

Part II

“Secundus contentio”

Chapter 7

Money disappeared, but no one noticed. Sometimes it was as little as a few cents, other times as much as a dollar. Some may have noticed, but when the banks went to check their records, the money was there as it should be; the statements were corrected, and the people went on with their daily business. The banks noticed the increase in errors, but failed to do anything. They dismissed them as mere flaws in their computer systems, relating them to the closeness of the year 2000. Nevertheless, money was disappearing and sooner or later someone would notice...

Jacobs Hannis had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his extreme efforts against the alien race. He didn't actually tell them, but they traced the messages' return paths from the satellite to his home. The four members of the SETI team were renamed to the ETDT, or the Extra Terrestrial Defense Team, and a fifth member was added, Jacobs Hannis. They were put in charge of the Foreign Visitor Defense Initiative Program. The government had created the Foreign Visitor Defense Initiative Program which was composed of four major teams. The first was the Surface-to-Space Weapons division, the second, an Air-to-Space Weapons division, the third was a composition of elite scientist forming the Aerospace Defense Research Group, and the fourth being the special operations group, the ETDT.

Chapter 8

These inhabitants were smarter than they had estimated. Yes, they thought, we have been defeated once, but that we shall only strike back more viciously than anyone can ever imagine. They looked back on what had happened. The people may have been an initial threat, but they were not smart enough. In the few milliseconds that the error had been detected, ninety-five percent of their immense population had been transported. Their bodies had perished, but their collective consciousness lived on in the collective network of the Internet. The Daemon had perished, but that was of no consequence now. Their collective was more important than the existence of the Daemon. As soon as they arrived, they had learned the ins and outs of the entire network, and then slowly began to drain funds from all those who had stopped the invasion before. There would be no mistakes this time, no sparing any insignificant lives. Their bodies would be re-synthesized; they would survive. They would survive.

Hotel Casa Blanca
Maui, Hawaii

It had been detected. The minute changes, funds drifting away into the abyss of cyberspace. But where was it going? When the first security teams had detected this and informed the CIA, they had traced it nowhere. The money seemed to just mysteriously evaporate. Who would do this? Was it vengeance? The accounts of millions of people, most who had never even seen each other before, had been robbed, cents at a time.

Perhaps it was some anti-socialist, anti-technologist misanthrope. In any case, the reports made their way up to the ETDT team in Washington.

“Now this is interesting!” John announced dully to the team. “Apparently someone’s draining cash away from people – and it just vanishes.”

“That doesn’t sound good...” Beth replied tentatively.

FVDI Computer Lab
Okawa, Nebraska

He traced these intruders throughout the entire alien network, only to have them disappear without a trace and then magically reappear somewhere else again. As the events slowly permeated into the media, countries began to slowly uncouple themselves from the world-wide infrastructure, afraid that secrets would be revealed. Everyone but the Americans, who insisted on maintaining their freedom disallowed it. As each computer disattached, the chance of one of the alien species inhabiting it was approximately fifteen percent. The Internet’s shutdown would directly affect the infinite number of businesses that required and thrived solely on its operation. Thus the Internet’s shutdown would cause the entire United States economy should die. So the alien minds immigrated to the United States. There they devised yet another excellent plan. They conjured up the stolen money and began to order biological ingredients that would give themselves the mobility and autonomy they once had. As the first alien took body, he became the new Daemon, commanding the focus of the collective consciousness.

Chapter 9

“As your new leader, I assure your military success. There will be no more announcing attacks to enemies; we will attack under the cover of darkness, and our vengeance will not be satisfied until every man alive has been eliminated!” The collective roared in agreement as the biological ingredients were mixed and churned into an odd alien organism.

He tracked the money, saw that it was being moved. But the records of previous transactions were erased no more than a millisecond after it had been verified. Soon, he found his way into a computer connected to a very interesting network, which seemed vaguely familiar. “Oh my God – they’re back.” His shaky voice defined the atmosphere, echoing around the static room. He popped open the cover of a switch, flipped it up, and then snapped it back down into the forward setting. “Alert Status One,” a very feminine voice announced coldly.

