SOLIDARITY

A passing thought.

BY GEORGE ZEBROWSKI

Leo Wilson sat by the window and watched the insects passing through the glass.

It was an illusion of some sort, he told himself, unblinking to catch how it was done; a love of insects was fooling him. Dreaming, he had to wake up.

But they went through, unstoppable solid ghosts — mosquitoes, ladybirds, a bee and even a wasp; the mix made no sense, as if each kind of insect was showing off.

He watched sadly as the bugs came through and stuck to the sticky strips he had hung nearby to keep a record.

He touched the glass and drummed on it with his fingers, once again testing its solidity; the charge in the mass of his fingers, which produced the experience of solidity, was certainly related to what the insects were able to do. They knew the physics and could alter the well defined illusion of solidity by varying the resistance. Absolute solidity, non-atomistic matter, closely packed to forbid all space-like fields, did not exist. Nature had been too cheap to make an all-solid Universe. Ever parsimonious, it had inflated a pattern with space, not unlike Styrofoam. All the mass of Earth might be compressed into a thimble, an entire universe into a single point...

No, what the insects were doing was not a miraculous violation of natural law. But how were the bugs doing it? And why were they doing it?

Another group arrived at the window, passed through, and flew into his stickies. He stared in wonder, thinking that he might be helping them by watching, deluding himself into seeing the impossible-possible.

He checked the stickies again. Three were full now with writhing bodies struggling to break free of the glue.

He turned back to the window and saw with shock that the window was now covered with the bodies of dead insects that had failed to pass through — and feared that his turning away had caused the catastrophe.

To come through, they needed him.

He sat and waited for another group, thinking of the very small statistical chance that he might walk through a wall; quantum theory admitted as much.

The insects, some of them, had found that moment.

And some had not.

Video would not do to witness the extraordinary event.

But just before he called in observers, he went outside and pushed a finger through the glass, then his whole hand, but resisted the urge to push through with his tongue.

Finally, he stood on tiptoes and went

through with his head, and felt a tingle as he withdrew, sure now that all it took was belief, derived from the fact that he had seen it done.

Being a patriotic sort, Leo convinced his government of the phenomenon. History did not need to record which governance, as it did not much matter after he walked through a wall for a few ministers. An advisory magician was sceptical until Leo took him by the hand and walked him through.

Quantum probabilities had a lot to offer.

Some months later, several heads of intelligence agencies went to lunch — a commonality among professionals in a world determined to quarrel instead of war, but this time each was asking the other what they were going to do about one another's agents, the ones who were now stuck in walls.

All the agency heads had the same problem. They all knew Leo

Wilson from his file, and asked for his help. Finally, after a number of agents had died in the

walls and others had to be fed by hand to survive, the agencies called a secret meeting somewhere in the Mediterranean and asked Leo Wilson to attend.

"What do you suggest?" they asked after telling him what had happened.

"Never had that problem myself," he said. "I've forgotten I have doors in my house."

"You do it without... difficulties?" they asked.

"Of course," he told them.

"What can you suggest to help us?" they asked.

"Read to them about the reality of probabilities," he said. "Might loosen up their imaginations."

Tried. It did not work.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Leo said, "I don't know what else to tell you. Insects are cooperative, and maybe they pool the energy of the hive." It occurred to Leo that the insects that had gone splat on the glass were the ones with individual tendencies, not unlike agency spies. "Or maybe it's something like..." he started to say.

"Like what, Mr Wilson?" they all asked at once, as if suspecting that he was holding back the vital answer.

He sighed. "Like bird navigation."

Our feathered friends have something in their brains that enables them to go anywhere on the globe without our kind of GPS.

"But you told us some of the insects failed to go through. Doesn't that suggest anything?"

"Yes, but they didn't hesitate and stick part way through the glass," Leo said, thinking about degrees of cooperation; the spies were, after all, company types.

"Help us, Mr Wilson, men are dying stuck in the walls!"

"Dying?" Leo asked.

"We have to feed these political embarrassments. What do you know, what do the bugs know how to do that we don't?"

Leo looked around at the anxious faces, shrugged and said: "They do it better than we do." ■

George Zebrowski is an award-winning novelist, story writer, essayist, editor and lecturer. He is the author of the novel Empties (Golden Gryphon Press) and the editor, with Gregory Benford, of Sentinels in Honor of Arthur C. Clarke (Hadley Rille Books).

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