

Mr. H and the Mystery of the Meteorite

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Whenever Mr. H., a world-famous cosmologist, makes a new discovery, it makes front-page news all around the world.

Although most people who read newspapers are fascinated by astronomy, the explanations Mr. H. usually gives are too hard for most people to understand, so they usually just end up reading the title of the article and looking at the interesting pictures.

Today's headline all over the world was:

"Enormous Meteorite to Hit Planet This Friday the 13th at 1:13 PM GMT - Impossible to Know Where It Will Land!"

The entire planet was in a panic.

But what could the number thirteen mean?

Mr. H. was not panicking like everyone else. He was intrigued by the meteorite and was determined to study the secrets of the strange cosmic rock heading towards Earth.

Not knowing where it would eventually land, Mr. H. packed three different suitcases: one for warm-weather regions, one for cold-weather regions, and a third with diving equipment in case the meteorite landed in the sea.

Mr. H. turned his giant telescope towards the sky, unaware that on the other side of the world, Mrs. Shee, a world-famous fashion designer from the Land of the Rising Sun known for her extravagant tastes, had also been reading the papers. She wanted the meteorite for herself.

“Money! Fame! Fortune! I must have this rock for my next line of jewellery! I must! I must! I must!” Mrs. Shee cackled to herself. “And I’ll call the new line...‘Superstition!’”

Mrs. Shee was the kind of person who believed that her wealth and beauty could get her whatever she wanted whenever she wanted. So she phoned a geologist and offered him an enormous sum of money if he found the meteorite for her after it landed. But she was disappointed when the geologist replied, “Sorry, but I can’t help you. This rock comes from outer space. You need to find yourself a cosmologist!”

Mrs. Shee rang up several other scientists, only to be refused. After getting refusal after refusal Mrs. Shee had to face facts: this cosmic rock from outer space had so much scientific value that no scientist in the world would ever sell it to her.

Determined, she tried to think of other people who might be able to help her. She phoned several private detectives, all of whom refused to help her. Furious, Mrs. Shee decided to call on her fiancé, Mr. Soo. Although everyone called her Mrs. Shee, she had never actually been married.

She phoned him and told him to meet her at once at her house.

"Dearest," she snapped at him once he had arrived, "have you read the papers this morning?"

"Um...yes, dear," Mr. Soo replied, a bit surprised to have been interrupted from his important work for such a silly question.

"If you can bring me this meteorite," continued Mrs. Shee in a much softer tone, "I'll use a piece of this cosmic rock as the stone in my wedding ring...when we get married."

Mr. Soo was so happy! Mrs. Shee had finally agreed to marry him!

Mrs. Shee told Mr. Soo her plan.

"All you have to do is follow Mr. H. around until he leads you to the meteorite. Now get going my Dear!"

Mr. Soo agreed. He was willing to do whatever it took to marry Mrs. Shee.

Mr. Soo was hoping to get a kiss from Mrs. Shee before he left, but instead she only put her hand on his back and snapped "Don't come back empty-handed!" as she shoved him out the door.

On Friday the 13th everyone all over the world was in a panic.

On the radio, biologists gave the following warning to everyone:
“Keep an eye on what the animals are doing! If they run away, that means you should run away, too. If they don’t do anything out of the ordinary, then there’s no need to worry.”

Then, at thirteen minutes and twelve seconds past one in the afternoon GMT, a blinding light suddenly appeared in the sky. The meteorite was heading towards Earth!

A strange and colourful light appeared in the sky. “It’s the end of the world!” cried people everywhere.

But then the meteorite disappeared in a bright flash.

“What happened to it? Has it landed?” people asked one another, terrified.

No one knew what was going on.

Mr. H., who had barely taken his eyes from his giant telescope for several days, eventually figured out what had happened and decided to make an announcement on the radio.

“The Magnetic South Pole has drawn the meteorite to it like a magnet. It’s crashed somewhere on the Antarctic ice sheet. Since it’s winter now in the Southern Hemisphere,

that means there will be no sun there for several months. It's too dark now to go looking for the meteorite. We'll have to wait until the sun returns in Antarctica before we can do anything."

Mr. Soo was listening to the radio and heard the announcement. He was happy. "There's no way I'm going to Antarctica to get this cosmic rock!" he thought to himself, thinking that Mrs. Shee would now cancel his mission. He decided to phone his fiancée to tell her that he was coming home. However instead of being happy to hear such news, Mrs. Shee was disappointed in him. "Deeeaaarest," she began. "You're not afraid of the cold, are you?" she asked in a mocking voice before hanging up the phone. It was clear to Mr. Soo that his mission was still on, regardless.

For several months, Mr. Soo spied on Mr. H. One day, after tapping his phone, he listened in on a phone conversation Mr. H. was having with some important people. He could only understand a few words. "Antarctica," "Princess Elisabeth station" and "in eight days" were the only words he could make out.

