

Emergent Behavior in the Presence of Elephants

Picture this . . .

You are standing on an ice floe near the Arctic Circle,
 Surrounded, to the horizon, by white ice
 And slate-blue open water.
A-big-white-raku-crackle-glaze of floe.
The sun is low and gray.
 It has been low.
 It will continue to be low
 The rest of the day.
Its soooo warm! – certainly above freezing.
That's very unusual – so far north.
And the water doesn't seem that cold.
 It was colder in Colorado.
Perhaps that's why the elephants don't seem to be in discomfort.

Elephants!

 Great, gray African Elephants.
Chest deep in water – standing on ice.
 Spraying themselves as if they were
 Bathing in the Mara –
 With the Serengeti stretching to the south
 And Tanzania on the horizon instead of the sun.
You are very careful not to get sprayed by the elephants.
It's warm now – no danger of freezing.
 But it must get cold sometime.
 The biggest danger in the Arctic is of getting wet and chilled.
You climb into your shelter –
 A four by five by five
 Open-sided box
 Mounted on four iron stilts
 Twenty feet above the floe.
Inside is your sleeping bag and a camp stove.
You light the stove to take the dampness out of your clothing.

From above, your actions are monitored by
 Three hundred remote-sensing satellites
 In polar orbits
 With one minute visit times.
Each satellite a neuron.
 Each neuron a traffic signal.
 Each traffic signal communicates with
 Eighteen hundred intelligent vehicles per hour

Themselves ganglia.
You know about the satellites and traffic lights.

I'll tell you what's puzzling you.
You have been splashed by elephants
 Near the Arctic Circle
 Fifteen steps outside the pale
 Thirteen steps north of the DEW Line.

And you're not cold.
You have touched your daughter
 And nothing turned to gold but her hair.
And it was warm gold –
 Not cold.