

THE WAR OF THE WHORLS

Few could imagine that now, well into the 21st Century, our very existence could be threatened by forces from another world, forces with an intelligence far greater than our own, harboring an appetite for chaos and ruin exponentially greater than that which we could ever sustain ourselves. And yet such an insatiable force of destruction exists, far beyond the realm of our darkest imaginings. I know this, because I have seen it with my own eyes.

It began as a normal day. I was going about my morning business as usual, enjoying the high humidity as I plucked dead human skin cells and delectable pet dander from the forest of nylon fibers that I call my home.

I chanced upon what I initially thought was a clearing, but soon realized I had come upon a swath of desolation unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. The section of forest I had chanced upon was completely barren, denuded of all sustenance. Fibers completely devoid of dirt, dust, or hair surrounded me on all sides, in every direction, as far as the eye could see.

A frosty chill ran down my spine as I realized that some otherworldly entity, some unspeakable force previously unknown to me, had no doubt moved through this portion of the forest, taking everything with it but the fibers themselves. It was as if the full measure of the forest's bounty had been sucked up into thin air, leaving behind only an unspeakable desolation.

My mind reeled as I tried to conceive of what extraordinary power could possibly have caused such destruction, but my dark surmising soon halted as I became aware of a growing sound. A menacing whine permeated the distance.

Low and unceasing, the vibration filled the air, gradually increasing in volume and power, until it seemed to infuse the very air itself with its ominous drone. I turned to face its source as the deafening roar flooded my auditory

senses. The sky above me filled with a dark, hovering mass, and I first beheld the source of the unholy cacophony, the unspeakable evil that was no doubt responsible for the destruction I had witnessed earlier.

An enormous, black, saucer-shaped object floated over the forest, moving methodically towards me. It was gigantic, larger than anything I'd ever seen in my life — easily a foot in diameter. The dark behemoth advanced with an incessant forward momentum, sucking up everything in its path indiscriminately, showing no quarter to any particle, be it dust, dirt, or dander.

Too terrified to even scream I turned and ran, certain that there was no way I'd ever possibly escape the rapacious suction of such an indiscriminate killer. The saucer gained on me, growing closer and closer — so close that I could sense the upward movement of the air just behind me. The sky blackened above as I prepared for my inevitable ignominious end.

And then: a miracle. The saucer stopped and abruptly turned, inexplicably moving away, proceeding, in an entirely different direction, on its unceasing march of death and destruction.

I fell to my knees and wept with gratitude, looking to the sky to give thanks for the unexpected reprieve bestowed upon me by some unseen power of benefaction.

“You’re safe here,” a voice said, “at least for now.”

I turned, and through my grateful tears I saw an old, bedraggled clump of cat hair standing over me.

“You’ve seen that thing before?” I asked.

“‘Yep. ‘Fraid so” the cat hair replied.

“What *is* it? Some sort of broom?”

“Oh, that air’t no broom. My pappy and my grandpappy both fell victim to the dustpan. Always figgered I’d wind up there maself. But *that* thing, well, it’s like no gosh darn broom I ever seen.”

“What is it, old-timer?” I asked.

“They call it a ‘Roomba,’ he said, “but I calls it the unholy angel of death. That there’s an unstoppable killin’ machine. It don’t care what it picks up. There’s no corner it won’t find you. No nook or cranny it’ll miss.”

“Maybe we could hide under the couch?”

“It can *go* under the couch! It’s got sensors, computers, I don’t know, but it can’t be stopped. I’m tellin’ ya. Nobody’s safe. ‘Specially a dust mite like yerself.”

“But what if we —“

“Listen to me, son. That thing won’t stop till it’s sucked up every gosh darn livin’ thing in this world, and, then, when it’s done, gone back to it’s unholy base. Somewheres in the kitchen.”

He looked away, lost in thought, but his reverie was halted by a reprise of the horrible whine, signaling the killing machine’s return.

“Here we go,” the cat hair said, “round two.”

“What do we do?” I asked, paralyzed with fear.

“You’d best run, young blood,” the cat hair said, taking off at a gallop. “Run like you *never* run before!” he cried as he raced into the forest.

He veered off towards the legs of the ottoman just as the horrible black apparition re-appeared on the horizon. I followed him, moving as fast as I could through the nylon fibers, but I stopped when the Roomba, with an unforeseen change in direction that bespoke an almost preternatural intelligence, zig-zagged and headed straight for him.

I will never forget his unholy scream as the cat hair was violently sucked into the air, the tendrils comprising his mass ripped apart into single strands, greedily consumed by the insatiable maw that I now saw comprised the underside of the saucer.

I turned and ran in the opposite direction, faster and farther than I ever have before, but it was to no avail. The terrible whine grew in volume and pitch behind me as the ghastly contraption grew closer and closer.

I tried to change direction, hoping to somehow elude my seemingly inescapable demise, but it was all for nought. In the distance I spied a strange object, an enormous red plastic rectangle topped with eight circular protrusions. I ran towards it, hoping that it might provide me some sort of shelter from the monster's unceasing swath of death and destruction.

But as I made my way towards the rectangle the saucer turned again and came directly towards me. Only the plastic rectangle lay between me and my unholy end. I fell to the ground with exhaustion, readying myself for my inexorable destruction, just as the plastic rectangle before me flew into the air, directly into the saucer's gaping jaws. A din of cracking plastic assaulted my ears, as the the awful whine of the craft descended in pitch and decrescendood into an eerie silence.

I got up from my knees. The air was filled with an acrid smoke.

"Lego," a voice beside me rasped. "Gets 'em every time."

I turned to see a wizened dust bunny, standing over the Roomba's smoldering wreck.

"So it's over?" I asked, addressing his back as turned to walk away.

"For now," he spat, never turning around. "But he'll be back, kid. He'll be back."

I must admit, the horrors I experienced — the ominous shadow of the black saucer, the echoing scream of the cat hair — still haunt my dreams, as well as my waking hours, to this day. I suppose we must reconcile ourselves to the truth that to the Roomba, and not the dust mite, is the future ordained. But at the very moment that marked the conclusion of the terrible events which I have recounted here, I made a solemn vow to myself: that I would live each remaining day to the very fullest, secure in the terrible knowledge of the robot vacuum's inevitable and abominable return.