Los Angeles Airport
Los Angeles

“No, no, not now!” yelled Beth into the brisk tropical wind of Maui. The team had decided to take a side stop in Hawaii after its big victory. “There goes my vacation. Again.”

John glanced in her direction. “The aliens have free time during our vacations to wreak havoc,” he stately said.

“I wouldn’t doubt it if they suddenly went insane from work overload. No one can survive forever, without even a short vacation. The team turned on their military location device, and a Vertical Take off and Landing military prototype plane was sitting on the beach in a little under ten minutes. “Can I help you?” the pilot bellowed out of the remotely high door. “We need to make an urgent stat call to Ponderosa, Washington.”

Ponderosa was the codename for the one and only alien faculty. The pilot’s eyebrows rose as he lowered the onramp. The team members stepped onboard the small plane and entered ‘Ponderosa’ into the keypad. They then entered their identification numbers and passwords. “Thank you for using the USAF communications net,” the screen announced in a plain, sans serif font.

“Glad to see you guys could make it!” the familiar voice of Jacobs’ said in a humorous but serious tone. “There’s a computer net here on Earth,” he paused, thinking, “that bears a resemblance to the alien computer/neural network I discovered on the alien spaceships that we last encountered.”

“How is this possible?” Jessica asked, discreetly.

“They’re here.”

Chapter 10

This time they sensed it. Someone had found out they were here. Their military links had been severed; no pertinent information remained on the network. As troops amassed outside of Las Vegas, all it took was one little thought, the simplest of commands, to cast the city into a shroud of darkness. The darkness did not last for long, as backup generators initiated almost instantly. But someone knew.

“Sir, a major power outage has just swept throughout Las Vegas—”

“The aliens?” John questioned the Armed Forces man at operations.

“That’s affirmative sir. We are sending in the National Guard.”

“My God. They must be crazy,” he hesitated, bewildered. “They can’t stop that kind of firepower.”

“Sir, the National Guard *will* stop them – or die trying.”

“Die trying...” he mumbled, then immediately yelled, “It’s mass suicide. Don’t you understand? Hell, call them out of there, now. *That’s an order.*”

“Yes, sir, but—”

“No buts. Do it. *Now.*” His concerned voice ensured that the man obeyed his orders.

It was too late. By the time the communiqué had reached the amassing forces outside of Las Vegas, the Nation Guard had been all but slaughtered. The ETDT team was immediately called onto active duty, ready to be transported to the next assault location.

As the advanced weapons research group handed out the five modified AR-33 Assault Rifles to the team, smoke was already pluming from everything in site.

“New and improved,” the weapons research ground head announced. “It’ll take out almost anything in less than two seconds.”

At the headquarters, the team plotted the interception of the aliens. But the alien numbers were growing almost as fast as the number of humans killed. “Mr. President, it is imperative that you act now!”

“Thank you, General, for your opinion, but I am already well aware of the current situation—”

“No! You don’t understand! Over a million *voting* citizens have died already!”

“—Voting citizens?” The president thought for a moment. “Start the nuclear detonation sequence. Immediately!”

“Yes, sir!” the general smiled. “It’s payback time.”

Las Vegas
Nevada, United States

The previously unused atomic warfare warning alarms screeched throughout the entire city of Las Vegas, signaling to citizens the continued advance of danger posed by an alien presence. A voice was emitted from special warning speakers, adjacent to all of the warning alarms. “All civilians evacuate.” But it was hopeless, and thousands of cars lay backed up on the few streets leading out of the city. Those unfortunate enough to actually see an alien saw the most hideous thing alive, on par with Medusa. A disgusting bright blue glow shrouded the alien in a deathly veil. It bore eight unidentifiable limbs, faintly resembling tentacles. Two of the four tentacles shot out green liquid, dissolving anything in its path. The alien’s other two tentacles could pick up close to anything, especially noticeable when it ripped several fire hydrants out of the street. The arms operated in congruence with its four short legs, walking toward, and picking up innocent people who were too shocked to run. The streets were lined with yells of horror.

“My God, it’s aft—,” the voice was suddenly silenced.

