

-And Lurking Behind Quasar 3C295 . . .

by strannikov

No quasi-stellar objects have ever been observed from the other side. Quasar 3C295 is a case in point. It's not the most distant quasar, nor the oldest, doesn't have the highest relative velocity—and still, after all these years, no one has observed what is just behind it. Furthermore, no one ever shall, but that's become a pedantic point ever since we began receiving transmissions from the vicinity, apparently no more than one light year behind the quasar.

The significance of these transmissions continues to elude astronomers, astrophysicists, cosmologists, and a few other people. Since reception of the transmissions began in 1975, monitors have recorded an uninterrupted game of Rock Scissors Paper. Mysteriously, the game has been played continuously by a purple-skinned beauty queen in a green swimsuit with a sparkly silver sash, a common black bear, and a sullen hunter clad in a dark rust-burnt orange-and-cream plaid. The beauty queen is slightly ahead, cumulatively, but the bear puts up a good fight. The hunter regularly beats the bear but hardly ever beats the beauty queen. Also mysteriously, the transmission is in color whenever the beauty queen wins. Transmissions of the bear's wins arrive in black-and-white. The hunter's wins' transmissions alternate. The respective wins and losses of the three players have no discernible correlation with emissions of x-rays or gamma rays and do nothing to alter the quasar's red shift.

The participants have not aged one day over the course of thirty-nine years of monitoring. The trio never pauses to dine, never takes breaks for the loo (although, empirically speaking, no sight of a kitchen or a loo has ever been made). The décor hasn't changed once in all this time, either. Viewed in color, the beauty queen sits on a mustardy leather sofa (not always with her legs crossed). The bear

always sits on his rump, swaying (in clockwise fashion, unless he happens to win the match). The hunter, in matching plaid hat and coat and blue denim coveralls, sits glumly in a white rattan chair, his shotgun always on his right, away from the bear.

"We hardly expected this!" an astonished doctoral candidate at the Paramount Observatory exclaimed to his graduate assistant one evening when the beauty queen won thirteen matches in a row.

Even less expected were the events occurring one sultry summer evening four months later, seven weeks after the grad student's internship had ended, on a night when the doctoral candidate was alone and obliged to recalibrate one of the observatory's working spectrosopes. That night, at the very summit of the peak that thrust the top of the dome of the Paramount Observatory to its elevation of 2128 meters above sea level, the transgalactic beauty queen paid a visit. She looked far more fetching in person than she'd appeared in the transmissions enthroned on her mustardy leather sofa. Her purplish skin had a powdery softness in the dim light of the observatory's cool interior, and somehow she'd neglected to arrive with either her swimsuit or her silvery sash. "I get bored playing the same game with those two all the time. Got a spare lab coat, brainiac?" she smiled mischievously. The doctoral candidate hastily locked the observatory's interior doors from the inside, just before rifling a closet for a lab coat. "Call me HemiDemiSemi," she quavered with a purr as she left the proffered lab coat unbuttoned.

"Your dual source albedo is amazing!" the doctoral candidate confessed as she steamed his glasses.

"Let's see that great big telescope of yours," she exhaled hotly, "I want to grind your lenses!" The doctoral candidate dutifully stood between her and his massive telescope so her roving hands would encounter some instrumentation with no optical components. My, but her purple hands were hungry! The newly recalibrated spectrometer showed she had quite a red shift all by herself.

"Mmmm, your light amplification is stimulating my emissions!" she moaned radiantly. "Oscillate my quanta, YES, let's

fluctuate!" The doctoral candidate abandoned his promising career in astronomy there and then. He's now well ahead of the bear in Rock Scissors Paper and continues to score infrequent wins over the beauty queen herself, much to the discomfiture of the hunter, who now only observes the matches in play and whose white rattan chair is no longer white but canary yellow and no longer rattan but wicker. The former astronomer always stands, although he was offered a four-legged bar stool on arrival, and his wins are all transmitted in high contrast sepia white.

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