

SOUL CATCHER

And 20 More Sci-Fi Short Stories

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Introduction

This is a collection of science fiction short stories. All were written in 2014 and 2015, most on Friday afternoons as part of my Free Fiction Friday series.

Yeah, I write short fiction on my website each week, and have been for more than 80 weeks at this point.

These 20 stories represent the science fiction aspects of those stories. Most pertain to current events and many have elements of politics or economics thrown in.

When I feel it's warranted, I'll offer a short introduction at the beginning of each story. This will place the story and give you a frame of reference. Other than that, sit back and enjoy the ride!

1 – The Life and Times of Herman Schultz



Herman Ivan Schultz was born in Missoula, Montana, on December 5, 2018. It was two years into the Great Chaos, and to protect their young son, the Schultz family moved out of the city and into the surrounding countryside. They were joined by many other families, and Herman was able to grow up with great teachers, largely from the academic university that once existed there.

By the time Herman was a teenager the Splintering was already in effect, so he was given the tests and then put into the appropriate institute. For Schultz, it was engines. He learned all that he could for the six years he was required to attend, and during that time he began tinkering with the obsolete science of rocketry.

It was 2038 when he was finally done with his institute, and the last manned space mission had been 23 years earlier. No rocket had left the Earth's atmosphere for more than 20 years, and so Schultz's interest in the subject was a bit odd. He kept to himself, however, and as a result few knew of his obsession. When he *had* tested his primitive devices, he'd done so from the safety of the Montana forests where few eyes could see.

There weren't that many eyes to begin with. From the fragmentary records that exist from that time, we know that America's population had gone from a high of 320 million in 2016 to 75 million, a drop of 76%. It was a lot better than the world had done during the Great Chaos. In 2015 the global population had been 7.2 billion but by 2040 it was thought to be only 1.2 billion, an 83% drop. Still to this day, however, it's not known how many perished.

It's likely that Herman Shultz wasn't thinking much about that in 2039 when he began building what would become Space Port I on the outskirts of Wolf Creek. The small Montana community had only had 510 people in 2014, though it's likely that number had grown in the subsequent years. Like many small, mountain communities, Wolf Creek had thrived as self-sufficient and enterprising individuals came to realize it was their best bet for survival. The anti-government mentality, coupled with the large number of guns and lookouts, also ensured that Schultz would have the privacy he'd need. Since Montana had been so sparsely populated before the Great Chaos began, the Board also didn't take an active interest in the former state.

All of that culminated in the July 20, 2039, launch of Ganja Blue. The rocket was the third that Schultz had built, the first being Ganja – which had blown up on launch – and Ganja Red – which had to be scrapped after a group of rabid bears got into it. Those proved minor setbacks, and on that summer morning Ganja Blue launched 435 miles straight up to pierce the last layer of the exosphere, sending it into space.

After that things moved quickly. Since Ganja Blue didn't have a homing recoil the rocket fell back to Earth, likely crashing into the Atlantic Ocean, where the Board would have noticed. Shultz had been expecting this, and had Moon Shot ready. That was the name of the rocket, orbital pod, and moon lander that Schultz had been

building. Thinking that they'd be swooped down on by the Board at any moment, Schultz and his friend John Reddy boarded Moon Shot that same day and launched themselves into space.

It had taken the first men 4 days to get to the moon back in 1969, but Schultz had engineered a special fuel out of biowaste and was able to make the 238,900 mile-journey in 2 days. Once in orbit, Reddy stayed in the orbital pod while Schultz donned his homemade space suit and went down to the lunar surface in the lander. He'd studied the charts of the moon well, and had landed exactly where he'd needed to, the Picard Crater. The crater was in an area of Mare Crisium that was known to have ancient volcanoes. In less than six hours on the surface, Schultz was able to mine 2,000 pounds of gold and 500 pounds of titanium.

Before the Great Chaos, gold had been selling for \$1,159 an ounce, or \$13,908 a pound. That all changed in the years that followed, and so by the time Schultz had blasted off from earth, gold was trading for as much as \$45,000 a pound, if any buyers or sellers could be found. The Board controlled most, and that's exactly what Schultz aimed to change.

When he and Reddy arrived back on Earth two days later they had an estimated \$100 million in precious metals. At the time, most of the world was on the barter economy. Even the few "cities" that remained had probably \$10,000 at the most. It was the Board that controlled the money supply, but when Herman Schultz landed back in Montana with the hardest currency there was, everything changed.

THE END

2 – Grandpa, How Did World War III Start?



“Grandpa, how did World War III start?”

Crawford Jameson frowned and looked at his grandson lying in bed, the castle nightlight on the bed stand nearly done with its fission countdown. *Would three minutes be enough?*

“Grandpa?”

Crawford shook off his thoughts of yesterday and looked back at his grandson.

“Yes, oh, well, um...do you really want to hear *that one*?”

In the bed, Billy nodded. Crawford frowned as well, but the kind that was half-frown half-smile. *Someone wants to hear my stories, damn it!*

“It started right before the 2016 elections,” Crawford began, “at a time when no one was expecting it...”

It began on a Friday in August, shortly after the conventions. The price of oil was dropping precipitously low, at least for the producers. Consumers couldn't remember the last time they were paying \$1.09 a gallon. It was the oil countries, however, that felt it the worst.

In Venezuela the president cut his salary but inflation was still pushing 150%. In Nigeria the subsidies to the oil companies were cut completely to save the national budget, but still unemployment hit 79%. In Iran the \$136 a barrel price the government needed in order to keep a balanced budget was long gone. With prices of \$37 a barrel their economy crumbled and the overwhelmingly young and unemployed workers took to the streets. But Russia...Russia got it worst of all. The ruble down 70% against the dollar, there was just now way they could continue. Food prices and power bills from the triple-digit summer temperatures put more than 50% of the country out of work. They took to the streets to protest against an already unpopular president, and this time their parents nodded their encouragement. It was the Americans, however, that really got the show started.

It was August 19 when disaster struck. The latest \$1.7 trillion omnibus spending bill had been passed the previous winter, and once again it had the five largest banks of the country off the hook. Since June they'd been hammering the derivatives market, betting on a loss, and finally on that Friday in August it came.

The Dow had been just over 21,000 when news hit from the Tehran that there'd been a major breakthrough in the protest camps. It was night there, and from the soft glow of millions of mobile phone screens, the world watched the president of Iran and then the leading ayatollah ripped from the palace and beaten to death with bricks and bottles. YouTube carried it live and the effect was instantaneous. In London the Queen opened the palace to the protesters and allowed herself to be taken off to the Tower of London without incident, ending the 6-month standoff. In Hong Kong the Bank of China tower's final 9 floors were taken and the bankers thrown from the 72nd floor. In New York the siege of the Wall Street district ended when the police commissioner saw the writing on the wall and told his men to stand down, averting the 10,000+ casualties that'd been seen in Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, and New Delhi. But the disaster the protesters had been trying to avert was carried out by the Wall Street bankers online.

At exactly 3:49 PM the five leading banks finished the off-shoring contingency plan they'd had in the works for years and suddenly the American economy was without a good three-quarters of its wealth. By 3:52 the Dow was down to 17,000 and by the closing bell eight minutes later it was at 9,000...the lowest it'd been since 2009.

The anonymous online watcher group known as Secret Sauce then unleashed their counter-off-shoring plan. At 4:09 PM the personal information on every banker and top-level employee of the five banks was released on social media. With the California networks still taken over by the Neo-Black Panthers, the message went onto the national feeds. At 4:11 PM the first video of the head of the largest of the five banks being killed was released. A truckful of unemployed young men caught sight of the license plate at an intersection in Fresno and dragged the occupants out, beating them to death right then and there. YouTube carried it live and those with advertising associated with the video were made rich overnight, although only in the now-worthless currencies the world was still using at that time.

The day continued like that, with death and destruction, until just past 8 PM when President Sinclair came on the national feeds, a gun to his head. He announced he was stepping down and that's when Joe Curts stepped in front of the camera. He was taking the oath of office when the White House exploded. Three minutes later the Chinese dissidents led by Bo Hochi came on the air, claiming credit for the attack. Their feed was disrupted after just 30 seconds and none of them were ever seen again. One minute after that three rockets – many suspect Russian, but this has never been proven – were launched into space, aimed directly at the global communication satellites and the one backup. At 8:07 PM the world went black once again and communication was back to Dark Ages levels. And that's when the bombs started to explode.

The castle nightlight went dark, it's fission countdown complete.

“Oh, grandpa!”

Crawford smiled “There'll be plenty of other nights to finish *that* tale.”

THE END

3 – The Sex Fiend



Janet Shumair noticed the man looking at her, and her pulse quickened. She didn't need the "female Viagra" anymore – it was permanently in her blood.

It hadn't always been this way for Janet. She'd been a successful news reporter, one of the big network TV variety. She'd traveled coast to coast and country to country, profiling the big stories, the headlining issues. Of course, none of that had left her much time with Mike at home, himself straddled with a full-time job, not to mention their two kids. It seemed each time she got home from the latest assignment, one or the other of them was 'out of the mood.' And it wasn't Mike, either, Janet knew – it was herself.

Janet looked both ways quickly and then darted across the street, toward the terminal doors. The man had given her a few more glances, and was now reaching for his phone. *Good*, Janet thought, *he's checking his phone, looking at his schedule, seeing if he has time for me.*

'You never have time for me!' that's what Mike had shouted at her when she'd rolled over in the bed, he storming off to whatever internet porn site he preferred. What could she say? She just wasn't in the mood.

That'd all changed in June of 2015 when Feboosterin was approved. It was touted as the "female Viagra," the wonder drug that would finally give women their sexual desire back. Janet had profiled a couple living on the Oregon Coast, a pair that'd been hampered by the same work-family juggle that she and Mike were experiencing. It'd worked for them, why wouldn't it work for her? Janet had popped her first pill that weekend.

BEEP! BEEP...BEEP!

Janet made it past the last lane of honking traffic and onto the sidewalk in front of the terminal doors. The man was walking down the sidewalk, but he was still glancing over his shoulder at her. He was talking on the phone now, too. *Good*, Janet thought, *he's calling his wife, telling her the flight was stuck on the runway, not to pick him up for another 30 minutes.*

'God, I hope this lasts at least 30 minutes,' Janet had said that Saturday night back home in the bathroom, just before she swallowed the Feboosterin pill. The kids were sleeping at friends and Janet had been adamant she and Mike spend the night together, dinner and a movie, and then upstairs. Of course it'd been more than 30 minutes, a lot more, and together with Mike's Viagra it'd been the best night of her life.

After that it was Feboosterin pills each night, and sometimes even on weekend afternoons. Janet and Mike's whole life changed, but for Janet, it soon wasn't enough. Just taking Feboosterin on the weekend afternoons wasn't cutting it, soon she was taking it *every* afternoon, and going into the backrooms of the TV studio with several of the hired hands, set boys, and interns. Soon it was producers too, and then she was screwing just so the word wouldn't get out. It became too much, and she decided to stop taking Feboosterin. It was hard, but she made it through a full day, though the headaches were worse than here worse period had ever been.

Janet wasn't alone. She was soon doing stories on women who were taking Feboosterin, women that were turning into sex-crazed nymphomaniacs, though *her* network never called it that. Soon employers around the

country were laying off women in droves, mainly because they'd been more focused on nailing the boss – or just about anyone – than actually getting any work done. It became an economic crisis. It became a medical crisis soon after.

The man was glancing over his shoulder more and more, and Janet was close enough now that she put on her million dollar smile and picked up her pace.

“Hey, handsome, how about we have some fun, huh?”

The man looked over his shoulder then tried to bury his head in his chest. *A shy one*, Janet thought, but then she caught a snippet of the man's conversation.

“...she's right behind me now, she's got the look in her eye, oh God...I don't want to be raped!”

Shit! Janet thought, then turned around and started moving back the way she'd come. It was still early in the day, there'd be plenty more...*shit – police!*

“Ma'am, please come over here right this instant!” the police officer said, reaching for his gun. He had 'Security' on his coat, so Janet knew he wasn't the real deal. She could make it, she could–

ZAP!

“Ugh!” Janet cried out as 50,000 volts of electricity shot into her.

“Got her!” the officer yelled to his partner, who was already calling in the medical unit.

Janet was down on the ground, the Taser still coursing through her. It was over, she was done. It took them less than half an hour to get the medical unit there, get Janet carted off to the nearest facility. The facilities were filling up fast, and many in the larger cities were overflowing. Unlike Viagra, Feboosterin had gone not to a woman's reproductive area, but to her brain. It'd turned them into lunatics, raging sex fiends.

Janet Shumair was one.

THE END

4 – After 9 Days

How long would society continue to function after a nuclear attack?



God, where the hell was everyone?

He hadn't seen a soul in 18 days, not since leaving Quantico. He'd had to get out of there, though. After 18 days underground he had to get out of there.

They said the bombs had gone off, but he could see no sign of that. There were no people, that was for sure, but then many had fled when news had broken. Those that hadn't had been rounded up. For the most part, he had to remind himself, for the most part. There could still be some around, and that's what he was looking for...wasn't he?

God, where the hell was everyone?

Walking along the highway was a likely place, but he'd been walking it and walking it. With a sigh he walked off, into the trees a bit. Keeping his eyes on the road, he knelt down and took off his pack. He glanced down after it was unzipped, checking that all was in order. It was. There was a cracker box stuffed with various dry foods, all bagged. A tin at the bottom with wet stuff – butter, cheese, some hummus. Some candles were down there, and the last of the batteries. The radio of course, and some toilet paper. That he had to save more of, he now knew, and he was trying. He reached down past it and grabbed hold of the small bottle of dish soap, brought it up and put a few drops on his hands. There was a small brook here, babbling away, and if he could just find it he'd wash his hands. He hadn't washed them since breaking camp that morning and–

He paused, listened, looked.

Deer, he saw, and with a slight chuckle he turned his head back to his pack and–

“And what the fuck'd we got here, eh?”

He was just turning his head and caught a glimpse of someone with long blonde hair and bad teeth and then everything went black.

He woke up to the sound of popping.

Pop, pop...pop!

He was looking up, toward the trees above, and could tell that a fire was burning nearby. That's the popping he was hearing. He could hear more though – he could hear voices.

“What the fuck do you want me to say?” one said, loudly and with quite a bit of anger.

“Easy, pal – I’m hungry too,” another voice said, this one calmer.

“So what’s the problem, then? The fire’s going.”

“It’s just...”

“Just what?” the first voice said, a bit of amusement in it. “Just you’re not going to *eat* a person? Well I say *fuck that!*”

“You might say that but–”

“Man I haven’t eaten in *9 days*, you got that, *9 fucking days!* There ain’t nothin’ *too* eat, not after Ed scarfed the stuff in his bag.”

