

Life on Earth

Time for my weekly feedback. Delia stood up from her clean strategic planner's desk in this clean, busy, open-plan agency office, and grabbed her smartphone. The intern one desk over looked at her: "Stay punk!" he mouthed.

She grinned, held up her new Waea4 ninja-style, strode to the door of the corner office, rehearsing her pitch. *Ads are dead. We need to get into Big Data Direct Social Interaction. It's BIDDSI. It's the future. And I've got just the project for you: ILSONSE!* She stopped in front of the door, taking a deep breath. *He either buys this, or I'm outta here. For real this time.*

She opened the opaque glass door and, playing with the smartphone in her hand, aimed to go straight into pitch-mode. Looking up, she stopped, forgot to breathe. There was her boss, but twice. One of them standing behind the desk. His pants were black, shiny, tight like the skin on a sausage. Trying to be hip. Painting his bristles pink, colour clashing with his green forehead. The other one sat at the clear glass desk. The same blob in a suit. His paunch protruding over said pants. Both were looking down. One of them had skin the colour of a fresh sprout, all green and healthy. The other one's looked washed out like a sick leaf.

Oh no he didn't, got himself a replica, she thought and turned towards the one standing. The one with the washed out skin colour. *This is how you look when you get old, doesn't rub off. I don't wanna get old.*

He looked up and smiled at her. "I admire your style," he said, "Alert like a race-blinster! I like that. Remind me that I need to talk to you about race-blinsters. But now, sit down."

Totally disorienting, both speaking at the same time. But the replica followed the man's words with a nano-delay, just enough to be noticeable. She sat in front of the desk, across from the replica.

"Can't walk yet, this one." he said. "Software glitch. But these iTauras will be huge. I want us to do their launch campaign."

She nodded. Her mind tried to make sense of being compared to race-blinsters. *Was that an insult? My style is like a six-legged creature bred to run races?* Suddenly, she was unsure if today was a good day to show the holo-presentation on Big Data.

The replica began to shuffle around on the desk, led by the shuffling movements of her boss standing behind it. Finally, it produced a printed sheet, slid it across to her. She took the sheet.

Shit. Official looking, letterhead from the Command for Planetary Protection Subcommittee for Forward Contamination. She started reading. *Issues with your ILSONSE Program...required to look into the decontamination methods of your spacecraft following the Slomo incident. Methods on the ILSONSE Program insufficient, probes contaminated. ILSONSE program to be terminated immediately. Penal sum of...holy shit!*

"I asked our legal guy what the Slomo incident was," he said as she looked up again. "He told me the space guys had sent probes looking for life on Slomo. Wound up finding life from their own backyard, because the probes had been dirty. So now they're all jiffy about making clean machines. He says we need to honour this. I seem to remember that the ILSONSE Program was one of your social media pet projects. Remind me why we did this."

The healthy green of her skin turned bilious, making her polished black fingernails look like talons. She took a second, then: "ILSONSE... I Love Science Outreach Nanoprobe Space Exploration. Social media CSR we did for Bla&Bliss two years ago. It was cost neutral. Something we wanted to try out. The idea was to send a cloud of crowd-sourced nanoprobes to a solar system close by. Explore, go beyond! Message was right on brand. We ran a contest, selected a system some 100 light years away. Young system, ordinary sun, four rocky planets, four gassy ones, loads of smaller stuff, all quite pretty. We got images from all planets right away, because the cloud worked like a kind of super-large telescope." She searched for signs of comprehension in his face. But there were none. "We used them in brand communication for different lines of fitness drinks. The third planet from the sun has a bright blue colour that matches their brand perfectly. It was super-exciting, major KPI-smash."

"You mean we've launched already?" he asked, echoed by the machine at his desk.

"About two years ago. Piggybacked on a commercial launch."

"Anything we can do about that?"

She shook her head.

"But we can comply and scrap the program," he stated, looking her in the eyes. "We've lost the Bla&Bliss account anyway."

She took another second, then: "The campaign was a big success. The perk for gold supporters was putting personal messages on the probe. So they were totally like: send our message to the third rock from the sun! Be bold and not a maybe! Got a lot of social media awareness. My favorite tweet was: We come in pieces! #blanbliss." She smiled, but he only looked at her - twice. The replica-stare was even more unnerving. "The probes will arrive in 150 years, or so," she continued, squirming in her seat. "But the campaign officially ended with us aiming the probes at the prettiest planet. The blue one that's most likely hospitable to life. But it's been over for a year. The program. So we're good?"

Sighing, he turned his eyes away from her. He was probably trying to find an answer in the view of the sprawling metropolis under the orange sky outside his corner-office he loved so much. But in her mind, the future was clear. *They don't get this. They never get it. We could spin this. Bla&Bliss brings life to the universe. Pitch it to them. Win them back.*

Then she was handed the verdict: "One: write them a letter stating that we comply and that the campaign is over. Two: stop gabbing about your perk-laden probes heading for the blue planet. Shut this down and hope everyone forgets."

She nodded, creating a to do list: *scrap my talk at Digital Akauawakeri, kill the bots that have kept the social media pages alive for a year, wave goodbye to the target group that has moved on to new sharing apps anyway, get drunk out of frustration. It'll be like dust in the wind, nobody will remember.*

He looked at her, all smiling anticipation again: "Is there anything else you wanted to show me?"

She pocketed her Waea4. "No."

"Right," he said. "But I've got something for you. I want *you* to prepare our pitch to Tauri. The biggest, the best we can manage. Huge ads, product placement, holo-displays and of course social media. And here's the angle: iTauris are the cooler, sleeker version of you. How do you communicate that? Easy: race-blinsters! That's cool with the crowd. Sleek, six-legged race-blinsters; that's speed, that's excitement! Go to Slinka, she'll give you the branding guide. Then show me what you've got. Get me some ideas by tomorrow. Right?"

Right. She went out, feeling four eyes on her back as she closed the door. Her intern smiled at her like a puppy: "How did it go?"

"I've got work for you," she replied.