There is another Earth. Like Schrodinger’s Cat, Earth exists in two plausible states and there’s no one around to prove which is actually real.

Just after the time of creation, the other Earth experienced an alteration of some seriously fundamental laws. Water, the hallmark of our blue planet, ceased to exist on the surface. Instead, every single molecule of water rose up and stayed suspended several feet above the ground and extended up, up into the stratosphere.

**Other Earth: The Ocean**

The suspended sea does not carve canyons into the earth’s surface or fill deep basins or run through forests. Rather it is a spherical homogenous aquarium with fixed depth. Life flourishes, but with a narrow array of creatures.

Despite reaching high altitudes, the suspended sea does not freeze over. There are strenuous currents that keep the water temperature relatively stable throughout the depths.

There are photosynthesizing plants which crowd the surface with gigantic, floating leaves and flowers. Pollination occurs from above and below by wind, currents, and living creatures. One plant, however, has done something remarkable.

It has long, flexible limbs on top which are laughably pliant to the touch. On their own, they flail, sink, and die. But amid the cacophony of other plant life, they grow vine-like and slowly wrap around the others and eventually form a tangled web. This design is incredibly strong, supporting long tendrils of roots that dangle down in the sea.

The tendrils continue to grow, and as the center is hollow, do not have much mass. When the tendrils penetrate the sea floor, there are several profound consequences.

**Other Earth: The Surface**

The earth surface is cool, but not as cold as you might think. The sun does not penetrate the deep seas, but periodic volcanic events spew superheated gases into the narrow band of air, like a steamy exhalation. There are some mountain ranges which stick up into the suspended sea due to the action of tectonic plates, but otherwise the surface is utterly smooth. And sandy.

The suspended sea, like our earth’s sea, generates a constant stream of detritus. There are dead plants and animals, excretions, et cetera. These particles fall to the ocean floor and stay suspended in a sort of reverse adhesion process.

Life on the surface of the earth must get most of its energy from the ocean floor (a few feet above the surface). Dominating the sandy surface are 7-foot-tall grazing creatures with vacuous mouths which hang agape and troll the ocean floor for sustenance through curtains of baleen. Their lower bodies are snakelike, rapidly careening across the sandy surface. They digest the nutrients and excrete the waste as sand (think parrotfish on our earth). This is why the entire earth is covered with sand.

The surface of the earth is dark. Actually, darker than that. Black. There are no plants. The animals have no sight as it would serve no purpose. Animals have varying degrees of hearing, smell, and echolocation.

Trapped underneath the suspended seas, the air below could become a toxic soup of gases expelled from the earth’s core. But the air is naturally cleansed thanks to the hollow tendrils of that most special of plants.

**Other Earth: Sentient Life**

Most life on the earth’s surface is constantly moving, eating, and reproducing. That is, there is no stopping, ever, until death. Without sunlight, there’s no external rhythm of night/day or seasonal change. Animals lack biorhythms or circadian clocks. But there is one exception.

One animal, the ablator, has evolved in close connection with that special plant that extends into the surface air from atop the sea. The biology of the two species is intricately linked. The most intriguing side effect of this coevolution is the audio component.

The sounds from the upper atmosphere, at the ocean’s surface, are readily delivered, through the hollow tubes of the plant, to the air below the sea. Due to the vascular structure of the plant, sound only conducts from top to bottom. The ablators have always been tuned in to the frequency of life way, way above them. There are various cracks, cackles, rips, and whoops. There’s a constant whisper of wind and random chit-chattering-goo-goos. But there’s also the click-clack of a language.

Listening twice daily are these heavyset, pilose creatures who gather in troops around the dangling roots. Ablators could be described as obese and truly ugly to us. But of course they are never seen as all animals down here are blind and live in obscurity. Their fur is white, devoid of pigment. These creatures have huddled this way for generations and are intimately familiar with the sounds from above. The click-clack language is what maintains their interest, as they “know” the language. That is, they know every single word and are used to the frequency of its use. They recognize individual voices and the idiosyncrasies of each speaker.

The devoted listeners are social creatures and enjoy commenting on the daily audio stream. But despite all this, ablators do not know what a single “word” of the click-clack language means. They have never experienced the completely different environment above the suspended sea and therefore have no way to begin to piece together what the sounds refer to. They have an addiction to a meaningless language of sounds.

When the listening time is over, they spend their remaining time hunting, grooming, and socializing. They are a charismatic bunch whilst together, and it is key to their hunting strategy.