The other man laughed. “The six you put in his gut was a just dessert.”

“Yeah, well I’m still hungry, and we know what happens when you eat one of the dead, we’ve *seen* what happens when you do that.”

“I know,” the second voice said, and he pictured that whoever it belonged to was nodding, beginning to agree. That bothered him, for he knew that he was the ‘food’ they were talking about.

God, what the hell happened over the past two weeks?

He didn’t even work for the feds, just did IT services for them. He’d been doing some stuff on sight at Quantico when the alarm had suddenly gone off. His support contact told him to stay there, went and checked it out, and then when the man came back twenty minutes later he said they were stuck there. Of course by that time he’d already gotten the news online, before they’d shut down the outside internet feed. Even with his skills, it was gone, severed at the source.

How the hell could they have hit us in so many places and so fast?

He’d thought about that a lot over the next two days that they’d been down in that basement. There were plenty other workers there, but many filtered out over that time. You didn’t have to, and people were actually encouraged to stay, but with families you couldn’t blame them. He hadn’t had one so was lucky, for when the second attack came...he didn’t want to think about it.

After that it’d just been a waiting game until the food ran out. Quantico had quite the ample stores underground, but that was for the main spooks and marines. He wasn’t one, and his support contact wasn’t either. Low men on the totem pole, they’d been sealed off on the surface floors with a few dozen others, enough food for 2 days. When that 2 days was up he’d headed outside despite what they’d said, for he’d known from the looks going around that it was soon going to become some *Lord of the Flies* shit in there.

There was rustling on the edge of the bushes where he was at, interrupting his thoughts, and then he saw two figures, the men who’d been talking he knew. One of them held a long-bladed knife in his hand and it gleamed in the firelight.

“Sorry, son,” one of them said, the one without the knife, and then started to move forward.

He struggled, his hands and feet tied, but he struggled. All the while he had his eyes on the man with the knife, who smiled.

“Hold him,” the man with the knife said.

The other man came up to him then, leaned down, and grabbed hold of his shoulders. He struggled, and managed to throw the man off balance. Then he threw his body forward, hitting the man’s calves. He started to topple over. There was a chance now, a slim chance, and he started to shimmy about, flopped over, and–

And something soft and long and afterward warm came down on his throat. He looked up to see the man with the knife looking down at him, and now the knife had a thin line of red all down its length, and it was dripping.

“No hard feelings,” the man said, and then things started to get fuzzy and his vision was beginning to blur and...

THE END

5 – The Missing Free Fiction #9

One week I accidentally skipped a number in my Free Fiction Friday series. Well, that's what I *said*.



No one's ever asked me what's happened to the missing Free Fiction Friday story – #9 – and I'm happy for that.

I was never told that I *couldn't* talk about it, it's more that it was implied. Well, it wasn't even that really...it was more like, oh, I dunno, like they made it clear it was out of their hands entirely by that point.

It all started back in the summer of 2009 when I was back in the States for a few weeks. I went down to New Mexico to visit an old friend that'd moved down there.

James was living near the Jicarilla Apache Reservation and one night when we were sitting out there he pointed out the lights going in and out of the ground there.

"They're UFOs, no bones about it," he said, drinking his 12th Pabst.

"Oh yeah, then what're they doing here?" I asked back.

James licked his lips and moved his jaw about and grabbed another PBR before answering. "They're here by treaty," he said.

"Shit," I laughed, "here by treaty – what the hell are you talking about?"

"The treaty Eisenhower signed with them back in the 50s," James said, looking over at me askance.

"Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" I laughed.

"That's just as well," he said, and that was that – we quickly passed out.

I came to the next morning and didn't think much about it – I didn't think much about anything my headache was so bad – and was soon back to Montana and then back to China. Another four years would go by before what happened next.

I was working in Missoula in October of 2013 when I got an email from a guy trying to get a book written. It was about this mine down in Arizona, the Lost Dutchman's Gold Mine. We agreed to meet up. When we did I told him that I'd actually been down around there – I had no idea where it was, but what the hell, right? – and he asked me more precisely where I'd been.

"Oh, around the Jicarilla Apache Reservation or something like that," I said, remembering the name of it suddenly, somehow.

"Oh, well that's about 400 miles northeast of where the Lost Dutchman is," he chortled, but then leaned in closer, "what the hell were you doing down *there*?"

"I was visiting a friend that moved down there."

“What was *he* doing down there?”

“He was working in a donut shop.”

That seemed to flummox him and he leaned back. We drank our drinks and a short lull in the conversation developed. After a moment he leaned back in, his interest in this now greater than that in his book.

“That whole region is part of what’s called the ‘four corners,’ he said.

I nodded.

“You know what happened down there, don’t you?” he asks me, a sly grin on his face. I look over my coke at him and shake my head. He nods. “It was in ’75 when it got away from ‘em down there...the base that is.”

“What base?”

“I imagine it started down in the depths, where the tanks are and the vats...and the ones that even *we* don’t know about that are brought in.” He looked over me and through me and back into some other place or time. “I imagine too that some of those forty-four that never made it out might still be down there, in some form or...another.”

I got one of those chills you get when something cryptic is said, perhaps something important in the whole cosmic fabric of things. It could’ve been the Coca-Cola too, though.

“What are you talking about?” I narrowed my eyebrows.

“Nothing,” he said with a shake of his head and a wave of his hand over the table.

The waitress came just then and by the time she’d gone again we were back to talking business and I forgot about it again until July of 2014 when I got a call out of the blue one day from a guy named Kevin.

Kevin told me that he’d read my comment in the [Missoula Independent article about UFOs in Montana](#) and cattle mutilations.

“I followed it back to your website then got your phone number off the contact page there,” he said first thing over the phone, as if to justify his call.

“Alright, well, uh...I comment on most stories on that site, each Thursday usually...have been since the election.”

“No, no, it’s not about that,” he said, his voice sounding a bit more hushed all of a sudden, “it’s about Carl.”

“Carl?”

“Yeah, Carl Haywood, who you helped last year with getting his books up on Amazon.”

“Oh, yeah...*Carl*, the Dutchman Mine guy, right?”

“Yep,” Kevin said, “that’s the one.”

“You know,” I said, thinking back to that conversation we’d had at the Red Robin restaurant in the mall the previous fall, “I just stopped hearing from him all of a sudden when we were working on this second job.”

“Was it around December 18?” he asked.

“I don’t know – but yeah, it was probably around December or so...I’d have to check.”

“Doesn’t matter – Carl’s gone.”

“Well, where’d he go?”

There was a long pause. “What’d he tell you about his prospecting down in Colorado?”

“I don’t know,” I said quickly, flustered, feeling this was a waste of my time all of a sudden, “we just talked about his book.”

“In 1978 Carl went down around the Dulce Base and began prospecting around, first with his metal-detector, and then when that became useless because of the high readings, his mining equipment...you still there?”

“Yeah, go on – now that you mention this, he talked about some people going missing somewhere around there or something.”

“They didn’t go missing, they were taken by the–”

There was a horrible static sound over the line and I had to pull the phone away from my head. It faded after a moment and I pulled it back. “Hey, are you there?”

There was no answer and I looked to see that the call was finished. I tried calling the number back but it said the number could not be reached or some such. I shrugged and put the phone down and got back to work on whatever it was I was doing and didn't think about it again.

Didn't think about it again, that is, until the night of August 10.

THE END

6 – Bringing Hitler Back

A mad scientist said he'd create a time machine for the sole purpose of bringing Hitler to the modern day to stand trial. Everyone thought he was crazy, until it worked. Now everyone wishes he'd never been born.



The Second Occupy Wall Street Protests were getting worse. They covered more than eighteen square blocks now, and looked ready to expand further. Mike Kincaid wasn't going to let that happen.

"What is that?" a voice shouted out.

Mike felt the back of his neck, where his own hairs were rising. It felt like electricity, static...something. Something was in the air! *Lighting?*

Mike looked up, then his eyes went wide as a shimmering blue...cloud – that was all he could describe it as – suddenly appeared out of nowhere. People around him were shouting and beginning to scream, and for the first time in weeks the line of protesters broke.

Mike wanted to run along with them, but he couldn't rip his eyes from what he was seeing. Lighting or electricity or...something right out of the movies...rippled and crackled along the cloud, and suddenly the thing fell or expanded or...Mike just didn't know what was going on.

The cloud touched the ground and the light blue shimmering...pool...in the middle suddenly became white, then yellow, then so bright that Mike *had* to look away, no matter how much he might not have wanted to.

He could see the light under his eyelids and beneath his arm, but noticed too when it began to fade. He turned back, and slowly lowered his arm from his face, then his eyes went wide again. There before him was a...doctor or some sort, and at his feet was...*Adolph Hitler?*

The doctor had the scruff of the Nazi leader's collar gripped tightly in his hand, and when he saw Mike standing there he nodded and started forward. Hitler – if that's *really* who it was and this wasn't some crazy joke (*was Prince Harry in New York again?*) – scrunched up his face in a wicked scowl, but then his eyes went wide as he was drug across the ground.

"Officer, I was wondering if you could help me."

"What can I...do for you," Mike said, looking from the doctor to Hitler.

"I'd like you to arrest this man."

Mike laughed. "For what? Wearing a stupid costume."

“No, for war crimes.”

“Hey, mister—”

“Holen Sie sich Ihre verdammten Hände weg!”

Mike looked down at Hitler then to the doctor. “So he’s taken some German lessons, so what?”

“So you’re not going to help?”

“Well, maybe if you’d just stepped out of a taxi, no, I wouldn’t help. But considering you just stepped out of some magical portal I’d only expect to see in a superhero movie...then yes, I’ll help.”

The doctor smiled. “Good.”

“There’s just no way in hell that could have been Hitler!” General Hawthorne Sticks shouted as he and a higher-ranking general walked down a Pentagon hallway.

“They did a blood test on him, and supposedly the DNA matches what they’ve got on file.”

“Got on file...don’t feed me that horseshit!”

“What?” Colonel Henry Clap said. “OSS catalogued *all* that shit back then.”

“Fucking Wild Bill Donovan, always an asshole.”

Colonel Clap frowned. “So what do you want to do, sir?”

“I want a fucking lid on it, that’s what I want. We can’t have anymore people finding out about this. If that prick makes it known what we’ve done and what will happen then—”

A uniformed soldier rushed around the bend in the hallway and came to a sudden halt upon seeing them.

“General Sticks!” he said. “Sir...there’s...”

“What the fuck is it, Captain?”

“Sir, there’s a news conference happening right now, or about to, in New York. The doctor’s going to explain...well, everything.”

“Fucking hell!” General Sticks shouted, his hand going to his forehead. “Who let that mad bastard off his leash?”

“I didn’t know we were under any orders to put one on him.”

The general got right up in the colonel’s face, much to the wide-eyed dismay of the captain.

“Don’t you play dumb with me you paper-pushing pansy! You know damn well we didn’t want him to talk! Fuck!” He turned to the captain. “When’s he go on!”

“He’s on right now sir.”

SOLD OUT!

The signs said it all, yet the people kept clamoring to get inside. Not that they needed to – the networks had things pretty-well covered...

“This is Chip Hunter for *WCRI*, reporting here from the Manhattan Conference Center in New York. After yesterday’s events things moved quickly, and even organizers managed to rent out Madison Square Garden, which is now overflowing well beyond the 18,200 that the place can safely hold.

“I don’t think the Fire Marshall’s going to care much tonight, Chip.”

“No, Dan, no I don’t think he will. Dan Michaels sitting in the booth above the proceedings here with me tonight, folks.”

“I think the fire Marshall is right there actually.”

“Alright, Dan,” Chip said with some annoyance, “now, to get back to what’s happened...”

“Well, I don’t think we’ll see anything like it again in our lifetimes, or at least that’s what I *would* have said yesterday.”

“Now that saying’s lost all meaning I suppose.”

“Right, Chip. When time travel is possible, it makes a lot of things sort of meaningless.”

“Something’s happening down there, Dan.”

“Yes, it looks like...yes, that’s Dr. Roberts, coming onto the stage now.”

“We’ll listen in.”

Dr. Anthony Roberts strode out onto the stage to the standing ovation of all present. There were murmurs, however, for no one really knew what it was they’d seen the day before.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you,” Dr. Roberts said, and the hall fell quiet. “To explain how we came to be here today, well...I suppose it’d only be fair if I explained where the idea for time travel *originally* came from. You see, one day I was watching the NBC Nightly News on the computer.”

The audience laughed.

“Yes, yes, who would have thought, I know, right? Anyways, they were reporting, using one of those split screens where two people are talking in two different studios, ha, often in the same building even! Well, you know how they have all kinds of TV monitors in the background of those news room shots. In this case it just happened to be the exact same broadcast that was happening, with the two men talking split screen. So you had in effect a mirror into infinity, with the actual newscasters speaking, then the TV in the background of them speaking, and then another in the background there, on into infinity. Now, when they’re talking and they hand it over to the other broadcaster, you see the screen become full-screen once again. In this case it took that TV in the background an additional five seconds to make the switch to full-screen, showing it was on a five-second time delay.”

“Alright, are you following me still?”

Anxious laughter from the hall.

“Good. Now, it seemed to me at the time that we had the same moment happening in time on into infinity, just separated by five seconds. That’s stretching into the past. Also, I thought it safe to assume we’d have the same thing, but travelling in the opposite direction, into the future. But what was throwing me was that *five-second delay*, and how none of those TVs could be showing the exact same images at the exact same time. It was *impossible* for both to exist in the same spot in the same moment of time, on into infinity.”

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, that’s a big problem!”

The audience murmured.

“We’ve been dealing with this philosophical or physical or even religious problem if you like since we seriously started studying time travel back in the year 1895. It all boils down to getting rid of that five-second delay on those television monitors.

“Alright, now let’s say we did get rid of that five-second delay. In effect, all of those TVs would be in the same spot in the same moment in time, thus negating the principle of time itself. After all, if everything is here now, there can be no infinity, no?

“And if there can be no infinity there can...be...no...time, and therefore there can be no five-second delay. Time travel becomes possible simply by removing time from the equation all together.

“But we’ve still got a problem, don’t we? No, it’s not with commercial breaks, however problematic those may be. No, it has to deal with you, the casual observer.

“See, when I was watching that news broadcast I was observing those events outside of their own time, now in their own past. But I was also there, in *my* time, showing that even the absence of time in that newsroom to make

that five-second loop gone would still ensure that another five-second loop is still present somewhere in my own time.”

The crowd shifted uneasily in the hall, and many regretted their decision to come.

“Yes, now we’re getting into the idea of dimensions or pockets or...whatever you want to call these small clusters of time. This is where most people get lost, so if you’re still here, congratulations.”

The doctor felt he was losing his audience so got right to it.

“Now...how did I bring Adolph Hitler here to New York City in the year 2014?”