At first Mr. Soo didn't understand what this could mean. But after doing some research on the Internet he discovered that the Princess Elisabeth station was a scientific research station in Antarctica – a sort of hotel and laboratory in one for scientists who study the Antarctic. The station is only open during the austral summer, when the sun shines all the time in Antarctica, even at midnight. Mr. Soo also learned that Mr. H. was going to join a scientific research expedition going to Antarctica to look for the meteorite.

Knowing absolutely nothing about Antarctica, Mr. Soo tried to look for a hotel room close to the Princess Elisabeth station. Much to his dismay he discovered that there were no hotels – and no buildings or people at all for that matter – for hundreds and hundreds of miles and miles around the station.

Then he thought about camping out in his tent not far from the station. However after thinking it over for a bit he realised that with such a harsh climate and bone-chilling temperatures, even in the summertime, camping out in Antarctica was probably no the smartest idea.

“I need to get a job at this Princess Elisabeth station” he thought to himself. He did some more research on the Internet and came across a list of people who were going to work at the station. Unfortunately for Mr. Soo all the jobs at the station had already been taken.

But Mr. Soo wasn't going to let this stop him.

After doing even more research, Mr. Soo discovered where one of the mechanics going to the station lived. So one day he followed the mechanic down a dark alleyway, snuck up behind him and gave him a powerful judo chop.

“Augh!” cried the mechanic as he fell to the ground. “I want your job at the Princess Elisabeth station!” Mr. Soo snarled. “Either you let me take your place or I'll give you more of the same!”

The mechanic's head was pounding and he was so frightened by Mr. Soo that he had no choice but to accept Mr. Soo's proposal. Mr. Soo, not being totally without scruples, gave the poor frightened mechanic some money in an envelope in exchange for taking his position before he ran off, grinning from ear to ear at his triumph.

Several days later, Mr. Soo found himself going to Antarctica with Mr. H. He soon found himself standing at the entrance to the Princess Elisabeth station in the middle of nowhere, Antarctica. He was determined to find the meteorite.

"Mr. H. won't be able to hide anything from me!" thought Mr. Soo to himself when he learned his room would be next to Mr. H.'s. As soon as he found a good opportunity, Mr. Soo planted a bugging device in Mr. H.'s bed so he could listen to everything he said.

The first week at the station was very hard for Mr. Soo. As a mechanic he had to work outside for long hours in the cold weather. He was getting tired of the Antarctic climate and there was no sign on the meteorite. So much snow had covered the meteorite since it had landed that there was no way to spot it from the sky by plane.

One day while he was in the kitchen, Mr. Soo got fed up with waiting. "I'm going to go look for this cosmic rock myself!" he grumbled to himself. As he stormed out of the kitchen he stole some chocolates from the storage room and stuffed them in his pockets.

Since the sun doesn't set at night during the austral summer in Antarctica, Mr. Soo decided that every night while everyone else was asleep, he would take a snowmobile and look for the meteorite himself. For several nights in a row Mr. Soo searched and searched the frozen wastelands of Antarctica for the missing meteorite. But much to his dismay he came up empty-handed night after night. Before leaving each time, he stole more chocolates from the storage room to give him energy and a small dose of comfort for when he was out in the frozen wasteland searching.

As for Mr. H., he was determined to find the meteorite. Every time his fellow scientists – geologists, glaciologists, seismologists, meteorologists and biologists – went out into the Antarctic wilderness, he asked them to look for any signs that could help them figure out where the meteorite had landed.

The cook on the expedition wanted to do his part in helping with the search by giving chocolates to everyone. He knew that chocolates gave everyone on the search team a bit of energy and warmth when they were outside in the bitter cold. But when he found out that half of the chocolates were missing, he became furious and demanded to know what had happened to them.

"We didn't eat them!" the scientists told the cook. "We'd never do such a thing!"

Everyone was wondering who had eaten the chocolates.

After thirteen days of searching, Mr. H. finally discovered a piece of the meteorite. But it was only a small piece. Mr. H. was very frustrated by this. His made him think that when the meteorite struck the earth, it shattered into several tiny pieces. Mr. H. realised it would be a lot of work to find all the pieces of the meteorite. Once he'd found them all he would try to put them back together again like a puzzle.

Mr. Soo, on the other hand, was quite overjoyed that the meteorite had broken into so many pieces. Having smaller pieces would make it easier to hide a piece each time he found one.

The following night, Mr. Soo stole more chocolates and went out searching for more pieces of the meteorite. This time he found a piece of the meteorite – and it was bigger than the one that Mr. H. had found! The piece of cosmic rock sparkled magically in the midnight sun. The beautiful and mysterious rock fascinated Mr. Soo. He was determined to find more pieces of it to bring back to Mrs. Shee.

But in order to find as many pieces of the meteorite as possible, Mr. Soo had to keep Mr. H. from finding them first. "I'll sabotage the motor of his snowmobile so it breaks down when he's far away from the station in the middle of nowhere!" said Mr. Soo with an evil laugh as he made his way back to the station to do the villainous deed.

But as chance would have it, a seismologist staying at the station happened to find another piece of the meteorite as he was setting up some equipment to measure for earthquakes. It was bigger than the piece that Mr. H. had found the day before.