**Ablator: The Hunt**

Bottom line, these are slovenly carnivores surrounded by lightning-quick serpentine prey. They must rely on their intelligence or they wouldn’t stand a chance. Over several hours, they patiently arrange themselves in a tight, circular ring. This takes several hours as their bodies move so reluctantly, despite having 3 sets of legs (in order to support the excess girth). During this preparation, the snakey prey easily avoids the lumbering shapes, detecting the shuffling sounds and movements.

At long last, when the formation is perfect, they begin to dig. Well, dig may not be the right term, as they have perfected a wiggly maneuver that allows them to permeate the sandy surface with ease, not at all like arduous digging. Their blobby bodies elasticize and spread out in a pancake shape. After just a few minutes, the circle has transformed into a circular mountain of sand. There can be hundreds of individuals involved, in order to create a very gradual incline which rises several feet in the air at the top. In the center is a very deep hole.

Like a spider’s web, once spun, it only requires patience. Sooner rather than later, the prey slithers up the sandy slope and drops into the hole. The hunters designate two elders to then enter the hole and leisurely roll atop the now panicked animal. Another two or three assist to pin down the meal, rendering the serpent immobile.

As you may have guessed, there is a ritualized way the prey is eaten so that special parts, especially the baleen plates, are reserved for particular individuals. So the prey is painstakingly ablated, each organ and tissue type having a place in the culinary hierarchy. Meanwhile, all this ritual incurs an indescribably slow and excruciating death for the hapless victim.

**Ablator: Reproduction**

Ablators do engage in sexual reproduction but each individual is equipped with both male and female equipment. A combination of environmental and social factors will determine whether or not a given individual procreates as a male or a female. Many eggs are fertilized with each pregnancy- generally 12, with occasional sets of 13 or more.

The eggs spend little time in the womb, rather they are expelled after a mere two weeks, emerging as one unit, like an ice-cube tray. The tray is placed by the parent inside a pouch, which dangles loosely on the side of the body, a bit like a marsupial, but in a more slipshod fashion. Some trays do not even make it to the pouch, as the ablators seem barely cognizant of the egg expulsions.

If placed successfully, the tray slowly dissembles and tiny ablators grow and fraternize inside the furry pouch.

Ablators do not fret over their progeny. In fact they practically ignore their young ones until they reach maturity, or at least can engage in conversation. The young ones stick together, and basically listen to the conversations of the adults. Unlike our young children, these youths do not crave physical activity as they are preparing to be supremely sedentary adults.

As a result of this sloppy parenting, many trays of eggs are simply dropped or spill out of the flimsy pouches. Some even enter the ocean bottom, which generally leads to death in one way or another.

**Other Earth: Sentient Life Part II**

Life has taken completely different forms above the sea. Bathed in intense light, high winds, and high altitude, the animals here have adapted modes of flying, swimming, and anchoring. Nothing walks as there are no terrestrial surfaces.

Surrounding the special plants are colonies of spiky, many-armed creatures. They sort of resemble brittle stars, but they have 8 arms as well as 2 tentacles. The arms constantly move about- above and below the sea. Each arm has sensitive bristles as well as an eyeball which provides sensory input to its distributed brain. Rather than one brain at the center of the body, each arm has a mini-cortex which is connected to all the other “mini-brains” in each arm.

These creatures communicate by click-clacking their teeth which are located at the center of the body. The mouths are notably large and are filled with white shiny teeth. When these creatures talk, the sound is quite robust, like when we clap our hands but even shriller. Depending on which teeth are struck and the angle, the individuals create very distinct types of sounds.

(rest of story contents)

*One ablator egg does something unique- it ends up entering the suspended sea…. lands in larval hive of surface creatures. Eats its own siblings at first (rest of “ice cube tray”). Surface creatures treat as pet. Don’t realize it is eating their babies but by then there is a bond. They try to feed it other foodstuffs, but it does not tolerate any foods except those babies!*

*Meanwhile, this “pet” mimics language of adopted species. This is heard by its kind down on earth.*

*This “pet” eventually drops a larval baby of above creatures down into root system, and is picked up and put in pouch of animals down below…*

*\*\*THE ROLLOUT PLAN\*\*\**

*Release 3 books at once. One is portable baby book showcasing this “charismatic megafauna”- like 5 pages. Second is for school-age kids- this story. Third is for “adults” (actually for older kids) only which has a more sinister twist ?*