Dr. Roberts paused for a long time and there wasn’t a sound.

“I did it by hopping from my...*our*...pocket of time...to his. But...but...not just *his*, but *one* of his. You see, there are countless – infinite really – Hitlers out there, and all in their own pockets of time. If it makes you feel any better, there’s an infinite pocket of time that has him blowing his brains out. But that also means there’s an infinite pocket of time with him and his mistress...well, you get the idea.”

The audience murmured again.

“That’s right...that’s right...now there’s an infinite pocket of time with him being pulled into our time by me, and countless others being created right now that have him sitting in that cold, hard, concrete cell on Riker’s Island.

“So can it be done again? Do we want to? And who’s to say who gets brought back to stand trial, and who doesn’t? Napoleon, Ghenghis Khan...Jesus?”

The crowd became restless.

“You see, one time’s hero is another time’s villain, and this is cyclical, changing throughout time...or at least pockets thereof. I don’t know, I don’t have all the answers and I’m not sure that even the philosophers do, but I’m working on them, and I’ll be sure that you’re the first to know when I’m finished. Thank you!”

“Well there you have it, Dan. A short speech, no questions, but responses to the audience nonetheless.”

“I don’t know what to make of it...any of it.”

“What do you mean?” Chip asked, the two newscasters watching Dr. Roberts take his final bow before heading for the curtains.

“I mean, this is why I always got ‘Ds’ in science class!”

Chip laughed. “Well, I wasn’t–”

“What’s that!”

Chip looked to where Dan was pointing. “Ladies and gentlemen it appears that...oh my God, someone’s got Hitler and they’re bringing him out on stage, they’re...”

“Stop!” Dr. Roberts shouted, his hand held up.

Ahead of him coming from the stage’s wings and out from the curtains was a clean-cut-looking young man, one Dr. Roberts would have expected to see at the front of any university physics class. Instead he had a dark look in his eye, Adolph Hitler gripped tightly by the throat, and a gun in his hand pointing at the former German leader’s head.

“This man deserves to die for his sins!” the young man said, and Dr. Roberts saw several other people, young and old, coming out from behind the stage curtains, each of them with a gun in their hand.

“Don’t do this,” Dr. Roberts said in a quiet and rather resigned voice. “Don’t do this.”

Outside the sound of sirens could be heard.

“You did a great thing, doctor, I’m sorry it has to end like this.” The young man smiled after he said the words and pushed the gun further into Hitler’s temple.

“Nein, nein, nein...bitte!”

The young man pulled the trigger and Hitler’s brains shot into the audience as the people stood up and screamed. Next he dropped the lifeless body of the dictator on the stage and pointed the gun at Dr. Roberts.

“Sorry, doctor!”

“No, don’t do–”

The young man fired twice, hitting Dr. Roberts in the forehead and cheek. The doctor was dead before he hit the stage.

Next the man turned around and looked at the others behind him.

“Go, get out of here while you can.”

They nodded and he put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. The audience screamed louder and began falling over themselves in their mad dash toward the exits. Several of them began to turn back, however, as a strange electrical sensation appeared in the air around them.

A shimmering blue cloud appeared out of nowhere. Electricity and the forces of the universe rippled and crackled along the cloud, and suddenly the thing fell and expanded and touched the stage and a light blue shimmering pool opened and became white, then yellow, then so bright that the people in the audience screamed the loudest they had yet.

When the light faded the people lowered their arms and stood in shock – there on the stage standing over the bodies of Dr. Roberts and Adolph Hitler was another Dr. Roberts, and next to him another Adolph Hitler.

THE END

7 – Space Crash

I wrote this story after the Antares rocket exploded on October 28, 2014 – here’s [the YouTube video](#). It’d been heading up to resupply the space station and something happened.

This story speculates on that “something.”



The video was clear – the Antares rocket lifted off, the tower fell away, and it shot upward with the main engines going at 108%.

“There!” Dr. Carl Bernard shouted, his arm shooting out to point at the monitor.

“What?” General Sticks shouted right back, his frustration plain. “I don’t see a damn thing!”

“Strip the top three layers,” Agent Weston said from the back of the room.

The video stopped, started over, but this time the coloring was different, the nighttime sky wasn’t so black, and the fires from the rocket weren’t so bright. And right there, plain as day and coming in from the upper-left-hand portion of the screen, was the UFO.

“Well I’ll be Goddamned,” General Sticks said, a lot of the air taken out of him. “I’ll be Goddamned.”

Obviously Agent Weston and the controllers in the room had discussed beforehand what the General was to see, for the video slowed now, allowing him to clearly view the UFO approach. It was one of those Goddamn flying saucers, just like he’d seen strewn across the desert floor of New Mexico himself all through that hellacious month of March in ’53 after the treaty’d been signed. *They haven’t improved technologically since then?* he thought to himself, but then quickly remembered that the Greys were still stuck in their own time, time-stopped, and unable to do anything about it. That didn’t mean they couldn’t travel back in time, and on Earth, that meant anytime they so chose. *It’s amazing they keep making so many damn mistakes.*

The saucer came down like a dart, a hummingbird...faster than anything General Sticks could compare it to. And there it stopped, just a fraction of a second, even on this low speed, and then shot right back up, straight up and into space and, General Sticks knew, to that damn mothership that’d been around Mercury since 1789.”

“Typical energy beam, undetectable,” Agent Weston said from the back of the room as the tape was allowed to play out and the rocket met its fiery fate. After that the video began playing at regular speed, but still with the saucer visible, and on a continuous loop. General Sticks turned around.

“Stupid, damn stupid of them.”

Agent Weston nodded. “True, but they knew what they were doing, they knew full-well what they were doing.”

“What was that thing worth?”

“\$266 million to Virginia’s Orbital Sciences,” Dr. Bernard chimed-in “The thing had 5,000 pounds of food and supplies and other essentials for the Space Station.”

“It’s a good piece of luck that the thing didn’t have any people on it!”

“They’re not that stupid,” Agent Weston said to the General’s words, “not when the entire eastern seaboard from the Carolinas to Maine’s watching.”

“Does NASA know?”

“Of course, but they’re still under the gag order.”

The General nodded. “Alright, this is what we’re gonna do. We’re gonna hit ‘em for this, and I mean we’re gonna hit ‘em hard!” He looked to Agent Weston. “Get me a map of the Four Corners.”

THE END



8 – Activity Near the Silos



“There!”

Daniel’s arm shot across my face and I flinched backward before looking to my right. Sure enough, there they were.

“Who the hell’s out here walking in the snow in November like that?” he said more than asked, his face screwed up a bit as the truck continued to trundle on down the road. We were on the Hi-Line, the northern stretch of Montana that went along the old Union Pacific railroad route. I was up on the farm for the holidays, and now out again with my cousin to check on the cows. We’d been doing fine, but the instant the words were out of his mouth his eyes went wide and we looked at each other – we knew exactly who’d been out walking in the snow.

I remember my eyes filling with water, the shivers of fear going through my body as I looked out the window. The footprints were fresh, and deep. They’d happened the night before, and had nary a thin coating of snow on them. We’d just been there the day before, not twelve hours earlier in fact, and there’d been nothing there, the ground had been fresh and smooth and snow-covered. I’d commented on it, asking about the old barn or homesteading shack, what it held, how long it’d been there...everything someone from the capital would ask.

“Most likely an owl,” Daniel had scoffed after one of the endless questions. “Nothing else is around here, no one *picks* about in there. I’ve been in an old place like that.” He shook his head. “Just owls taking nest, maybe some foxes and some other small rodents too.”

And maybe that’s why...they come, I thought as we both stared out, the motor of the old Ford pickup humming and the Ag Radio Network turned down low. The heaters were going nearly full-blast still and the truck’s cab was getting hot.

I’m not sure how you’d explain the footprints in the snow that day, but they were there. Oh, they shouldn’t have been - who’s out walking in the middle of a field at night in the middle of northern Montana in late-November for God’s sake?

My cousin and I decided not to stop the truck and look that day, mainly because of the lights in the sky the night before. They’d been darting about, and the paper that morning even mentioned a few sightings miles away. Sightings usually happened when there were training exercises at the nuclear missile silos. Other strange things happened too, like footprints in the snow where there shouldn’t have been. *Ugh*, gives me shivers when I think about it.

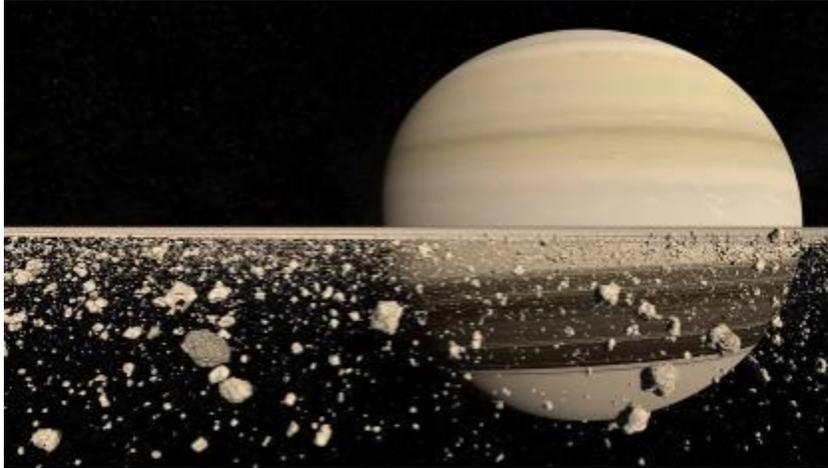
They'd been doing training missions, Daniel told me later, after the bad things had started to happen. When I pressed him on what those bad things had been he just shook his head and said cow mutilations and wouldn't say anymore. I didn't really *want* him to say anymore.

We drove back to the ranch in silence, our eyes darting to the sky more than we'd care to admit.

THE END

9 – The Rooms in the Rings

On February 24, 2015, there was some kind of strange fireball over the northwestern United States and Canada. The next night there was an awesome talk on Coast to Coast AM Radio about ancient alien civilizations. I went ahead and combined both stories, and there's a link to them in this short story.



The door slammed and Carolyn looked over.

“What did they say?” she said, rushing up to Jim and getting up in his face. Usually the on-edge photographer would get miffed about something like that, but tonight he barely registered it.

“What did they say?” Carolyn said again, more firm this time. Jim looked at her and noticed her arms were cross and her grin awry – in other words, she wasn't in the mood to put up with anything.

“They said...” Jim began, looking at his wife. Her eyes widened in a *'well'* kind of look, and he shook his head and headed for the couch, his coat and shoes still on. “Oh, God, they said a lot, let me tell you, they said a lot.” He started to laugh a bit to himself.

“But did you show them the picture?” Carolyn said, coming up to sit beside her husband.



“Yeah, yeah...I showed it to ‘em,” Jim said.

“And...did you *tell* them?”

Jim rubbed at his eyes and forehead like you’d do if you had a really bad headache. “Yeah,” he said at last, “I told them.”

“My God, Jim – what did they *say!*”

“They told me about [the rings around Saturn and rooms](#) – *rooms* – that are just floating in space. They told me about giants and how they were banished here long ago, to this forgotten corner of the galaxy, like some galactic Australia-like penal colony. They told me about the Atlanteans and how their flood was an attempt to get rid of them. And they told me how they failed.”

Jim trailed off and it was clear he was on the verge of tears, a complete breakdown, like his world had been completely upended. Carolyn stared at her husband, or the wretch that he’d become. It’d only been three days since [the comet](#) in the night, and then just two since he’d gotten a call and gone to investigate. Just yesterday he’d written it up on the site, about the hoax of the Chinese satellite. It was but a few hours ago that the call had come, the call to meet. And now here they were.

Carolyn shook her head and scoffed. “*Saturn?*”

“Ha!” Jim laughed, then reached over to his camera bag, still slung over his shoulder. “Here,” he said, handing over a photo, “they even gave me a copy of the image they showed.”

Carolyn took it and scrunched up her face. “What am I looking at...*rocks?*”

Jim frowned and looked over, then shook his head. “Oh no, that’s the ice crystals, as they call them, where the rooms are located.” He took out another photograph. “Here.”

Carolyn took it, and this time here eyes went wide. There before here was what looked like a bedroom, that’s all she could describe it as, like a bedroom that’d been cut off from a house and flung out into space to float. Except it wasn’t floating, and it wasn’t out in space – it was there, nestled in the rocky debris of what could only be the rings of Saturn. The yellowish planet below outlined the room well, which seemed to have been sheared off on one side. What was unmistakable were the table and chair, firmly attached to the room, part of it really. Nothing could sit at that table but a human, or at least, human-like being.

Carolyn looked to Jim. “What is–”

“That’s not what we need to be worrying about right now,” he said, cutting her off, “and I don’t think they care about what I saw near the lake – them giving me those picture shows that.” He laughed. “Can’t you see, Carolyn – they don’t care what gets out at this point, it’s too late. The holes in Siberia, the openings in Antarctica, it all points to one thing – something big is going to happen, and it’s going to happen soon.”

“You don’t know that.”

Jim frowned. “No, I don’t know for a fact, but what I was told tonight makes me believe it. Carolyn, they were talking about some of those giants still being here, about how some of them are starting to wake up. It’s not just finding old bones in burial mounds, either – it’s the military sites built up in far-off areas, covers for what lies beneath. Things are moving, and things are waking up. Far up in Canada right now–”

“Who told you all this tonight?” Carolyn shouted out so as to be heard over her husband’s rambling.

Jim smiled. “It was–”

His words were cut-off in his throat, and a moment later he was paralyzed. Looking over at Carolyn, he saw she was also immobilized. That’s when the bright light appeared shining through all the windows.

THE END

10 – Firing up the Collider



Dean Geisert bit his lip and stared at the wall.

“I don’t like it either,” Angela Cooper said. Those pert lips of hers drew Dean’s attention and he nodded.

“But what can we do?”

“Not much,” she said with a sigh as she rose up from the chair and headed to the window. Lake Geneva was stretched out before them, the view impeccable from this high up in the Geneva Building.

The President of Landolche & Cie Bank pumped his fist in frustration and cursed under his breath. “Damn those Americans and their cocky swagger.” He winced slightly after saying it. How easy it was to forget that Angela was American – she sure didn’t act like it. Dean scoffed inside. *Oh, she acts like it all right.*

“It wouldn’t do much good,” Angela laughed, turning back to face her full-time boss and part-time lover, “they’ve already done that to the world.”

“[The CERN Hadron Collider](#) doesn’t *have* to start up again.”

“That’s true, but that’s a rather feeble argument to make at this late juncture, don’t you think?” Angela kept that implacable grin on her face, the one that wasn’t quite a smile but not quite a frown either. Dean hated it.