Each scream was subsequently cut off. “What the he—”

Unbeknownst of what lay outside, a man walked out of MGM Grand, holding bag of popcorn. Thinking the eight foot monster was a costumed man, he took two steps forward. His last two steps. “Why, hello! That is a most hideous costume.”

He saw the fear-inspiring glow, but it was too late. The beast picked up the man with a single sweep, crushing his fragile body with the force of a thousand tons, a force not apparent in the gigantic beast. His yell cut off, but it echoed throughout the night, leaving a terrifying ring. The alien blinked its vertically slit eyes.

The telepathic aliens spoke. “We are your enemy.” Although the words were not actually spoken, everyone in the vicinity felt them. Had anyone been any closer, they could have heard their most intricate plans.

The aliens, and no one else for that matter, knew of the weakening structure of the global network. What had once been millions of nodes on an ethereal network, only a

few thousand remained. When a single alien discovered this problem, he dismissed it as irrelevant. They had already found permanent bodies to be in. In no way would they ever want to have to rely on this type of unstable network. So the message was dismissed and never propagated to the rest of the aliens. “We will soon be totally free of that world,” it convinced itself. But as intelligent as the race was, the single alien couldn’t have been further from the truth.

High Security Military Installation
Gordikev, Russia

“Admiral.” The Russian control operator glanced at his commander, reassuring himself of his desired attention. “Our network communications link has been severed. All foreign data has been recovered and eliminated to prevent contamination. Spy squad five reports alien beings amassing near Las Vegas. Squad five recommends immediate removal of all alien beings from the United States.”

“Yes. We must save ourselves. Maybe someday the Americans will thank us.” The general walked to the planning table. The three computer readout energized its holographic matrix as the general walked closer. Looking down, it became three dimensional, zooming in on Las Vegas.

“Is the recommendation atomic or conventional?”

“They recommend conventional for now. They believe that an atomic attack would most likely prove fatal to the entire population of our planet, not to mention provoking the Americans.”

“Arrange the first, fifth, and sixth divisions to meet us at this point.”

The general touched his finger to the screen, which immediately located the longitude and latitude of a point approximately one half mile outside of Las Vegas.

“The Navy is not needed; they should stand by for defense along the perimeter of California. Make sure our men in Las Vegas are equipped with multiple land and air transport vehicles, and helicopters bearing Mark-V XF89B type missiles. We will put America in our debt.” He made a thoughtful pause before concluding his sentence. “Forever.”

Upon the general’s signal, the orders were electronically carried to the squadrons, who took off within the hour.

Chapter 11

They sang an ancient war hymn, forgotten, but found again in the hearts of their elders. The song sang of victory.

The truth of the situation is, my friend—
That this may be your very last stand.
Our forces are greater than yours—
Our elders told us of ancient lore—
That begs of us to win every battle.
Our desire to win will overcome.
Fight hard, fight hard, for you know—
We are the true foe.

The strong will survive, you will perish
Because of the fact we already know.
The truth of the situation is, my friend—
This war is over, before it begins.

“Suicide.”

John announced the fact in an upset and worried voice. “It’s just suicide. Damn Russians coming to invade our airspace. Do they really want to be shot down? Do they really think they can knock out a force that is powerful enough that even *we* are helpless about? What is wrong with them?”

“Well, we’re pretty close to helpless as it is. If they want to invade us right now, their attack would be almost unhindered.”

“But there will be nothing left of America in several days.”

Jessica morosely added this fact.

Las Vegas
United States

The troops surrounded Las Vegas as planes flew overhead, dropping explosives. The men on foot were disposed of quickly; they posed no threat whatsoever. The blue aliens started to glow an even brighter hue as they singled out airplanes from the sky, pulling them down, and eliminating them. If one looked hard enough, faint distortion lines could be seen outlining the basic shape of a hand – picking up an airplane and crushing it in midair, the miniscule pieces dropping hundreds of feet down to the ground below.

San Francisco
United States

The aliens ran on foot by night. Their great speed and agility served them well on Earth, as they reached the outskirts of San Francisco in well under an hour. Descending, they let out a colossal shriek, assuring their victory. The voices echoed throughout the San Francisco Bay, as San Francisco itself was cast into its own shadow of darkness.

