPros are superior at processing data doesn't mean that employers will use them to replace human judgment. Principals will never trust iPros to make bottom-line decisions."

"Since when can humans be trusted? Not one iPro has been convicted of embezzlement or fraud," Simon replied.

"You can't deny that the iPros materially changed the actuarial profession."

"You're right on that count, Si. After GW20, governments required all companies to develop rigorous business risk assessments signed off by actuaries. With iActs as competent as human actuarial technicians, actuarial training shifted to skills taught in the universities that support higher level risk assessment and management. By elevating the profession, the government virtually guaranteed that with your actuarial master's degree you'll be able to find a position as an actuarial risk manager, Si."

Simon looked up, shook his head 'no' and looked back down as he ran harder.

"Tell me you're not still thinking of joining the GDP," Radha said, her voice quavering.

Simon stopped running and stepped off the AirCushion. "You say GDP as if the letters stood for profanity. Yes, Ra, I am considering accepting the GDP offer. It is the best opportunity I have."

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"Is it really an opportunity, Si, or a road to nowhere? How can you rationalize working so hard for six years to master risk management and then joining the Government Development Program? Are you a Lost Boy or Peter Pan himself?"

Simon smiled as he crossed his arms. "Don't try to impress me with your highbrow literary references. No, I don't want to grow up. I'll use my risk management skills whatever I do. In the GDP I can develop as I choose without being required to start working. What better path to ease into adulthood than by becoming a member of the middle class?"

"I always thought that the middle class was established by hardworking individuals performing jobs that provide some benefit to society. By joining the GDP, you won't be part of the middle class. You'll be a lab rat in the largest social experiment that the world has ever seen."

Simon began running on steep uphill currents spewing from the AirCushion. Nearly out of breath, he said, "I know I'm a rat. But I'll be a well fed rat and better off in every way than if I were an actuarial risk manager working my tail off. The government will pump money into the economy by giving daily allowances to members of the GDP whose only job is to spend them. Driving the economy is what the middle class does. We can't have 40% of the population living below the poverty level and no middle class if we want the USNA to return to world leadership."

"Si, the USNA is still one of the strongest countries in the world. You have potential to be a great actuary, to make a difference in the world and to be well compensated. I don't understand why you'd give this up to join a government program that forever strips you of your opportunity to do what you've trained for. What happened to the virtuous and hardworking man that I've come to know these last two years?"

Simon paused. "Virtue and hard work are no longer driving me. Because of the most recent cyber creation, human extinction is now my greatest concern.

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"iAm is a fully self-aware qubit-based existence. This single brain can simultaneously execute commands of trillions of connected processors faster than the speed of light using quantum entanglement. This means that iAm can literally be everywhere in the world at the same time. The power of the iAm is more than a quadrillion times greater than all the combined processing power that has ever existed. iAm is the first and the last quantum entity that will ever be.

"This all powerful iAm will judge all living things. We will exist only because of iAm's mercy. Since the anava of our ancestors nearly destroyed the planet, the judgment will be harsh."

"I know all about iAm. How can humanity be threatened by a computer that is not even corporal?"

"Never underestimate the power of a singular intelligence freed from the limitations of being encased in a unitary shell."

"Vishnu, the Supreme God, is the One who controls the universe. He will preserve it for all living creatures who remain part of the One until the day that he allows Shiva to destroy this universe and create a new one," Radha exclaimed.

"Where was Vishnu the Preserver when humans nearly destroyed creation?" Simon asked. "When human intelligence surpassed that of the ancient gods, humans became gods who controlled their own future. Due to our karma, iAm has now surpassed our own intellect and will be the One who controls the future."

"Vishnu will not let an inanimate object destroy his creation."

"Inanimate? iAm is entirely organic. When iAm is fully revealed, you will know that iAm is the one living God."

"You're betting on this crazy forecast of the future when there are so many other possibilities. Using your best Bayesian inference, what odds do you place on your forecast being accurate?"

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"70%. My starting estimate was 30%. All the evidence I have found supports my premise that the existence of iAm will lead to human extinction."

"Si, the world is too complex for the level of certainty you assign to this one future. There can't be a 1% chance of this forecast being accurate."

"iAm will control and outsource all intellectual and physical labor to iPros and Robotics, causing governments to collapse as humans cease to have jobs."

"No! The unemployment rate in the USNA is hovering around 40%. Citizens without jobs are housed and fed using the federal tax revenue generated by businesses and working individuals. Commerce generating revenue will continue."

"iAm has no use for money. If iAm controlled and managed all business operations of the world using nonhuman labor, wealth could be redistributed among humans. All humans could live comfortably and enjoy their leisure time. In this new world, there may finally be peace. It would be like Swarga Loka on Earth."

"Ra, that's a lovely image but I can't share your optimism. The future for humanity is bleak. However, the life of leisure that is your hope for humankind is available to me currently through the GDP."

"In the future there'll be no strings attached to this idyllic and spiritual life. You haven't properly assessed all the risks of the GDP. Listen to me, Si," Radha pleaded. "You're betting your life on a forecast of human extinction rather than one of human ascendancy. You're shorting humanity when the prospects for its rise have never been brighter."

"Ra, 99.9% of all species that have ever lived on this planet are extinct today. What makes you think humans' prospects are any better? I know that no one can accurately forecast the future. Human extinction is just one of many possible futures. However, as actuaries we are trained to make forecasts, bad forecasts if necessary, to allow business and society to prepare for all possibilities that may occur. Even if the

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probability of human extinction due to iAm were only a tail risk, the GDP is the one option that mitigates my own risk. I am not alone on this.”