“They never had to split atoms and particles or anything else,” he said, rising up from his desk in frustration. He walked over to the chaise lounge and ran his hand over the armrest. “Besides, that was never their intention anyways.”

“And don’t forget that it’s far more advanced than anything the Americans could be capable of on their own,” Angela said. “The organizational skills alone point to a much larger power behind the scenes.”

“And the funding too,” Dean added as he moved to the window to stand beside Angela. They both stared out at the early-March weather and its hold on the city. It should have been colder, with more snow.

“The magnets have already overheated once, and there’s a good chance it’ll happen again.”

“And if it doesn’t, then what?”

Dean shook his head at her words. “It will...it has to.”

Angela scoffed. *The naïveté of men!*

“[The Collider will fire up again](#) on March 15 and this time they’re really going to see what she’s made of,” she said. “Before they only reached 6.5 transient earth voltage, but now they’re going for 13 TeV. And that’s not even factoring in the strangelets that have formed and dropped down to the center of the earth. For all we know, they could be ripping holes in the very fabric of space and time, reality as we know it.”

“They know not what they do,” Dean said while shaking his head. “Already the reports of orbs and balls of light are filtering out to the outside world. They’re beginning to realize what they are, [the power of evil](#) that they hold.”

“Shakespeare warned us of the Ides of March, but I don’t think he ever saw this coming.”

“No...no I don’t believe he ever did,” Dean said. He shrugged and walked back to his desk, sat down, and pulled out a notebook from the top drawer. Angela’s eyes followed him eagerly.

“We have just nine days before the thing starts up again,” Dean said as he flipped through the pages.

“Or nine days before the world comes to an end,” Angela said. “You know full-well the second that Collider reaches full-capacity it could simply wink us out of existence, tearing the very particles of our beings apart.”

“Don’t remind me,” Dean said, and then stopped on a page. He looked up at Angela.

“There’s still a way we can stop it...but I don’t think you’re going to like it.”

Angela sidled up to the desk, her seductive smile on full display. “I’m all ears.”

Dean gave a half-smile, half-frown. “You’re a lot more than that.”

THE END

11 – Stopping the Collider

Dean Geisert bit his lip before hanging up the phone. He stared across his desk at Angela. She could see the fear in his eyes.

“What is it?” she said.

The President of Landolche & Cie Bank, fourth-largest in Switzerland, gave a slight shake of the head before looking down to move things around on his desk.

“Don’t tell me it’s nothing – what did they say!”

Dean looked up. “They said the towers have started to glow.”

“Glow?” Angela said, her eyes narrowing as she leaned forward. “What do you mean, *glow*?”

“They said they’ve started to glow,” Dean said, “but also that Big Ben’s started up.” He laughed in amazement and looked at his full-time consultant and part-time lover. “It’s actually *ticking*, Angela...can you believe it?”

It was Angela that bit her lip this time. She replaced it with her thumb as she rose and started toward the window. *God*, she thought, *I haven’t chewed my nails since I was nine.*

Lake Geneva unfolded below, cool and crisp on this March afternoon. It was Friday, Friday the Thirteenth. It didn’t bode well, but then what did, the American thought to herself as she stared out at those clear waters. They were placid and calm and full of hope. There was life there, and peace. It was such a stark contrast to what lay beneath the ground at the CERN headquarters not more than a few kilometers from them. And still no one knew what would happen on Sunday, the fifteenth, the Ides of March.

SNAP!

Angela frowned and pulled her thumb from her mouth to see the bright red nail broken, a thin shard of clear white showing for the first time in as long as she could remember. She turned back to Dean, an idea forming.

“We don’t know what those towers on the moon are there for, Dean, we don’t even know how long they’ve been up there.”

“R&D thinks they were us, or at least another iteration of us before we wiped ourselves out...however many eons ago that may be. Think about it – man has only been around for 200,000 years...but the Earth is 4.5 billion years old? It doesn’t make sense.”

“[Towers on the moon](#) don’t make sense, and they shouldn’t be glowing.”

“And we shouldn’t be drilling down into the earth, putting particle collider setups down there, turning them on in the hopes of seeing God,” Dean shot back.

The two stared at one another for a moment, Angela with her broken fingernail and Dean with his wounded pride. They may have been standing there still hadn’t the phone rang. Dean picked it up, nodded a few times, then put it down before looking back up to Angela.

“What is it?” she said, a tremble in her voice.

“The mothership that’s been behind Mercury since 1789 has fired up, we’ve detected it with the VSS.”

“How...” Angela began. The Venus Space Station could only direct its detectors to that side of Mercury by firing up and...

Dean shook his head, reading her thoughts. “They don’t *care* anymore. They don’t care if the world finds out, not this late in the game.”

Angela frowned and turned back toward the window. So this was it then? It really was over.

There was a knock at the door, followed a moment later by a faint shout of ‘you can’t go in there.’ Angela turned around just as the door to the office was kicked open. Her eyes went wide at the sight of a tall black man in a three-piece suit, one with a frantic look on his face. Her eyes darted to Dean.

“Dean...” was all she managed, and then her voice was gone as the man hurried across the room toward her boss.

“You must be Dean Geisert,” the man said.

“And you must be Dexter Michaels,” Dean replied, his eyes narrowing. “But I thought I sent someone to pick you up at the airport, what—”

“They’re dead,” Dexter said, and started around the desk.

“*Dead!*” Dean nearly shouted. “What do you mean, dead?”

“Like a doornail,” Dexter said as he got up next to Dean and grabbed the phone. “My phone’s been dead since I landed, what do I need to dial...”

Dexter trailed off – something just wasn’t right, his years in Iraq and Afghanistan had given him a sixth sense. His eyes went to the door, a second before a gun-toting man in a suit appeared. “Get down,” he said.

Dean wasn’t fast enough and the first bullet that was fired took him square in the forehead. His eyes took on a glazed and confused look before rolling back in his head. Angela screamed.

“No!” Dexter shouted, but the first few notes were out of her throat. The gunman’s eyes went to her, his aim changed, and he put two into her chest. Another would have went in her head but the force of the first two bullets had propelled her backward, into the window and then through it. Shards rained down all about her as she fell the fourteen stories, though she was dead before she hit the ground.

The gunman’s eyes tuned to Dexter. “You shouldn’t have left Chicago.”

“You shouldn’t have left the womb.”

The man frowned at that and readjusted his aim. Dexter was on the floor as the first bullets were fired. When the man’s gun went empty he started to open the drawers of the desk. *Surely the president of Switzerland’s fourth-largest bank has got a...there!*

Dexter pulled the small Ruger from the second to last drawer, popped the clip, saw it was full, then popped it back in. He dove down and saw the gunman’s feet were just inches from the desk. He fired, hitting the left foot twice and the right once. The man fell to the floor with a look of pain and anguish on his face, and then looked up in realization. Dexter smiled as the man’s eyes met his, then he put one between ‘em.

There was commotion out in the hallway as Dexter rose up, and he pulled the gun up too, pointing it toward the door. A moment later Sheila Durand popped through, her own gun up and ready. She frowned when she saw Dexter, and he did the same.

“Both of them?” she said, a real look of displeasure on her face. Dexter frowned as he walked up to her and then past.

“C’mon,” he said, “we’ve got to get prepared for Sunday. If those ships get here before we stop that collider, all hell will break loose – *literally!*”

THE END

12 – The Straw that Broke

In April 2015 the State of California was having serious issues with water. After awhile you stopped hearing about it.

What if you didn't stop hearing about it, however? What if the problem got worse? What if there was no water?



I'm not really sure who to tell this to, or who I'm writing to, but I feel like I just have to write it all down. Maybe sometime in the future someone will read this and they'll understand what happened, and how to prevent it from happening again. Since we lost about 90% of the world's population, however, I'm not sure it *can* happen again.

Some might argue over how it started, but I remember pretty clearly because I followed the news. It was the corruption scandal involving Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey. After he was found guilty the whole house of cards just collapsed. Probes found more bribery and corruption and then the vast network that funded it all. By May nearly half of Congress had resigned or was under investigation, and in their place came a bunch of Tea Party politicians from the various states. They proceeded to gut the federal government's budget in the form of tax cuts and model ALEC legislation. That set up the next stage of the disaster.

Around the time that Menendez was under investigation, Governor Jerry Brown in California had mandated water rationing. What he didn't say a whole lot about, however, was that the state had just one year of water left. And what he didn't tell *anyone* was that this wasn't true – the state had six months left.

Around the time the Tea Partiers in Washington were putting out their first tax breaks in time for the summer driving season, the California wildfire season had begun. It was the worst that anyone could remember, and that was brought home real quick in June when the city of Palm Springs burned down. No one thought it could happen in 2015, but it did, and 46,000 were burned alive in a matter of hours.

Unprecedented levels of water were used to fight the fire and keep it away from the city of San Bernardino. They succeeded in thwarting it, though it was the wind more than anything that spared the 200,000 people there. Unfortunately it blew right to the west, up into and then over the mountains. A wind shift threw it north across the bread basket of the state. With a one-two punch, California was left without both food *and* water. That's when the exodus began.

It was the rich and unemployed first, and they left in droves. Estimates for late-June put the number that left the state at 10 million. They went to Oregon and Nevada and Idaho and Washington, and just about every other state as well. The \$2 trillion economy of the state collapsed. After a week every single supermarket in California had run out of food and that's when the gunfights began. In a matter of days more than 5 million were killed, saving

them the slow death from starvation. More left and by July the population of the state was estimated at just 8 million, a 485% decrease from just three months before.

Neighboring states were quickly overwhelmed. Nevada and its shaky economy was the first domino to fall. They'd been stretched on water as well, and Las Vegas wasn't giving the state's coffers enough money. Whatever reserves the federal government had had leftover from the Tea Party spending spree were then used up fighting the fires and the exodus in California. There was no money to prop up the same problem in Nevada, or Oregon when it spread there. By mid-July the federal government was \$24.2 trillion in debt, an increase of nearly \$8 billion in just one financial quarter, and most of that from the Chinese.

At the end of July the Chinese called their notes in, and when America couldn't pay, backroom deals were worked out between the Saudis and the Russians – America would have no oil.

The country went into a panic and the economy went into a tailspin. All resources that were left to the federal government were put into two things – domestic oil production and [FEMA. Large camps that had been secretly constructed over the years](#) began to fill up, secretly at first, but then out in the open as the numbers increased into the millions. In early-August both Idaho and Montana broke away from the union, seeing the writing on the wall. They declared themselves independent states and closed their borders to the rest of the country. Vast citizen militias appeared at all highway entrances to the states, and the pitched battles that took place were some of the bloodiest in the nation's history. Without the resources, however, the federal government could do little. They couldn't even pay their own troops anymore, at least not with anything that was worth a damn – they didn't even have enough food reserves, and at that point currency was worthless. Inflation at the end of July had increased by more than 5,000% it was estimated, and many people were burning money instead of spending it. Increasingly, there was nowhere *to* spend it.

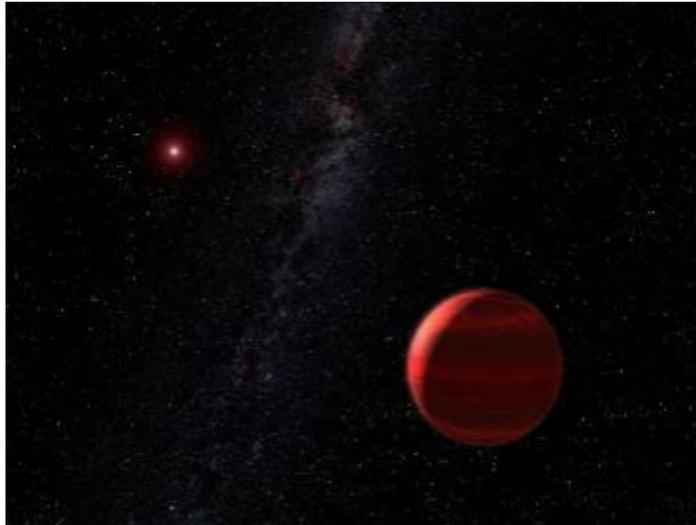
The last day came on August 8. What happened I can't be sure, but that's the day the power went out, the grid went down. It could have been an EMP, it could have been a sunspot. Most likely it was a nuclear attack, probably in New York or somewhere else, maybe even overseas somewhere...who knows?

Here in Montana we're safe, for now. The militias are keeping the borders closed and citizen councils are rising up to organize farming and resources. There's even talk of getting some of the dams running again...though that's just talk at this point.

I'm not really sure who I'm writing to, but I hope you don't have to go through what we did. Good luck.

THE END

13 – Desperate Letter from Scientist Today



The following message came through today on the alternate internet, Lost Net. So far it has been deemed authentic, though every attempt is being made to stamp it out, discredit it, or at worse, disown it. I'm not sure if it's true or not, but it's worth sharing. Here we go:

April 10, 2015

Dr. Oscar Middletown

Argonne National Laboratory

9700 South Cass Avenue B109

Lemont, IL 60439

I'm writing this email as fast as I can. I'm a scientist at the Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont, Illinois, just outside of Chicago.

Oh God, where to start.

I make batteries. I work on making batteries that last longer. Not the kind that work in your phone, but the kind that can power your house. About a year ago we had an influx of funding, and made some big breakthroughs. These changes were huge, and could have revolutionized everyone's life. The problem was that we were told to keep it quiet.

One of my colleagues refused, and a day later he was killed in a terrible car crash while driving home. It was an accident, but no one else on our five-member team was eager to talk after that. Believe me, I wanted to, but I have two kids at home. Oh God, I hope they're going to be alright.

Jesus, they're starting to break the door down.

Listen, we found out that the funding for these batteries came from an alternative government that's controlling the US government. I know it sounds crazy, but those batteries were for underground cities that are being built. And when I say cities, I *mean* cities. From the schematics we were able to put together from other areas of the lab, it's clear that thousands will get to go down into them.

Yeah, people wanting to go underground. The thing is, they'll be clamoring for it come December. That's about the time the first glimpse of Nibiru will come into view. That's the super planet that you were kept quiet about. It's real, and NASA has known about it since the early 80s. The problem is that only the richest of the rich are allowed to know about it, allowed to plan for it.

I don't have much time. Just know that this planet will destroy life as we know it. It has about five moons around it, and they'll become visible on the horizon a month or so after the planet itself. That's the end, the Biblical end times. Some will go into the underground cities, but if you don't know about it, then you probably aren't one of them.

They're about to break down the door so I'm going to send this. I'm not sure what will happen to me or my family, but there's still time. If the world can band together and come up with a plan, there's still time. Until then, we have...

That was all that was written of the message. It's thought that whoever was breaking down the door had done so or was going to and Dr. Middletown hit send. There's no record of anyone by that name at the lab or in Illinois.

You can find more information about this [here](#) and [here](#).