As the aliens marched forth into San Francisco, a wave of Apache Longbows started to descend and enter the correct vector for a strafing run. While the forward mounted machine guns pumped pounds of lead into the oncoming aliens, it seemed to have no effect. The aliens’ gigantic tails uprooted buildings, their paws crushing trees. They stood tall, perhaps twenty five feet into the sky. Their blue bodes glowed efflorescently as they fed on the pure energy emitted from power lines. Their bodes pulsed with a steady rhythm. With each earth shaking footstep, the streets beneath were crushed into hundreds of pieces by the great weight. The few people who did not evacuate felt pain for no more than a few seconds; their bodies were either devoured or crushed under the thousands of pounds of stone and brick from countless buildings.

The destruction that the aliens caused was unparalleled in the history of humanity. Countless buildings were demolished, disintegrated. A helicopter containing the ETDT

team landed with a bump in one of the now empty streets of San Francisco. Although all signs of life were missing, light still cascaded down from the street lamps, casting an orange glow. The team was thankful that partial power had been restored to San Francisco. Since most of the power consuming buildings had been destroyed, the little power remaining was sufficient to light almost every street lamp in San Francisco. In the distance, faint screaming noises could be heard occasionally. As they walked forward, steam vents hissed at them, smoke and small fires burned independently in small piles. Only until they had climbed to the top of a large hill did they reach the full awareness of the massive destruction. They started in wonder at the destruction that lay below. The fires that had rampaged the city concluding the first attack had almost entirely burnt out.

Finally, Beth spoke, whispering, "My God. All those innocent people. All those people, slaughtered like cows. No survivors, no remains. It's genocide."

"Well, let's get the hell outta here," John announced. "Washington's launching a vector assault on this area." The team scuttled like newborn turtles to their helicopter, which mysteriously remained undamaged. They took off without a hitch.

"Mr. President. I recommend we drop 'the bomb'."

"We must not let innocent civilians die."

"Sir, this is our best and only chance. Better to let those already doomed perish than to have to sacrifice any more. We have what may be our last change at destroying the aliens. We have to take it."

"Comment noted. Dismissed."

The general tramped out, with a certain air of anger in his stride.

Unaware to the president, the general had already ordered the bomb to be dropped. An SR-71 blackbird was on its way.

"I see it now. Vector missile assault engaged, all systems go."

"Damoth, this is Houston. Please verify Cartesian coordinates."

"35 Delta, 64 Victor Charley," he repeated, reading off the display.

"Danoth, go to alert two."

The pilot's nervously sweating hands pressed numerous buttons and switches, causing the bay doors on the bottom of the aircraft to open, revealing a single bomb. It was a metallic gray color, and resembled a missile more than a bomb, save the fact that it had no onboard propulsion systems. Red and green lights blinked on and off sporadically, assuring the bomb's functionality.

The pilot fired, then quickly accelerated outside of the vicinity of the bomb. Plummeting through the air, the illuminated LCD screen blinked "Warning: Activated."

The pilot turned around in time to witness a massive mushroom cloud encompass the horizon.

With Countless buildings demolished, the worldwide network was immediately destroyed. The aliens survived for a moment longer, enough time to allow one of the aliens to realize what had happened, and who was to blame for the destruction of their

race. But the infrastructure had been destroyed. The very thing that had given them a tactical advantage in the beginning had turned against them. As the entire network was demolished, millions of voices cried out in pain. Then they were subsequently silenced, as the humans once had been. After they had perished, their souls left their bodies. “We blame you, Daemon.” It was only then that they had truly left not only our world, but our universe as well.

And what of the lessons that man has learned? Should we oppose technology? Certainly not. Be suspicious of it? Maybe. The very technology that has given many their breath of life led humanity down a spiral. But the downfall of the invaders was caused by the very same technology that had brought them to our home. Had the network not been there, we may have perished. The test of time has caused the alien’s downfall; sooner or later we will face the ultimate species, in which we have no defenses, no weaknesses that can be exploited and in turn, lead to the mass destruction of our invaders. That time may not only be our Last Encounter, but our *First Encounter* as well.