



## The Sacred Element

by David Ramsay Steele

Listen children, this story is more than just true. It's true many times over, for the very same sequence of events has happened thousands of times on different worlds.

Once upon a time there was a well-positioned planet endowed with much carbon. And sure enough, on this planet there developed a marvellous array of living organisms. Out of these myriads of species, there emerged, by a succession of lucky accidents, one intelligent animal, with the capacity for building civilization and the indefinite development of knowledge. So far, so good.

As these intelligent animals exulted in their technological and artistic achievements, they little suspected that a terrible, malign force was pitilessly draining away the life's blood from their world. They were living in a shadowy and attenuated time, the darkness of death closing in on the biosphere, the light of life sputtering feebly amid the encircling gloom.

Of course you all know the explanation. For millions of years of evolution, countless living organisms had been dying every day, and some of these dead organisms became trapped deep in the planet's crust, their precious carbon locked out of circulation. Since biomass is fixed by the quantity of available carbon, the continual removal of carbon spells shrinkage and degeneration.

*Left to itself, life automatically eliminates the conditions for its own existence, though thankfully it does so quite slowly. Occasional volcanic eruptions do liberate some carbon, but this is a mere trifle compared with the enormous losses inflicted by the formation of peat, coal, and petroleum deposits. Forests are the number one menace to life, for any tree will eventually die, and who can say what will then become of its priceless carbon?*

A momentary reprieve came along when some of the intelligent animals began to dig for coal and drill for oil and gas. They thought only of the profits to be earned by providing their fellow species-members with cheaper fuel, but unbeknownst to themselves, they were benefitting their own population and their biosphere in an entirely different way. By liberating the imprisoned carbon, they helped—though this was no part of their intention—to counteract the insidious shrivelling of the biomass.

But these intelligent animals soon abandoned fossil fuels—while the vast bulk of the lost carbon still lay entombed beneath the planet's surface. Nuclear, solar, and other forms of energy completely superseded oil and coal, when only a minute proportion of the carboniferous deposits had been reclaimed for the benefit of life. The march of death recommenced!

Eventually, however, a few of these intelligent animals—on our world we know them as the Six Prophets—began to preach the novel idea, though to us it is common sense, that carbon must be disinterred from the geological graveyard if life is to fulfill its potential. The holy cult of carbon redemption was born: the saints pledged themselves to

donate a sixth of their income to extract coal and oil, solemnly oxidizing these organic minerals in magnificent public rituals and also in millions of humble household shrines.

New coal mines and oil wells were created, far more than in the days of fossil fuels, with the single intention of resurrecting these substances and reclaiming their carbon to sustain the living world. It was soon realized that it was often easier to pump oxygen down below and burn the deposits where they lay, but millions of tons and barrels were brought to the surface so that the devout could personally witness their reclamation. The liberation of carbon became the biggest of charities, and later (when every individual had become immensely wealthy by primitive standards), the sole charity, the last surviving philanthropic 'good cause'.

In our world, this all happened a long time ago. The observable benefits have been spectacular, even over just the last six thousand years. Our climate is more lovely and more temperate. The sky is bluer and the rain finer. The air is filled with the bright plumage of wondrous new birds. Vegetation springs up everywhere with an eager rapidity that would have astonished our ancestors, the dazzling effulgence of its emerald verdure far outshining the drab coloration of earlier times.

*The redemption of carbon has already created a wordly paradise, yet the great work has barely begun. Our machines have sniffed out every ounce of coal, oil, and diamonds for thousands of meters below the surface, they continue to go deeper—and there are vast reserves of limestone, chalk, and marble down there, just waiting to be converted.*

We award our most distinguished medals and our most prestigious prizes to those members of our species who

redeem lost carbon and restore it to the living world, thereby triumphing over death. And that's why we're going out today, children, for six hours, to watch the ceremonial burning. For today, the 6th of June, is Carbon Redemption Day, or Life Day, the most glorious holiday in our calendar. The redemption of carbon is a voluntary act, a noble deed of unsullied virtue. No pastime is more strictly righteous. "All religion is folly save only the sacrament of carbon redeemed and life amplified" (*Third Prophet*, 46:656).

Children, you are now six years old, and you may look back on this day as the most momentous of your lives. The torch of life now passes to you. No one can *make* you dedicate your life to burning fossilized mineral compounds. Only *you* can decide, of your own free will, to undertake that heroic commitment for the benefit of future life on this planet and its many far-flung colonies.

I know that you are good children and that all six of you will do your bit to save the planet. Please don't let me down. Now let's go and have fun watching all that wonderful smoke. A Happy Life Day to one and all!

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