THE END

14 – Mel’s Hole

Back in February 1997 Mel Waters called into the Coast to Coast AM radio show. He told about a hole on his property, one that had no limit. It’s an interesting story, one you can read [here](#), and I’ve delved into it a bit with this tale.



“And what happened to the dog?”

Mel’s eyes welled up with tears. “The neighbor saw it alive again, but with another hunter...it wouldn’t come to him.”

“Why not? Do you know why not?”

“Because *that* dog wasn’t the same as the neighbor’s dog...even though it was.”

“And why was that?”

Mel shot an angry glance up at Rick. “What’s with all these questions?”

“Did you want answers?” Rick shot back. “Now, why was that?”

“Because by throwin’ that dog down that hole it’d created another dog just like it, but one in the past, from one today...I don’t know!”

Mel was about to break down and Rick nodded and walked over and rubbed his shoulder. “It’s alright,” he said, “you’ve just experienced a dimensional time-suck.”

“I know,” Mel nodded, wiping at his nose, “I know, and I don’t *ever* want to experience it again.”

“But you will, Mel,” Rick said, “you will. That’s why it’s important to tell me it all, to tell me everything.”

“Alright,” Mel said.

“Alright...and then what happened?”

Mel looked at Rick and his eyes took on a look like a deer that’d been caught in a pair of high-beamed headlights. He sat like that for quite some time, moments that seemed to stretch to minutes, that dazed and defeated look on his face. Finally Rick shook his head.

“Forget it, forget I said—”

“No,” Mel said, his voice cutting through the air. It sounded weird to Rick, like water must feel to a man that’s been in the desert too long.

“No,” Mel said again, shaking his head, as if he were trying to convince himself, “no, I have to tell someone, tell the story before...”

“...before?” Rick echoed, nearly on the edge of his seat.

Mel looked at him again, that same look like he'd been caught telling a tale he shouldn't. This time instead of staring, however, he shook it off, started talking.

"Everyone said get the hell out of there, get the hell away from the thing." Mel shook his head. "I wouldn't listen. The next day I took the ladder out there, the long one that's all metal and stretches down 8 feet when fully extended. I put it on some ropes and then hitched it to the back of the truck. After that I lowered it in, backing the truck up."

"A ladder?" Rick said. "What the hell were you plannin' on doin' ...climbing down there?"

"No, I was plannin' on letting *something* climb up."

"Climb..." Rick started, then narrowed his eyes. "What the hell you think's gonna climb up?"

Mel shook his head. "I don't know, I just felt I had to do it."

"My God, Mel...were those thoughts comin' from you or from something else?"

"I don't know...I don't know."

There was a long pause as those words hung in the air."

"So..."

"So I left it overnight, the ladder like that, the truck too. I left it there and went to bed. Then around 2 AM I was startled awake. There was a sound, something coming from outside. I got out of bed and rushed to the window. It was coming from the direction of the hole."

Mel took in a deep breath and let it out.

"I ran outside and raced toward the hole. That's when I saw it, saw the thing."

"Saw what, Mel, what did you see."

"I saw—"

Mel was interrupted by a terrible racket from outside, a terrible 'clanging' noise. His eyes shot to Rick, who looked like he was as scared as could be.

"What is that Mel? Don't tell me..."

Mel nodded. "I've got another ladder down that hole tonight, one backed up with the truck."

"My God, Mel," Rick said frantically, "what the hell came out of that hole!"

Mel smiled, and for the first time Rick noticed a red sheen to his eyes.

"You'll see," Mel said, licking his lips, "you'll see."

THE END

15 – The Life and Afterlife of Mr. Thomas Randall and his Acquaintance, Reginald Sinclair



Heaven was just as Thomas Randall had pictured it would be – white and cloudy. Well, the clouds were white while in the distance and all around was a soft pink glow, like some summer sky that he was now walking in. He was walking on them too, and toward a set of pearly gates, a lone figure standing there, clipboard in hand, waiting.

Mr. Randall firmed his face and nodded to himself then started forward. He was alone, alone in this vastness of white, until he noticed another figure, one seeming to materialize out of the distance until he too was walking forward, toward those pearly gates. Mr. Randall put his hand up to his forehead as if to block out the sun, narrowed his eyes, and then widened them. *Was that...Reginald Sinclair!*

Mr. Randall kept up his pace, walking toward those gates. As he got closer so did Reginald Sinclair. *Strange that he'd be here*, Mr. Randall thought as he kept walking, *he died three years ago*.

Mr. Randall shook the thought off as he neared the gates, and the robed and bearded figure standing there. *This must be St. Peter*, Mr. Randall thought, *who else would it be?*

St. Peter nodded at Mr. Randall, as if reading his thoughts. He waited another moment until Reginald Sinclair was there, then raised up his clipboard, which Mr. Randall then saw was really an electronic tablet of some sort, almost like an iPad but not quite.

“Well, gentlemen, we really are happy that you could join us here,” St. Peter said, a smile on his face, though covered by that beard.

“Are we...dead?” Reginald Sinclair asked in a short, clipped manner. Mr. Randall looked over at him and saw that he was dazed, confused, and a little out of sorts. *Strange*, Mr. Randall thought, *he's been dead of a heart attack for three years, but looks like he'd just been hit by a truck this morning*.

“That you are,” St. Peter said with another smile.

“Then why are we both here...now, I mean,” Mr. Randall said, a bit perturbed. Everyone in Bartleville knew that Reginald Sinclair would *never* be going to heaven, after all.

“Oh...that,” St. Peter said, again with that smile, which Mr. Randall was honestly getting a bit tired of. “You have to realize that Reginald here has been in Purgatory these past three years.”

“Purgatory?” Reginald Sinclair asked, slowly and in a drawn-out fashion, kind of like he'd just been woken up.

“That's right,” St. Peter said, “we don't actually have a *Hell*.”

“No hell?” Mr. Randall said. “What on earth happens to all the bad people then?”

“Why, they stay right there on Earth!” St. Peter said with a laugh, if it was all so obvious.

"I'm not sure I understand," Mr. Randall said.

St. Peter smiled that smile again, and walked forward to clap Mr. Randall on the shoulder. "Oh, it's perfectly alright, Thomas – few do. Here, let us come over and look at the lives of you two, perhaps so you can understand...and understand what comes next.

St. Peter brought up his iPad – Mr. Randall couldn't think of it as anything but – and tapped the screen a few times. "Ah, here we go," he said, and then images appeared on the screen, and a moment later were thrown out into the empty space in front of them, like some theatre projection on an unseen wall.

"Gentlemen...your lives," St. Peter said, and then the show began.

It was a replaying of sorts, though not complete and not in any discernible order. There might be a childhood moment, then one of old age...or as close to it as they'd come. It quickly became apparent that these were key life moments, lessons, and regrets. It was a recounting, an accounting, and a judgment all in one. Then Mr. Randall saw it, the one moment, the one that he thought tied he and Reginald Sinclair together.

It was when he'd been a young man, just starting out. He'd gone to the offices of a large corporation, and there he sat, in front of the big man at the desk, a contract in front of him. It was one of the key regrets in Mr. Randall's life, one he hated to think upon. But now he was watching it, that pen sliding across the table, that look on the man's face...he wondered, *was it?* And then he asked, asked the question he'd come to regret.

"Seems like a deal with the devil, almost too good to be true."

The man had smiled across the desk at Mr. Randall, and pushed the paper and pen closer. He hadn't refuted the charge, indeed, seemed to bask in it. It'd left Mr. Randall with a cold feeling inside, and although he wasn't a religious man, the next question came from him unbidden.

"Do you work for good or evil here?"

"We work for profits, Mr. Randall," the man had said.

The projection showed Mr. Randall smile and nod and then get up and walk out. It then showed the rest of his life, one of struggle and unmet goals. Suddenly it flashed out, and showed that same corporate office again, but this time with Reginald Sinclair sitting there. Reginald was offered the same deal, but unlike Mr. Randall, he took it. The projection then showed a life of splendor, excess, and decadence.

"So you see," St. Peter said as the images at last came to an end, showing that fatal heart attack of three years ago, "Mr. Sinclair here will be going back to earth, while you, Thomas, will be heading inside." He nodded at the pearly gates.

As if on cue, and some invisible tether had been cut, Reginald Sinclair began walking away, back toward the direction Mr. Randall had come from.

"You're...you're...you're just going to let him go back!" Mr. Randall said, his eyes wide and his hands up in the air.

"He hasn't learned yet," St. Peter said, his smile faltering slightly.

Mr. Randall put down his arms and let out a sigh, put his hands on his hips, started to pace around. He couldn't believe what he was hearing, couldn't believe that someone like Reginald Sinclair would be allowed to go back, to lead another life, to ruin so many more. He was thinking those thoughts with his pacing, looking down and shaking his head, until he noticed something behind the small podium by the gates.

"What's that," he said, stopping to point.

"Oh...that," St. Peter said, blushing slightly, "that's nothing."

Mr. Randall narrowed his eyes. "*Nothing?*" he said. "That's an elephant foot trash can...and a real one by the looks of it!"

"Make haste, not waste," St. Peter smiled.

Mr. Randall looked from the wastebasket to St. Peter with a strange look and then looked back again. He did a double-take, for something had changed. Before the trashcan had been holding umbrellas of all shapes and sizes,

their handles sticking out at him. When he'd looked back, however, it hadn't been umbrella handles waiting to be grabbed, but sword hilts. Mr. Randall jerked his head back to St. Peter, an even wider-eyed look on his face.

St. Peter gave a slight frown, like a small child who'd been caught doing something wrong, and then shrugged.

"Those are for the fighters," he said, "the 'angels of retribution,' I sometimes call them." Mr. Randall continued to look confused, so with a sigh, St. Peter went on. "It's why we always bring two in at a time, Thomas – one from Earth and one from Purgatory. Hell was just a construct of man, one that's sadly not that effective at reigning in our...problems. So we send some souls back, the brave ones, the fighters. That way we can keep *some* of the balance." St. Peter laughed. "I'm surprised you noticed," he said, nodding his head down at the trashcan, which, Mr. Randall now saw, was indeed filled with swords. "Most don't anymore."

Mr. Randall continued to look down at the elephant foot trashcan full of swords, then he looked back over his shoulder. Reginald Sinclair was almost at the edge of his vision, almost ready to be swallowed up by those clouds on the horizon. If he was going to go, now would be the time.

"What is your choice?" St. Peter asked, and for a moment Mr. Randall had sworn the man's white robes had been traded for white battle armor...but just for a moment.

"I...can't," Mr. Randall said with a deep sigh, his shoulders slumping back and the life seeming to drain from him.

St. Peter gave a smile, the kind with the mouth turned down at the edges. He'd heard that answer before, all too often as of late. Man just wasn't the same as he used to be.

"Welcome to the afterlife," he said, holding his arm out for Mr. Randall to head forward, through the pearly gates.

And so the number of good souls on earth went down by one, while the number of bad souls remained steady.

THE END

16 – Austerity



Davros sat on the stoop and watched the smoke from his cigarette waft up into the evening air. The smoke was at once bluish and then purplish and then showed a hint of green. Such was the case these days; after all, the only cigarettes the country had were those that had been rolled together from butts collected off the ground.

The smoke's lazy climb to the heavens was interrupted when Nikos rushed out of the apartment and stood panting in front of the step that Davros was on.

"What'd they say?" Davros asked, stubbing out what was left of the cigarette before putting the butt back into a worn and empty pack.

"They're gonna do it!" Nikos said, his eyes wide and his body shaking. I was clear the youth could barely contain himself. That was good, Davros thought – few young ones today ever showed much excitement, at least about anything concerning the old world. Maybe there was hope after all.

The meeting was well outside the city, in a small village on the Gulf of Elefsina. Davros smiled slightly at a sign still bearing the body of water's name. Few names were the same, and so few remained that what names had been in place were now either warped beyond belief, forgotten, or just not used at all.

"Ha!" Nikos laughed at Davros' side, pointing out to one corner of the square. "There those Elby-gits are now!"

The youth dashed off and was soon standing around some others his age, all school-age children that would have been home studying for the next day's lectures...if lectures still existed. Well, they did, Davros thought, just at the behest of their parents and not at school, and usually for doing something bad.

"Elby-gits," he said quietly, shaking his head from side to side. The common insult had grown up from 'LGBT,' one of the last exciting catch-words that society had used...before. Few remembered what that meant anymore, and even fewer identified with it. With the mobs, it just wasn't safe. And so it'd become another of the warped words, a gross caricature of its former self, a quasi-relic of a bygone era.

"I didn't think you'd come, old man."

Davros turned about, all thoughts of semantics going from his head. He hadn't needed to see the face, however, to know the voice behind those words. It was Thanos.

“This isn’t your place,” the tall Greek continued. Thanos had been born and raised on the Island of Paros, and his darker skin was a sharp contrast to the white teeth of his smile.

“It’s been my place ever before it started,” Davros said, his voice weary and his head drooping a bit. “I aim to do now what we should have done twenty years ago.”

Thanos nodded. “That was a long time ago, when the world was a very different place, and when you were a much younger man.”

“Well I’m old now,” Davros shot back, “and I’m sick of it. I’m sick of the daily gruel, sick of the weekly house checks, and most of all, I’m sick of being sick!”

He coughed loudly, a dry and wheezy cough, the kind that Thanos heard all too often. It was the dry cough, and all Davros’ age had it. It was a side effect of the bio-engineering that’d been tried four years after the collapse, and with devastating results. What was supposed to regulate the body’s nervous system, stopping hunger pangs for up to two days at a time, instead had targeted that system, embedding itself into the soft tissue of the lungs much like asbestos had in the old world. Thanos had no idea what asbestos was, but he was well-read, something he prided himself on. He didn’t feel too prideful watching Davros stand there hacking out his life, however.

Thanos stepped forward and clapped Davros on the shoulder. “This place will always be open to you,” he said, then began making his way to the center of the square.

“Ssshhh!” Nikos said, blowing air past the one finger he held up in front of his mouth. Around him, his young friends settled down, as did everyone else in the square – Thanos was going to speak.

The leader of the Greek Opposition was tall, dark haired, and had an air of confidence about him that few in society possessed anymore. Even the chirping of the crickets seemed to die down as he stood there, head up, getting ready to speak.

“Friends,” he began after several anxious moments of silence, “thank you for coming tonight. It’s been many years since the collapse, and in that time we’ve...”

Davros let the speech drone on and he stopped paying attention. He’d heard it all before, lived through it in fact. Few could say the same.

Davros looked around at the crowd gathered in the square that night. Most were like Nikos, young and full of life. Of course that meant their heads were full of nothing, for there were few Davros’ age that could tell them. Many were the age of Thanos, in their 30s or so. They’d lived through it too, but they’d been young, in their teens at the most, and few had understood exactly how it’d all come about. Davros scoffed – *he* still didn’t understand how it’d all come about. Who could, the way the banks and creditors had written the rules?

