

# Futures

## Tucking in the nuclear egg

To show we care. By John Wiswell

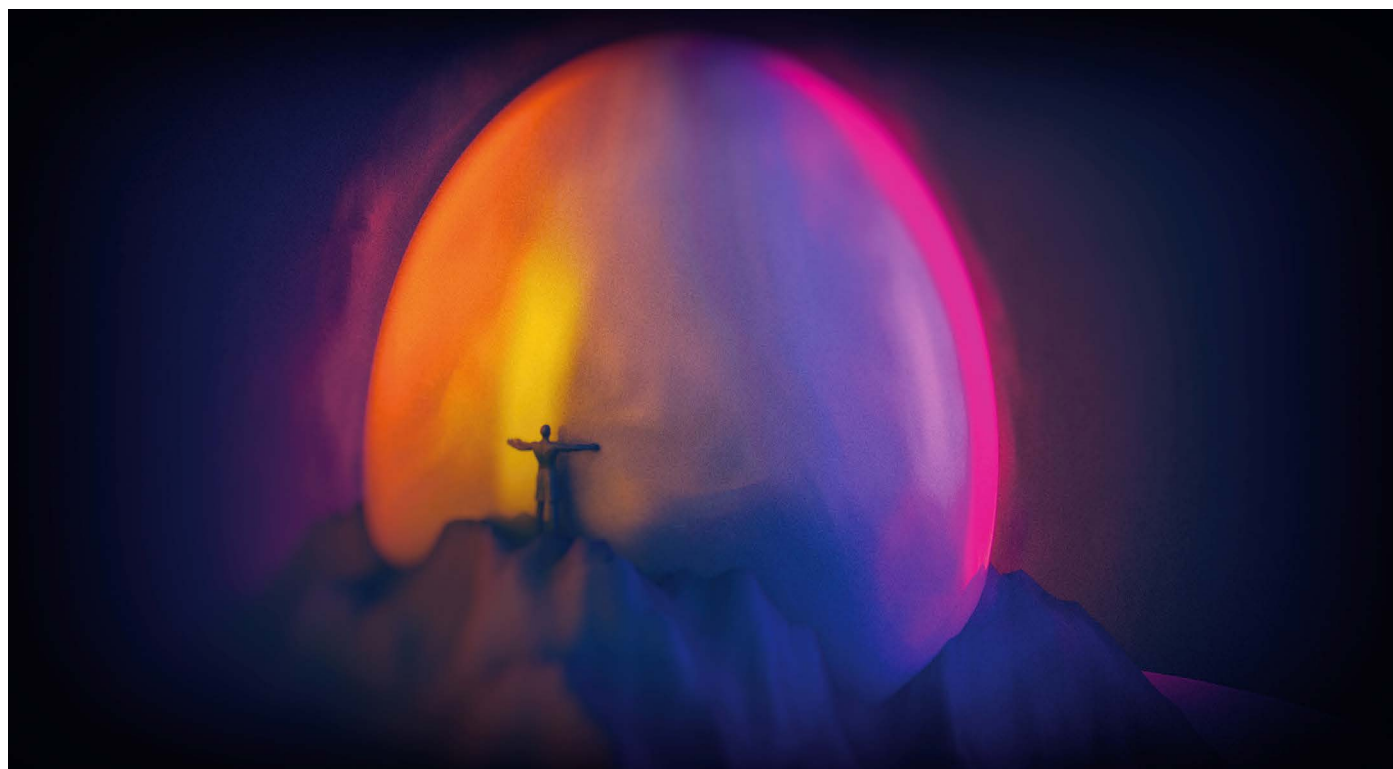


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

It is the largest mobile structure in the history of the planet. Its surface is both solar- and kinetic-absorbent, powered by sunshine and the impact of raindrops. This way it will never stop dampening the radiation. It is made up of more than 135 million modular plates so that they can expand and contract with your movements.

We couldn't build the blanket directly on top of you. That would've killed us.

Your radiation burned out 812 different drone vehicles in our effort to pull the structure over you. These were drones with independent shielding systems used when nuclear reactors melted down. And you still burned them out.

When we almost had the mobile structure in place, it shook and nearly collapsed under the shift in wind currents. Apparently, you hit a new phase in your development inside your egg, and your heat output changed on a dime. It was so dramatic that the air pressure almost popped the structure like a billion-dollar balloon.

Because of your radiation levels, we literally couldn't get near you to fix it if the structure collapsed. The world went without sleep that night.

But it worked. Now all the drone vehicles lie dormant around you. When you hatch, you'll probably pulverize them into the earth without noticing a single one of them.

It was all worth it to tuck you in. We hope you're comfortable under there.

We don't know how long your gestation period is. As it is, insects don't lay eggs that look like yours. Every specialist in bird and lizard reproduction is publishing papers theorizing about what's going on inside your shell. Your shell does look something like a chicken egg the size of a baseball stadium, but most of my staff still snicker at bird specialists pontificating on what you'll become when you hatch. We laugh because your parent was clearly shaped like a giant dragonfly. I have money in the office pool that you'll be a bug.

What do I know? I'm just an engineer who's

watching over you from outside the exclusion zone.

Much of the UN Security Council thinks you'll be dangerous after you hatch. You've inspired modern-day alchemists to try to turn gold into lead for protection. Gun sales are through the roof – as if they'd do anything against you. The fearful expect that you'll be like a wild animal the size of a skyscraper, with centuries' worth of fallout pregnant on your breath.

We tell the public that most wild animals aren't dangerous.

I swear that we don't want to provoke you. Wiser heads don't think your parent meant to do all that to Miami.

The world looked at your parent and saw a weapon. It was a creature with wings larger than any plane or shuttle we've ever constructed, capable of moving them at speeds that broke the sound barrier. That it could move and not collapse under its sheer body mass challenged our notions of biology.

The radiation readings we got off it were

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minuscule compared with what it had inside. If it didn't hold back, if it weren't naturally capable of retaining its radiation for the good of others, it would've destroyed every city it flew over. You must have the same capacity to restrain your radiation. You have what your parent had: a raw destructive power, and an equal capacity for gentleness.

Researchers once put a literal bull in a literal china shop. We have this idea that they'll destroy everything by their nature. Instead, the bull struggled to stay in the centre of the aisles and not to bump into anything. He didn't want to break anything. All he wanted to do was escape the shop.

A bull in a china shop isn't dangerous unless the owner comes in screaming and firing a gun at it.

Why your parent showed up in Miami was beyond us.

What it did to Miami was our fault.

Now nobody in my lifetime will be able to set foot in Florida. All that loss of life cannot happen again. I'm trying to help. We're all trying to help.

We believe that all your parent wanted was to bury your egg in the earth until you were ready to hatch. The debt of our mistakes is too great to be repaid. We cost you a loving parent.

What we're doing now cannot repay the debt. It can, hopefully, show you that we don't mean you any harm. That we can live in peace together.

From the readings of the modular radiation blanket, your shell isn't expanding and contracting like it used to. People who know more

about biology than me say that you are calming inside your shell. We believe that before a chick is born, it responds to stimuli outside its shell. Is radiation how you communicate with your kind? Did your parent sing you lullabies in  $\gamma$ -wave dialects?

I cannot sing through your shell. I can only make promises. I promise I will not let the Security Council hurt you. We won't let anyone hurt you. The blanket is our best way of saying this. It's our best way of saying everything we have to say.

**John Wiswell** (@wiswell) is a disabled writer who lives where New York keeps all its trees. Nature Futures previously published his story *The tentacle and you* in 2019.