The seismologist radioed Mr. H. to tell him about his wonderful discovery. Mr. H. was overjoyed upon hearing the news. He couldn't wait to see the new piece of the meteorite his colleague had found.

But Mr. Soo wasn't at all happy to hear the news. "I've got to stop the other scientists from helping Mr. H.!" Mr. Soo thought to himself.

Mr. Soo decided to sabotage the motor of the machine the glaciologists use to take ice cores, which can tell you a lot about what the climate in Antarctica was like thousands and thousands of years ago.

"They'll be too distracted trying to fix it to look for any pieces of the meteorite!" cackled Mr. Soo to himself.

The next few days Mr. Soo sabotaged several pieces of equipment the scientists were using to do their research. However, much to the frustration of Mr. Soo, the scientists were still able to find most of the pieces of the meteorite.

But a few pieces remained missing...

Mr. Soo smiled devilishly as he figured out that he must have all the remaining pieces of the meteorite. He had hidden them safely away in the Princess Elisabeth station's garage. For the time being, Mr. Soo could relax.

Even though he no longer needed to go out searching for pieces of the meteorite, Mr. Soo continued to steal chocolates from the storage room. The greedy little man!

In the meantime, the scientists continued to search for the last few pieces of the meteorite while they were doing their research. The biologists searched as they studied colonies of nesting snow petrels (white birds that live in Antarctica), and the meteorologists searched as they released weather balloons to study the atmosphere. After several more days of searching, none of the scientists had found the last pieces of the meteorite.

Puzzled, all of the scientists met with Mr. H. to discuss why they couldn't find the remaining pieces of the meteorite.

"It's a mystery!" said one of the scientists. "Why we can't find them?"

"And my chocolates!" said the cook. "They've been disappearing!"

The idea that someone must be stealing the chocolates crossed the mind of everyone in the room. This made them think that maybe the same person had been stealing pieces of the meteorite, too! But who?

Realising that everyone was getting suspicious, Mr. Soo began to feel uncomfortable. "I've got to find a way to get out of here!" he thought to himself nervously.

"I know! I'll just say this freezing weather is driving me crazy. Then I'll leave when the next transport plane comes to bring supplies to the station."

Due to bad weather conditions that had been forecasted to last for several days, the transport plane had to come earlier than expected so they could get out before the bad weather arrived. This meant Mr. Soo had to pack his things in a hurry.

Soon Mr. Soo was on a plane and heading back home. As the plane passed over the coast of Antarctica, he gave a final look at the great white continent from the window of the plane. Looking down at the penguins playing on the icebergs, sliding around on their stomachs, he congratulated himself on having finally completed his mission. "Now Mrs. Shee will marry me!" Mr. Soo thought to himself as he thought about putting a ring on Mrs. Shee's finger – a ring that would have a piece of the meteorite he'd stolen!

Back at the Princess Elisabeth station, everyone was tidying up. When they got Mr. Soo's old bed, they found thirteen chocolate wrappers! In his rush to leave, Mr. Soo had forgotten to throw them away. He'd been caught red handed!

"Good grief! So it was Mr. Soo who was stealing my chocolates all this time!" cried the cook, disappointed that they hadn't discovered the thief sooner.

Things were starting to become clear to everyone. The circumstances under which Mr. Soo came to the station had seemed a bit fishy to everyone. The original mechanic who was supposed to come had backed out at the last minute under mysterious circumstances. And there were always mechanical problems with the scientific equipment. It dawned on everyone that Mr. Soo might have the missing pieces of the meteorite.

“Do you think he might have stolen them?” asked Mr. H.

Everyone decided that it would be a good idea to contact customs at the airport where Mr. Soo’s plane was going to land. Upon arrival, customs officers searched Mr. Soo’s bags and found the missing pieces of the meteorite. Caught red-handed again! Mr. Soo was arrested and brought back to his home country to stand trial because he had broken international law. The Antarctic is a continent reserved for scientific study, and using its resources to make money is forbidden by an international treaty.

Happy that the mystery had been solved, the cook decided to make chocolate mousse for everyone!

But Mr. H. wasn't hungry. He was lost in thought.

"I still can't get my head around it." he muttered to himself. "Counting the pieces that Mr. Soo stole, that means the meteorite broke into exactly thirteen pieces. Why thirteen pieces? What could it mean?"

Then Mr. H. stood up and announced that he was staying behind in Antarctica over the winter. He needed some time alone so he could think.

As for Mr. Soo, he soon found himself sitting all alone in a prison cell back in his home country. Mrs. Shee decided not to do anything to help him. In fact, Mr. Soo had heard that Mrs. Shee was lying to him all along about wanting to marry him. Apparently Mrs. Shee was going around telling all her friends that there was absolutely no way that she would ever want to marry Mr. Soo. She would never want them to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Soo-Shee!

Mr. Soo sobbed alone in his prison cell, angry that Mrs. Shee had tricked him.

D/2008/M.Dielemans, éditeur.



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