The old man shook his head, and thought about starting to move away. He’d heard speeches like this before, and they always ended the same way – with a lot of words but little else. That was when they weren’t broken up beforehand. Always, it seemed, there was one thing missing, one rallying point that...

Davros paused, turned his head back toward the speaker. He’d said something..

“But I have this!” Thanos shouted out, trying to still some of the fervor and anxiety taking over the crowd, his words beginning to lose their luster. He plunged his hand into the inside of his jacket, then brought out a rolled piece of cloth. His arm shot up, and as it did so, the cloth unwound.

A gasp went up from the crowd. “No...how...it can’t be!” were all cries that went up. No one, however, could take their eyes from the banner that Thanos was holding in his hand.

“Do you know what this is?” he shouted, his voice up, elation coming into it. There were murmurs, but no one spoke. “Do you know what this *is*?” he shouted out again.

No one spoke, they just stood there staring, looking at the emblem that had started it all. It was redder than many had thought, and more blue too. Those white stars running down the middle sure stood out as well, three on each diagonal blue bar, and then one square in the middle.

“It’s the Federate Flag,” Thanos shouted, holding up the banner and shaking it about. “It’s the flag of the American bankers, financiers, and industrialists. This is the flag they paraded about just before the collapse, this is their symbol of power.”

It was extremely plain in its simplicity and style, the very appearance of austerity. Davros smiled – some things just had to be seen to be believed.

“Stop!”

The shout rang out like a whip crack or a bullet in the night. All heads jerked back, to the few armed and helmeted guards, the austerity police. There were just three of them and more than a hundred of the people, but it didn’t matter. Any second now and...and there it was.

Davros turned his head back to the crowd and saw eyes go wide as they began to hear the sound. His ears were older and not what they once were, so it took him longer. But then he too heard it, the unmistakable ‘whirring’ that would spell their doom.

“Drones!” a man shouted, and then another joined him. Soon it seemed everyone was shouting it, and running wherever they could. Even Thanos had darted away, though Davros had seen him stuff the *Confederate* Flag back into his jacket first. There’d be another day, no doubt, and the revolution would need its symbol. For it *was* a revolution, Davros saw now, however small and unorganized it may be. Still, it had its head, and the body was growing stronger everyday.

Nikos was suddenly there before him, and Davros was bumped from his thoughts. “C’mon!” the youth said, pulling at the older man’s arm. “We’ve got to run.” The first of the drones appeared over their heads, the letters “IMF” stamped clearly on each.

“No,” Davros said, a serene look coming over his face, and just as the first mini-missiles began to shoot down from the fast-appearing drones.

“No? What do you mean ‘no’?” Then it dawned on Nikos, it dawned on him what Davros was going to do. “No,” he said again, more pleadingly this time, his tone different, “don’t do it.”

“Get yourself to safety, Nikos, and stay close to Thanos – he’s the one.”

“I won’t let you be a drone martyr!” Nikos shouted, tears forming in his eyes.

“Run!” Davros shouted, then tore his arm away from the youth and started to do just that, but not in the direction everyone else was fleeing; instead he ran toward the three guards at the entrance to the square. The guards took notice, and as if reading their minds, the drones all broke off from their various hunt-and-attack patterns and coalesced into one large group, turning around to set their sights on the threat at hand.

“Stop!” a shout came out from one guard, half-hearted and with no real desire behind it. To let them know he meant business, Davros started to reach into his jacket pocket as he ran. He was getting close now, and...

“Fire!” one of the guards said, and there was an incredible ‘whooshing’ sound as all the drones fired at once.

A dozen mini-missiles shot out and exploded right behind Davros. His old legs had been working fast enough to carry him out of the impact spot, but the blast still sent him flying. He landed twenty feet away in a heap, his body broken. And then that was that – the square was empty, save for the three guards and the torn and twisted body of Davros.

“What was he reaching for?” one of the guards asked as they got near.

Another bent down to pull the hand up, Davros’ sightless eyes giving no protest. The man scoffed when he pulled open the fingers.

“It’s a 5 Euro note.”

The men laughed, then radioed command for the drones to head home – this small group of traitors had been taken care of.

THE END

17 – Is the Kaufman Code Real?



‘Is the Kaufman Code real?’

The question the world’s been asking for the past year and a half started simply enough, with the film *Synecdoche, New York*. No one’s sure who brought its notice to which video rental agency first, but soon the internet was abuzz as well. The film simply could not be found.

It was a small story for many months, until a Swedish teen blogged about it. She had 243,000 followers on Twitter and it just spread like wildfire.

Where was Charlie Kaufman’s last film?

American Film Mysteriously Disappears.

What’s going on in Hollywood-land?

There were all kinds of headlines, but the gist of it was – you *could not* find the film to save your life.

The mainstream media wouldn’t touch the story, and most just laughed it off as a hoax. Local networks were soon trying to outdo themselves in which could locate the video store with the most missing copies. It wasn’t hard to do – most video stores had closed ages ago. The film had never been on Netflix and Amazon Prime hadn’t touched it either. The story disappeared...for two months.

That’s when Valentine’s Day rolled around, and for the life of them, sad and star-crossed lovers everywhere couldn’t find *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The earlier disappearances of *Synecdoche, New York* quickly came back to the fore, especially when a leading newscaster of the Chicago NBC affiliate did a lengthy monologue on the subject in association with the boyfriend that she’d caught cheating on her just the day before.

The story gained legs as the old-timers said, or went viral as the new ones opined. It was propelled further when it was discovered that *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* and *Human Nature* were unavailable as well, anywhere. It wasn’t just America – Europe didn’t have the films, nor did Asia. Even the Chinese street sellers were plum out.

People began to wonder, and by March the national media was carrying the story. George Clooney was quite vocal about a conspiracy underfoot, considering he’d directed 2002’s *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*. Most weren’t concerned with that one, but the spurned Valentine’s crowd was still adamant that Congress investigate. These calls were strengthened when Jim Carey appeared at a rally of 5,000 in San Francisco, questioning what had happened to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. People were also wondering what had happened to Charlie Kaufman.

The writer/director had risen to fame with 1999's *Being John Malkovich* and had won an Academy Award in 2002 with *Adaptation*. Both films were still available, though the director was not. He hadn't been spotted since late-January, the Hollywood tabloids reported, and he'd never commented on the original disappearances of his film the previous fall.

People were worried. Jim Carey's earlier criticism of vaccines spooked Washington enough to call for hearings, but then they never came, and the media tried to hush it all up. Late night talk radio was full of the "Kaufman Code," and many began looking to the stars for answers. Aliens had taken Kaufman, it was believed, or perhaps he'd just gone home – he'd always been a strange one, most agreed upon. Talk of other shortages led to fears that the government wasn't being clean about everything. Protest marches were soon planned.

Most people just wanted to watch the movies, which many hadn't seen before. What to many were becoming religious icons were to most just films from the early-2000s that they'd missed. There were runs on what video stores remained, forcing their closure by the feds. Netflix was having issues with piracy, so both they and Amazon pulled *Adaptation* and *Being John Malkovich*. Copies on Ebay were soon going for \$1,000 and then \$2,000 the next week. Speculators wandered over from the stock market and soon there was an underground trade that was larger than the GDP of some Eastern European countries. Something had to be done.

Universal and Columbia studio heads were brought forth to try and quell the rumors. They claimed they'd found Kaufman, that he was on some undisclosed Pacific Island, recovering from exhaustion. They also said they'd found new director's footage from the missing films. The black market copies fell in value from a high of \$2,325 a copy to \$700 overnight.

Under pressure, the studio heads – who'd never been in communication with anyone – said that they'd made a mistake, and that there were no new copies. The price of Charlie Kaufman films soared to \$3,750 a copy that very day. In Thailand and Vietnam there were riots in the street after the news, and the governments suddenly seemed like they would topple. In Hong Kong, knock-off DVD vendors joined together with the Triads to start a war with knock-off DVD vendors across the border in Shenzhen in the mainland. Two days later Beijing called for a crackdown on the former colony, and the semi-autonomous region's currency was taken away, the People's Republic of China's ushered in.

Chaos descended on the world financial stage, propelled by massive sell-offs in the Asian markets. Fears were out of control before trading on that late day in March, and right after the New York markets opened the Dow tumbled 7,000 points. In a bid to end the chaos, the heads of the studios said they'd finally found Kaufman, and had him in Burbank, California. A press conference was called, but when they brought him out it quickly became apparent to all that it was a decoy. The markets dropped further, another 2,000 points that day, closing at 8,952, the lowest since 2010.

The Kaufman Cult rose up all over the country and then the world. People clamored for posters to put up in their makeshift churches and shrines, and barring that, they painted images from the films. No one knew where the director was at, no one knew where the films had gone, or why, but everyone knew that the answers to the world's troubles rested there.

The Kaufman Cult swept through the 2016 elections, taking the presidency, both houses of congress, and most state legislatures. The nation's resources were directed to NASA, which itself was tasked with building the largest and fastest transport ship to Pluto that could be constructed.

That's where Kaufman had gone to it was finally agreed upon, Pluto. The planet had just been reintroduced to the world's consciousness before the original disappearances had begun, or close enough. Somehow Kaufman had went there – most agreed it'd come about via telepathic convergence or friendly ETs – and he was beaming back his messages to a select few, mainly those currently at the top of the American government.

The project would cost \$79 trillion and was embarked upon at once, having passed congress on a Kaufman Party-line vote of 515-20. Expected completion date is October 2017, and finally at that point the world can know the answer to the question, 'Is the Kaufman Code real?'

THE END

18 – The Truth Embargo



Hillary stood in the hangar, her orange pantsuit reflecting angrily off the cacophony of flashbulbs.

“Hillary, Hillary,” the press of reporters shouted, “Hillary, is it true?”

The 2016 presidential candidate gave that slight frown of hers, the kind she put on when she was about to drop a bomb on someone. She’d keep the look on her face for a moment, savoring it while those around her broke out into smiles. Then she too would break out in a smile, and then a laugh, throwing back that head, showing those teeth, making it clear to all that, yes, she was still human, and indeed, always had been.

“Hillary, is it true they wouldn’t let you talk?”

The frown was beginning to crease up. This was more like it, she thought, this was the attention she wanted. No more of that email nonsense, and Benghazi hadn’t been heard all day. Yes, the Right Wing Conspiracy’s time had finally come!

“Hillary, is it true that you wanted to tell the truth about aliens and UFOs but the Pentagon wouldn’t let you?”

Hillary turned her head to that comment, and that’s when the smile came.

“Why, *of course!*” she said, and then threw back that head, emitted that laugh. The pantsuit again felt an assault of flashbulbs.

Goddamn that woman,” General Sticks said from his office in the Pentagon, “Goddamn her!”

In his rickety seat at the front of the desk, Colonel Henry Clap frowned, shifted, and generally wished he was anywhere else. “Sir,” he said slowly, “maybe she’s right, maybe—”

“You Goddamn ninny, you, Clap!” the general shouted, and nearly picked up the bronze eagle statuette from the corner to fling it at the bastard. It’d recently been brought up from storage, had in fact been found when Clap had been doing the CIA purge, but Sticks couldn’t remember if it’d belonged to Truman or Eisenhower. They’d both been spineless pricks, and now it looked like he’d be dealing with a jellyfish. That’s all the general thought of Hillary, but he knew that no matter what, no she’d be the disclosure president, she’d be the one setting the human-alien agenda for the next one hundred years. Sticks didn’t have that long, and he sure as shit wasn’t going to have some *woman* mung things up now.

“Sir,” Henry said, getting up slightly, ready to dodge whatever else might come his way, for words being hurled were obviously the least of his concerns this day, “we can—”

General Sticks put up his hand, silencing his subordinate. Then he reached into his desk and pulled out a fresh cigar. The Cubans didn't taste so good, now that every asshole on the street could get one, but the general still preferred them to the Panamanians. His doctor didn't, but to hell with him.

"Henry," he said slowly as he lit the cigar to life, puffing out smoke into the rickety office located somewhere deep in the bowels of the Pentagon, "let the harpy run her mouth off on whatever she wants. Let her run with whatever agenda still remains with her and the cronies Laurance managed to put together. Let that damn [Rockefeller Initiative](#) do her in."

Henry smiled. "My pleasure, sir."

It was clear that the government had no teeth in October 2012. That was the month the extradition charges against Gary McKinnon were dropped.

McKinnon was a hacker from Scotland that got into the Johnson space center's computers. For thirteen months from February 2001 to March 2002, McKinnon used his girlfriend's aunt's house to hack into the systems using the username "Solo."

There he found a log of non-terrestrial officers, American and international men serving in space aboard the [USSS LeMay and the USSS Hillenkoetter](#). He also discovered photos of eight cigar-shaped motherships, each of them longer than two football fields placed end to end. In addition, there were forty-three "scout ships" accompanying them.

The American government was deathly afraid, and tried to throw the book at McKinnon. They blamed him for compromising the nation's security systems after 9/11 and undermining the US Army, US Air Force, Department of Defense and the NSA. They claimed he shut down 2,000 computers for a full day at one point, something that surely undermined the entire country. McKinnon posted a notice on the military's electronic bulletin board saying "your security is crap." The Pentagon put the damage he caused at \$700,000, or about what a Fortune 500 Company would bilk the country in taxes in an hour.

The government got wise to the Scottish hacker and had UK authorities interview him on March 19, 2002, whereupon he was seized, but never arrested. Another interview came on August 8 and then in November he was indicted by a grand jury. The only problem was that the grand jury was in Virginia, not Scotland. The seven counts of computer-related crime that McKinnon was facing, each carrying ten years in prison, were an ocean away.

McKinnon was sure he'd be sent to Guantanamo Bay, but three years passed with nothing happening, and he was even allowed to live at home, just checking in with the police station each night.

McKinnon got some good lawyers and appealed to the House of Lords, a body that could wave extradition charges. In the end, they chose not to. Next McKinnon went to the European Court of Human Rights, saying in effect that the Americans were trying to intimidate him with unfair plea deals to have him forgo his rights in their courts. He was rejected, but granted the right to appeal in January 2009.

Despite media attention from major stars in Europe, like David Gilmour, Bob Geldof, Chrissie Hynde, David Cameron, Boris Johnson, and Sting, it looked as though McKinnon would lose. Then, suddenly, on October 16, 2012, [the extradition charges were blocked by the Home Secretary](#), Theresa May. The reason? There was too high a risk that McKinnon might end his life if he faced actual extradition, and that would be incompatible with his human rights.

Major Fred Sayer put down the old newspaper clipping and stared out the port window. So what really happened, he wondered, four years ago. The clipping said that on December 14, 2012, it was revealed that the Director of Public

Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, stated the lack of evidence was the main reason McKinnon could not be tried or extradited. That evidence was in the US, and the Americans refused to turn it over.