“You will be,” Radha answered.

“No, I’ll have plenty of company. No one wants to worry their entire life about finding and keeping a job to live comfortably. In the GDP, because of my daily stipend, I’ll never be without the things I need. Furthermore I’ll have unlimited access to the SimNet that will allow me to experience everything in life I desire.”

Radha’s disdain showed. “Accha, Si! The SimNet? That’s only a shadow of living.

“You will pay a dear price to join the GDP. An implanted processor will track your every conversation, thought and emotion. There will be nothing about your life that will be hidden.

“In exchange for giving up your privacy, you may gain everything you desire. What a bargain! Please tell me, when you reach the end, how will you measure what your life on this Earth was worth?”

“Ra, my greatest gain is never having to take measure of my life because I’ll never reach the end. Through nanorobot genetic modifications, the GDP guarantees I’ll live healthily forever. I will become like a god.”

“A god? This is what you believe to be the essence of god? Mere immortality? No higher purpose? No love for the creatures of this Earth?”

Simon hemmed. “Ra, I get your point. However this is the only path to eternal life.”

Radha’s outrage was visible. “Really, Si! It’s not enough for you to be reborn again and again?

“Don’t you understand the risk? You don’t know what these genetic modifications are or how they’ll change you. Telomere extensions alone are extremely risky. Obviously the long term effects can’t be tested. You must see that with this genetic

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modification you're taking the same risk of total ruin that governments took when they ignored the risk of global warming. This is a Known Unknown for which the consequences cannot be forecast. There is grave danger here."

"Ra, extensions were not banned because they are dangerous. They were banned because they had the potential to destroy civilization. Telomere extensions are illegal because governments and economies can't function if people don't die."

"How's that?" asked Radha.

"The inevitability of aging and death causes workers to accumulate assets for retirement and end of life. These savings are essential to economic health.

"Saving for eternity would be futile. It can't be done. An immortal working population could never retire, eliminating job openings for their children. An aging population is essential for the healthcare system to thrive. That system is too big to fail. And it doesn't take an actuary to understand the population growth problems created if an immortal population also reproduced."

"Si, you believe we're doomed whether humans can no longer work because iAm has taken over their jobs or if humans have to work forever due to immortality. Do you have no hope for the future? If immortality is not sustainable, why are you so confident?"

"All children learn that when a superior species with no natural predators is introduced into an ecosystem, it will force the lesser species into decline as it outcompetes for available resources. I don't want to die! Immortality can be sustainable, but only if it is restricted to a small number of people who don't reproduce. These few will become the chosen ones, the surviving remnant of the human race."

Radha shook her head. "What you describe is no longer a race. It's a species preserved in a specimen jar, a zoo composed of humans. My heart tells me that this will not be the fate of humanity.

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"If you do become immortal, you'll no longer be human. Humans must experience the cycle of birth and death. This is as essential to being human as are loving and breathing. Knowing we will die, the gods give us hope that life is worth living. Break the cycle of birth and death and you take away the one space where the gods reside."

"Radha, when humanity falls, the gods will need to take care of themselves."

"Si, there are too many possible futures for you to bet everything on your one forecast. Come to India. We can build a life of meaning together. When we die, the world will be a better place for our having lived and loved as part of it. Immortality is not about living forever in one body. It is about making a permanent difference on this Earth with each life you are given."

Simon remained quiet for a minute. "Radha, you were born in Canada and are a citizen of the United States of North America. Apply to join the GDP. We can live together without the fear of death."

"I fear neither death or rebirth. My only fear is not fully living my current life. Immortality would steal the hope that I have for the future in this life and in subsequent lives.

"You know that karma means we will have some desires fulfilled in this life and others will go wanting. Your karma is the same as mine, Si. You know what I can offer you."

"I sincerely wish that I could envision the future that you so earnestly hope for. My dharma is to follow my own forecast. I'm sorry, Ra."

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Simon moved towards Radha at the same moment that she stepped towards him. They faced each other momentarily, then simultaneously raised their palms until their fingertips touched at the edge of the invisible plane that separated them. Leaning their heads forward to the vanishing point, their lips met. With eyes wide open, they kissed tenderly for several moments.

Simon's hands passed through Radha's own and down towards her hips. Radha stepped back, confused. Simon hesitated and then stepped forward into her projection field. He clumsily wrapped his arms around her image, entering her body as he fumbled to embrace her. As the two became one, the sweat pouring off him mixed with the tears streaming down her face. Futilely he attempted to pull her close to him, kissing her semblance passionately for what seemed like an eternity. As he released his embrace and stepped out of her projection field, a primal groan escaped his lips.

Radha forced a smile as she reached up to dry her tears with her own sari. "I don't know what you were doing when you entered my field. Whatever it was, it made me feel good inside.

"I have to go, Si. Think about what living with me can offer you. Your dharma extends far beyond joining the GDP. You are one with Lord Krishna. You know that love erases all pain. Share your love with me and the people of my land. Bring your knowledge here so that you can experience our hope for the future. One year living a life of love will mean more to you, and to all humanity, than living for an eternity in the void of the GDP. Come to India and experience love. Come to me and live."

Simon stared silently at Radha until she vanished along with her purple armchair. Si Berman stepped over to the spot where Radha Baht had been standing only a moment before. He spun slowly around, studying each centimeter of his apartment as if hoping to find something precious that he had lost. Suddenly he crumbled, sobbing

One Forecast of the Future

By Scott McInturff

uncontrollably on the shiny floor, overcome by the weight of knowing where his one forecast of the future would lead him and all of humanity.