Why, the space marine wondered, why? He had a hard time wrapping his head around it all, and now with the 2016 election just a few months away and full disclosure finally looking like a reality, he had to know. Lives depended on it, especially in the far reaches of the Oort Cloud. Out there anything could happen, especially when news traveled to the hostile races that the humans were indeed serious about changing their ways, becoming more outward looking than continuously focused inward. Fred frowned – that meant his eighteen years of secrecy would be up. But then it was a lot longer than that, wasn't it? At least since that day back in '79 when he'd been pulled into it all.

The ship lurched, and Fred was pulled from his thoughts. He looked out the port window again. Yep, it wouldn't be long now. He glanced back down at the report.

It was clear they could never have extradited McKinnon because that evidence the Americans would have to present at the trial or hearing or whatever, it would prove, without a doubt, that aliens and UFOs do exist, but more than that, it would show that the US and other countries have known about it for some time. Perhaps most damaging, and illegal, would be the proof that the American government has been funneling funds to their deep space military programs, off-world military installations, and troop deployments to them.

It all began in 1980 with "Solar Warden," the secret space fleet that's been exploring, colonizing and militarizing space for nearly four decades now. [In 2014 Solar Warden had a black budget of \\$52.6 billion](#) and that rose to \$58.7 billion in 2015.

Fred put the report down, closed the folder, smiled. \$52 billion, he thought, then smiled despite himself. That's just what was revealed to keep the hardest legal pressure off – everyone knew that there were deeper black budgets, perhaps going into the trillions of dollars. Where'd the hell they think that national debt was going to, infrastructure?

The ship lurched again, and there was a terrible groaning sound all through the large vessel. Fred had heard it all before, for he'd been to Jupiter plenty of times. *That's* where the true infrastructure was being built, there and in the Oort Cloud. Fred shuddered in spite of the insulated and heat-sensitive suit – the far reaches just had a tendency to do that to him.

Ahead of him the door to his cabin opened. It was Colonel Charlie Beckworth. Fred scoffed – how the bastard was still alive he had no clue, but there he was, looking about the same as he had back in the '80s, the last time Fred had seen him.

"If they're sending me to you, then I know it's bad," the space marine said as he got up from his seat and walked forward. Out the port window the swirling storms of Jupiter's upper atmosphere raged, but down on the surface there was relative calm, at least behind the eighty-foot retaining walls.

Charlie clasped Fred on the shoulder and nodded. "It's bad, son, real bad."

"Tell me," Fred said. He's stopped wasting time years ago.

"Hillary's announcement sent a flutter into the Kuiper Belt and beyond."

"How far beyond?"

Charlie let out a deep breath, slowly, with agony.

"Into Sedna's orbit."

"Shit," Fred said, hitting his fist down on his suited-leg, "that means it'll ricochet all the way out to..."

"The Fornax Void," Charlie finished for him.

Fred looked out the port window. The Fornax Void was the source of the unspeakable, that which they'd found but then had not found. It erased what'd happened, and erased the memory of those that'd known, though it left some intact, effectively making them crazy. Some thought it was their own radio waves being sent back against them, somehow having bounced off an alternate reality. Others said that it was the true reality which was there, and that they were the falsity, a kind of Bermuda Triangle of space.

“We still have two months before it reaches that far.”

Fred nodded to that, and soon the men were moving toward the door. Two months wasn't a long time to build the team necessary to save the universe, but it'd been done before.

THE END

19 – September Surprise



The events that led to the destruction of the Earth and the end of the race known as Man began in their month of September, in a year called 2015.

It's hard for us to understand that time and those people, looking so far back on it, but it must be done. No planet in the Fifth Quadrant should ever have to befall such a fate again.

To understand the fall of man, you have to understand their temperament, and their politics. To understand that, you have to understand a lot more.

In September 2015 that 'lot more' was named Donald Trump.

As the month began his race for world leadership was going well, though that changed quickly. On September 3 he signed a pledge to one of the two factions that controlled the world, saying that he would not run against them if he was not chosen by them.

It was later revealed that the reason for this was money, and how much Trump would be affected by interest rate hikes. His supporters at the time only knew that he was turning on them. He fell precipitously in the polls.

Labor Day came, the weekend of September 5 to 7. The people of America, the ruling tribe of the Earth, celebrated by eating charred mammal flesh over outdoor fires, usually while drinking mass quantities of fermented grain.

It was a primitive time, and always had been on Earth, though the race known as Man had developed technologically at a far faster pace than they had developed culturally or spiritually.

That was evident as September 11 rolled around, which was a date the tribe of America had been attacked by another much smaller tribe known as Afghanistan. The latter was an upstart tribe, but one that had played a large part in bringing down the second largest tribe of Earth for a time, Russia.

What few knew is that the tribe of America had attacked itself fourteen years earlier and blamed it on the smaller tribe in a bid to spread its warmongering ways around the globe. The people of America were lied to, as they had been for generations.

They were being lied to again that second week of September, for since the end of the previous month the tribe had been at war with another large and ancient tribe, China.

China was in a military pact with Russia and another large tribe, India. The latter was more of an economic powerhouse, and together with China, it controlled all of the manufacturing on Earth. Russia and China together had the largest militaries on Earth. America had much of this as well, but unfortunately for them, they had the world's largest amount of debt as well.

It was that debt which had started the war with China the month before, and America had retaliated against the tribe's financial tampering by using small nuclear devices on three major cities of China. The tribe retaliated by sinking several of America's submarines, primitive vehicles that could travel beneath water.

China had wanted to take out the leader of America, who Trump was trying to replace, but the Earth media had been too prevalent during the leader's trip to the area where the submarines had been sunk. Instead he called for more attacks on Chinese cities and further expansions of the military of Japan, a tribe that America had been using for years to keep leverage on China.

The people of America knew none of this, nor did most on the Earth. In retaliation for the war with China, Russia began fighting America in the tribal lands of Syria and other places around the rich desert area of Earth that contained their most sought-after resource, oil.

The wars were savage and the people of Earth knew little of them, except for the flood of people escaping those wars. Those refugees headed to the rich countries of a large gathering of tribes called Europe. Europe resented this, and tried to keep them out. That led to economic and human crises.

It all came to a head on September 15. The tribe of America controlled the world financial system, and had for a long time, but that control was coming to an end as the tribe of China bought up the Earth's gold, the most precious resource in the Fifth Quadrant, and one the tribes of Earth had been taught to mine when they'd been put on the Earth.

It was the price of that gold and the interest rates on America's debt that caused their financial markets to drop by more than half during the Ides of the month.

The declines continued all that week and culminated in the September 19 Jewish Smemitah, or what was known as the "wipe out day" on the Hebrew calendar. The Hebrews were an ancient tribe of the Earth that had remembered their task of finding gold, and had morphed into a nomadic tribe called the Jews.

The event fell over the weekend but totally obliterated the Earth markets to such an extent that by the time the markets of America opened on September 21 more than 75% of the remaining wealth of the that tribe simply vanished.

It was chaos around the earth, compounded by the Double-5 Energy from the stars that came on September 23. It was an ancient sign, and one that the planets had been aligned for. Most on Earth had wandered from their teachings, so they had no idea that the 500 Days of Chaos had started on September 24.

One who should have known was the Pope. That was the name of one of the most important religious figures on the Earth. Religion was a form of thought control that had been used on the planet for millennia, though it had lost much of its power by this time.

The people of the Earth were hungering for answers as their world crumbled around them, however, and the Pope gave it to them on September 25 when he spoke in America at a world institution known as the UN, or United Nations.

He spoke of doing away with all borders and tribes of the Earth so that the people could become one tribe. He called for America to take this lead, as the country was suffering badly.

America balked at this, for they considered themselves the best and strongest tribe in the world. That all changed on September 26 when Russia, China, and India knocked out the American electrical system, or grid as it was called. The tribe was brought to its knees.

All through that long weekend at the end of September the people of America thought, huddled in their cold homes with no power or light. Then on Monday, September 28, China and Russia turned the grid back on. They did so because they wanted Donald Trump to talk.

It was announced the country had no money and had no hope – the tribes of China and Russia had them completely, and India was going along with them. Trump had talked with them, he told the people of America as they huddled wherever there was a functioning television. Television was the most advanced form of thought control that Man was able to come up with before his fall.

Trump told them that he'd reached a deal with China and Russia. They would get power if they simply surrendered and did what those countries wanted. After the announcement the grid was shut off once again.

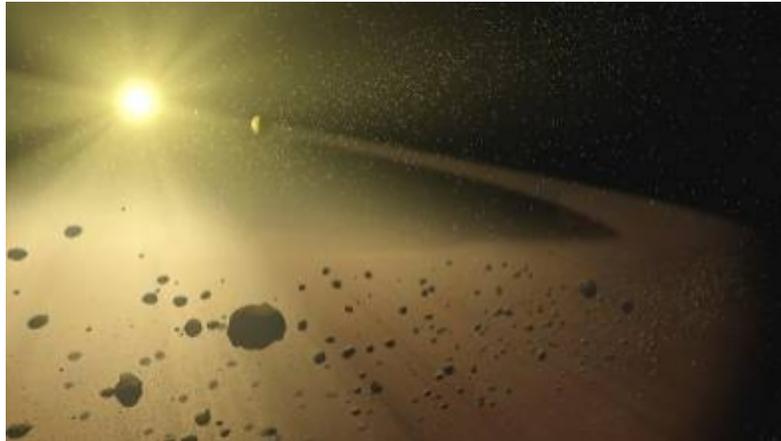
That night the fourth and final blood moon of the year came.

The next day the grid was turned on so that the people of America could let their decision be known. Overwhelmingly they said yes, they would give up their sovereignty.

Seventeen days later the Earth would be no more.

THE END

20 – Breaking Rank



Things were not going well in the fall of 2015, and this was noticed off-world.

“What the hell are we gonna do, Barnes?”

United Planetary Front Commander Eddy Barnes looked up from his bunk and frowned. There was Hanson, and he was asking the question that Barnes had been waiting days to hear. Hanson saw this and came forward into the small recessed area, sat down next to the dying philodendron.

“What the hell are we gonna do, Barnes?” he asked again. “Earth’s a mess financially, none more so than the US right now. On the Moon they don’t know if they can keep up their appropriations, what with all the government shutdowns that’ve been happening lately. On Mercury the mining’s gone to shit. Mars has been off-limits since the duster with the natives, and—”

“And here we sit, four months now, and not a damn thing to show for it but a situation worse than we found.”

Hanson nodded, not at all angry that he’d been cutoff. It was nice to see some life in the Commander again, very nice indeed.

“What do you think we should do, sir?”

Barnes chewed his lip. Hanson was looking at him all eager-like, ready and willing to go right then and there. And why not, why the hell not? For the past four months they’d been stuck out here on the edge of Eris’ orbit, watching...waiting. It was enough to drive a man mad sitting on the Kuiper Belt that long, especially when he had a team to look after, discipline to maintain. So far everything had gone smoothly, but Barnes knew that wouldn’t last much longer. What Hanson had failed to mention, or perhaps what he was saving for last before Barnes cut him off, was that their own lifeline was about at an end. ‘Earth’s a mess financially,’ Hanson had said, and that really did say it all – out here in the far quadrant, they didn’t matter much. More than 7 billion people on Earth and yet only a few thousand knew they were out there, knew *any* of them were out there. It was frustrating, to say the least.

Barnes looked up, saw Hanson still sitting there. He let out a sigh. *What the hell.*

“How are the engines, captain?”

Hanson’s face brightened, some of the sag of the past few months vanished in a flash. “They’re good, sir – real good. Better than good, ready.”

“And the boys?”

“Like the engines, sir – revved up and ready to go.”

Barnes nodded, looked out the window. Out there was the last of the known, the last they'd explored. Here they were, at the farthest point out, the last defense, the first to know. The joke of course was that as far as Earth went, it was the exact opposite. More and more, Commander Barnes and the *Ebony* were the last to know and the first and only defense. Appropriations weren't what they used to be, and neither was the fleet. He sighed. *What the hell.*

The thought kept running through his mind, and as he stared out into deep space he knew that if his exile were ever to end he'd have to be the one to end it. He turned back to look at Hanson.

"Well, what the hell are you waiting for? Fire this bird up and tell the boys – we're headin' back to base."

"Yes, sir," Hanson said before racing off.

Barnes just looked back out the window. *This sure as shit better work.*

The UPF Command Center was abuzz with activity, but then it always was. You couldn't monitor seventy-two different alien species, fourteen separate bulk carriers, two fluton-class starships, and a royal barge with anything less. The Center had been staffed continuously to see to it all, its power running and its stations manned since operations had commenced on December 8, 1982.

Lars Steen remembered that day well, remembered when the large monitors had had their tarps taken off, their IBM screens lit up for the first time. Of course, they'd gone through about a hundred new sets since then, each better than the last, but the Center's commander still looked back on that first set fondly.

"Sir."

Lars looked over, saw VanDyke there. "What is it?" he asked.

"Sir, *Ebony* has moved."

"Moved, what do you mean, *moved*?"

"It appears that Commander Barnes has powered it up and turned it back towards base, sir."

Lars frowned. "Now why the hell would he do something like that, do you think?"

VanDyke shrugged. "Because he's finally ready to start that war we always thought he would?"

Lars looked over at VanDyke. Two demotions for insolence and the man still said whatever the hell he liked. Lars liked him, liked him a lot.

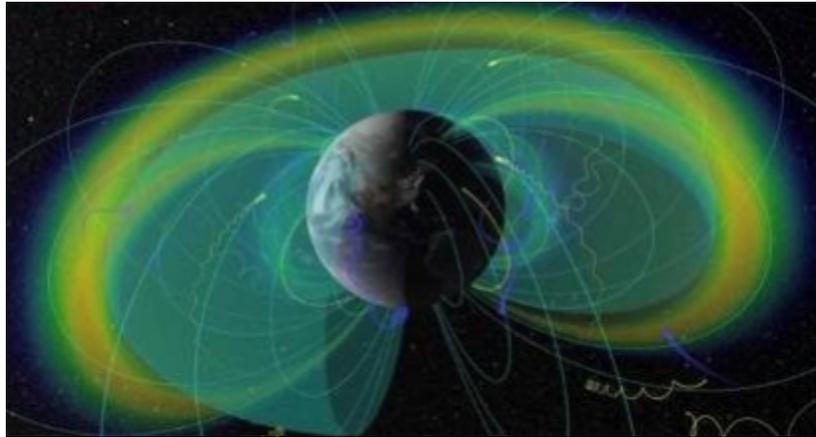
"Well, what do you suggest we do then, lieutenant?"

VanDyke scoffed. "With a commander like *Barnes*? Why, send the whole fleet at him, what else?"

Lars smiled. "Precisely, lieutenant, precisely. Order it done."

THE END

21 – Soul Catcher



Corporal Tommy Wynn's body hit the cold steel slab.

"Damn it," Colonel Roger Donlon nearly shouted, "take it easy, will ya!"

"Relax," Stu, the commander of the Material Acquisitions Team, said, looking as calm and cool and collected as ever.

"What do you mean, 'relax,' doc?" Donlon said as he put his hands on his hips and stuck his chest out. The military brass on his lapel glared out at Stu. "We just got wiped out back there and Tommy here's dead – how the hell do you expect me to relax?"

"He's not dead," Stu said, not even looking up at the stone-jawed colonel as the man gritted his teeth and seethed. Instead the astronaut walked up to the young Vietnam vet's body and put his fingers near the throat, the temples, and then the eyes. He knelt down and listened at the heart, prodded the stomach. Finally he looked back at Donlon. "We've got about thirty seconds to flat line him the way we want."

"Flat line him, doc! We're supposed to be *saving* him, not *killing* him!"

"Tommy knew what he was signing up for, Colonel," Stu said calmly, though his body was anything but. He was moving about quickly now, gathering up the needed materials and supplies. He only had one shot at this, he knew, and quite literally.

"What are you talkin' about, doc?"

Stu finally looked up at Donlon, the colonel standing there with his arms crossed trying to look as mean and authoritative as he could, though the confusion was beginning to creep into his eyes. He fidgeted and shifted nervously – Stu was up to something, and he didn't like it.

"Back in '68 we started a program called "Etheria," Stu said as he started attaching a few diodes and clasps to Tommy's body. "It was designed to get us as close to the Grays as we possibly could – right up to their soul catchers."

"Soul catchers..." Donlon said, trailing off. An underground alien base was one thing, but now it seemed even this was going a bit far.

Stu affixed a final clasp to one of Tommy's fingers and then looked back at Donlon. "We have to stop them, Colonel, we have to stop them stealing our souls."

And with that he hit the button on the bedside machine, sending 700 volts of electricity through the young corporal's body. A few moments later the defibrillator machine's line went flat.

Light suddenly burst into Tommy's vision, though it was yellow and bright and white and everything that the sun or overhead lighting was not. Then he realized that he was on the ceiling, or at least in the upper corner of the room. Most strange of all, however, was the sight of his own body on the cold steel slab of the makeshift operating room. It was then that Tommy knew he was dead. It wasn't until a few moments later, however, when Stu turned around and began looking up at the ceiling, waving his hand as he did so, that he knew Etheria had been activated.

My God, he thought as he floated there, disembodied and lifeless, I really am dead...we really are doing this....we-

"Tommy."

Tommy's thoughts were cutoff as Stu called out his name, still looking toward the ceiling. The young soldier knew that Stu knew he was there.

"Tommy, I know you're here," Stu said next. "We're going with Etheria, we're going to try and buck the light." Stu reached over and grabbed hold of some kind of medical devices that his hands wrapped around, then held them up. "You've got twenty minutes, Tommy, twenty minutes before I jerk you back to life...if I can." He looked down, a tinge of sadness coming to his face, but only for a moment before he looked up again. "We'll get you back, Tommy, don't you worry about that, we'll get you back, just don't go toward the light, whatever you do, don't--"

Stu's words were cutoff, though only to Tommy. For it was at that instant that a bright white tunnel of light suddenly appeared before him, blocking out all other sights and sounds. It was warm, inviting, and contained all the love in the world. Tommy wanted to go to it, desperately wanted to go to it, but he held himself back. It was a trick, he knew, for his Etheria training had taught him such.

A moment later the white light seemed to sense this, sense his apprehension, for it pulsed, sent out more warm feeling, but in the midst of that, Tommy noticed the slightest trace of coldness, fear, and hate. The light noticed that he noticed, and that's when the room around him dropped away, and he was suddenly in the deep blackness of space.

Fear gripped Tommy, though a kind he'd never known before. This was the fear that could only come to the dead, when they know that death wouldn't even save them from the unspeakable horror that suddenly confronted them. Tommy was confronted with that now, and he didn't know if he could take it.

The training back at Blue Lake in '68 had been explicit – the light would only last for the length of a meal.

They'd all questioned that, but that's all the instructor could tell them. It wasn't an exact science, after all, dying and seeing a light and then not going toward it.

To most it'd flew in the face of every notion they'd ever had. You should *always* go toward the light, for that light held your family, friends, and eventually God. It was all a trick, though, one designed by the Grays to steal the souls before they could pass to that place that the white light was thought to signify. The Grays needed the souls, for they had none. Something about the soul's energy fed them, though not like food fed a dying man; more like how a drug fed a junkie's fix.

No one knew how long it'd been going on, the harvesting of souls, but the American government had known about it since the year after Eisenhower signed the treaty. That's when they began exploring it, researching it, trying to figure out how it worked.

It took ten years, but they'd done it, though the cost had been high. More than three dozen men had volunteered to be killed on a table, their heart stopped with anesthetic or electric shocks. All were promised that they'd be brought back. None of them had been, not a one.

Tommy knew that, knew it right away when Stu called out to him in that hospital room. He was number thirty-one, and there'd be no coming back.

He firmed his resolve. He was a soldier, one meant to fight Grays. If they wanted a fight, he'd give 'em one. The light pulsed, sensing his decision, knowing it had another.

Tommy felt the pulse, sensed the love, but the underlying 'something' that wasn't quite right lying right under the surface. He backed off, fled, overcame his fear and went out into the deep blackness of space. He was going still when the feeling of aloneness hit him for the first time. He looked back, and the light was gone.

All around him was blackness, the blackness of space, the void, nothingness...death.

And then something else happened. It wasn't a light, but more a feeling. The overpowering feeling of love and life and friends and happiness. Tommy knew this was the true light, the one that most missed, the one the Grays could only block for a short time.

Tommy went toward it, went toward it and hoped he was right. The fate of Man's soul was riding on it.

THE END

And...the end of the book.

Thanks for reading this collection of short stories!

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About the Author



Greg Strandberg was born and raised in Helena, Montana, and graduated from the University of Montana in 2008 with a BA in History. He lived and worked in China following the collapse of the American economy. After five years he moved back to Montana where he now lives with his wife and young son. He's written more than 50 books.

Connect with Greg Strandberg

My website on writing and Montana: <http://www.bigskywords.com>

My website for teachers in China: <http://www.esladventure.com>

It's hard for books to get noticed these days.

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Preview of Dulce Base



Chapter 13 – A Nest of Grays

The night was quiet and still and dark as hell. Turn switched on his night vision and quickly picked out the other seven men, all huddled up ahead behind some trees and bushes that fronted the cave. One of them – Robbie by the look of it – waved him over.

“Don’t look like much, do it?” Charlie said when he’d drawn near and they were all together.

“Like some dank-ass cave out in the middle of nowhere,” Fred replied, two lengthy bullet belts slung over his shoulders and trailing down toward the Colt AR-15 Commando XM177 Assault Carbine in his hands, extras the men had...just in case. Turn looked at him and frowned slightly – neither Fred nor Charlie had ever fought the Grays before...he didn’t know how they’d hold up. As if in answer to his thought, Sammy stepped forward, that deep African-American voice of his booming out.

“Just like we briefed on – two teams, side-by-side all the while.”

“This cave complex ain’t supposed to be much more than half a mile deep, if even that,” Bobbie said, spitting a good-sized gob of chewing tobacco down on the forest floor.

Tommy laughed, and Turn had no doubt those crazy eyes of his were darting about under those goggles. “Look at the size of that landing strip – reinforcements could arrive at anytime.”

He nodded back behind them and Turn looked to see a straight-on line of nothing, no trees, no bushes, no boulders or anything else that was much higher than a foot. It looked natural enough, but that was probably just because this particular base had been used for centuries, maybe longer.

“Could be coming now, what with all this yappin’ we’re doin’ outside their home,” Robbie said.

“He’s right,” Charlie said, “move out!”

The men broke, just like that, falling into the prearranged teams. Charlie, Turn, Sammy and Tommy took up the left while on the right Fred, Bobbie, Robbie, and the quiet Paul grouped together. They were only fifty yards from the cave entrance, a low-rock overhang on a small hill set before a larger ridge. There were old stumps and moss and rotten limbs piled around, and it seemed as if a mist was in the air just before the yawning maw that was its entrance.

“Corporal,” Sammy said, quietly as both teams continued to advance, their guns up and sighted up on the cave entrance, their nerves taut.

“Let’s wake ‘em up,” Tommy said in response, then motioned upward with his arm, although it was more out of habit than any need, “two on either side, near the stumps and logs.”

“Got it,” Charlie said a moment later, while at the same time Turn said “see it.” Both men’s guns fired off one of the rocket-propelled grenades mounted on their side and a moment later there were twin explosions about halfway up the hill along the side of the cave entrance where the stumps and the logs had been. Both sent up a shower of sparks, something that’d be unusual if the men didn’t know that the sensing and perimeter security guard devices were located there, or at least had been.

“They’re onto us now,” Bobbie laughed.

“Then keep a lid on it,” Fred said over his shoulder. While the six super soldiers may have been the real brains and muscle behind the operation, it was still the two newbies calling the shots.

“I’d keep a lid on it if you weren’t so—”

Whatever insult Robbie was about to hurl Bobbie’s way was cutoff as a large turbine-like sound started from the cave entrance, or at least somewhere within, and quickly grew in pitch and frequency and volume, until the lights burst on.

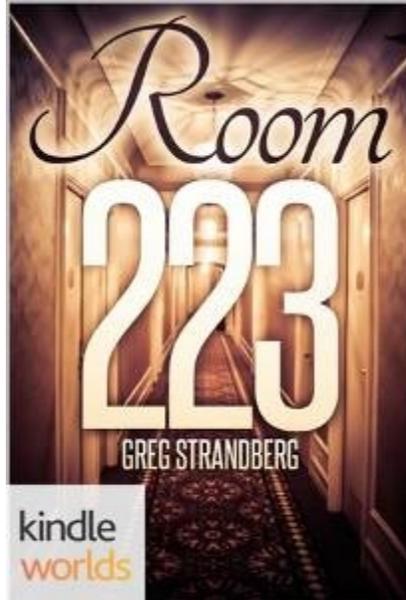
“Shit!” Charlie said up ahead, then ripped the night vision goggles from his head at the same moment everyone of the other med did the same.

“Down!” Fred shouted next, gaining a bit of his senses back, and right as he dove down to the brush beside him. It was a good thing, too, for at just that moment some kind of rocket or something shot out and exploded right near where he’d been.

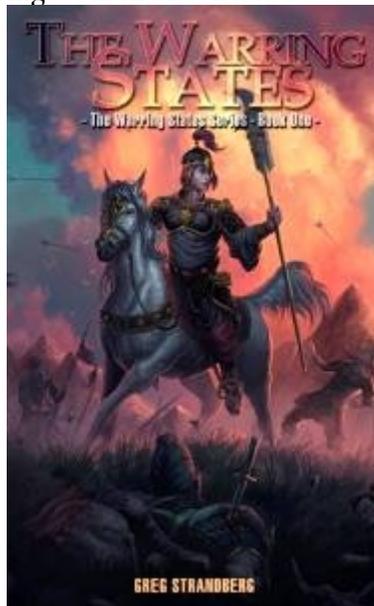
The others did the same, and the rockets – there were actually four shooting forth – all landed where the men had been or had been going. Still, the men had been far enough away that they were only showered with dirt and branches and leaves as the missiles impacted upon the forest floor. And that’s when Turn saw them.

Find out what happens...buy *Dulce Base* on Amazon today!

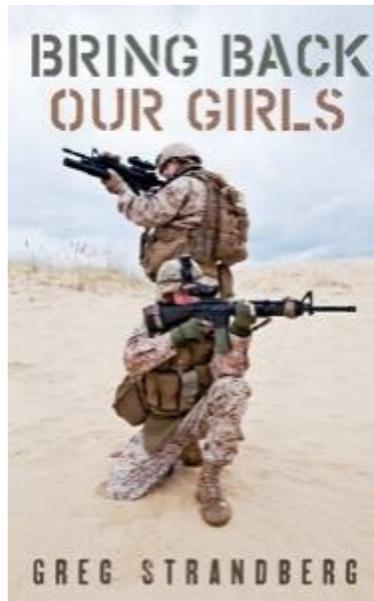
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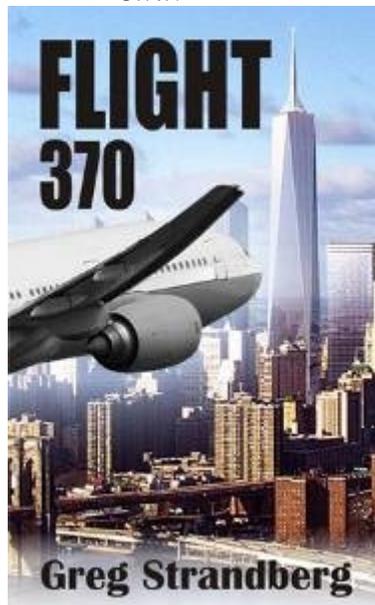
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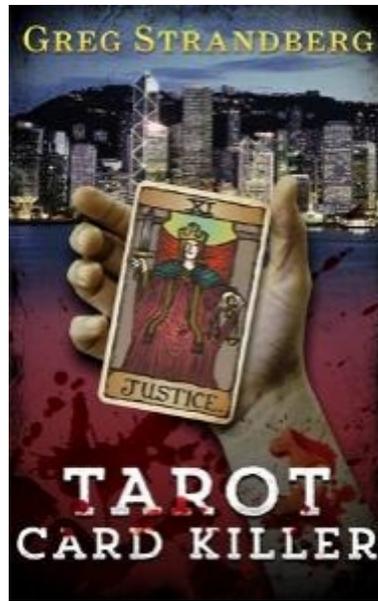
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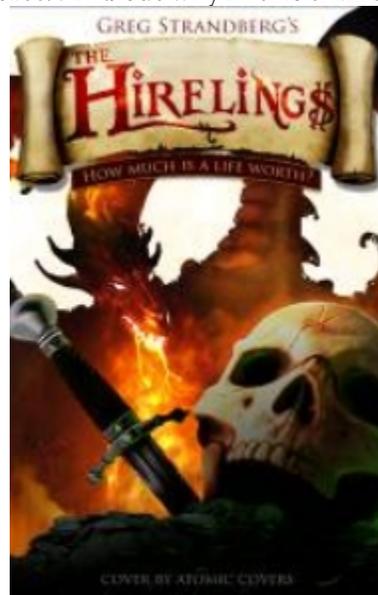
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