



Countdown

R. J. Davies



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Online Edition

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There are some people who think they would want to know the day they were going to die. A fanciful lie that we tell ourselves to help soothe and digest the hateful truth. We all are going to die, and we can't escape it. Knowing when death is coming to knock on your front door and there is nothing you could do to stop it, isn't really going to help you prepare for it. You can't hide. You can't run from it. How do you try to reason with your executioner that doesn't speak your language or even cares to understand your pleas?

The ugly truth is, we all must take the stand and face it at some point. Today was that day for most of humanity. He could feel it deep in his bones and he wished he was wrong about it. He flipped through the surveillance cameras on his property, not a single soul in sight. He turned his attention back to his TV screen with live coverage.

Taking a deep breath and slowly letting it escape between his hot dry lips. Sighing heavily, he poured another glass of scotch. It was the finest money could buy. He had been saving it for this day. The hardest part was coming to grips with the countdown. People were all outside in the streets looking up at the skies, at our reapers who were appearing as sheep, but they were wolves in sheep clothing. If he was being fair, it wasn't even like that. They never made the pretense of being friendly. Every message, their intention was crystal clear. We were insignificant to them. How could the masses ignore that?

Last year little black cubes appeared all over the planet, in every city, town, village, farm, field, anywhere humans lived. These little black cubes just showed up. Seem to have

materialized overnight out of thin air. It was the strangest thing. No one knew where they came from or why they were there. Made with metal that was new to us. They were alien. They weren't from this planet. Two months later numbers appeared on all the boxes and then the countdown began. 437,760 and with each minute that passed the number dropped by one minute. Counting down our eviction notice.

He tried to warn anyone who would listen. His warnings fell on deaf ears. No one wanted to listen to him. Aliens were approaching Earth. They were coming in peace, and it was going to be our "utopian era" that we were stepping into. Aliens wouldn't cross the universe to our little galaxy to destroy us. We didn't have the tech to space travel; we weren't threats to them in any way. They wouldn't travel so far just to kill us all, it didn't make any sense, people reasoned.

Maybe, unless they saw us as a future threat? Something to conquer? Something to eliminate? Desecrate? We were like bugs on the windshield of life.

The number on the boxes hit 58. 58 minutes left. There were other symbols that appeared a month ago, related to the other space signals that were received but never released to the public.

A year ago, he had worked with the government, deciphering the signals. No one wanted to hear him. The message was equivalent to doomsday. His boss misread it and translated it to communion, joining of two species. When he tried to voice what the symbols meant. No one would listen to him. He went from being respected and employed to unemployed in a matter of minutes. His boss told everyone that he was having a mental breakdown. That he was overwhelmed by first contact. It didn't take much, for Jessica to get his team to agree with her. He was escorted off the property and fired on the spot. His coworker Sam, frowned, "It's because

you're not a team player Steve. If you were, then maybe people would hear you. Plus, you're just wrong."

He wished he was wrong. For two weeks he felt sorry for himself then decided to fight back. There were a few people who didn't think the aliens were coming in peace and were building shelters and planning on fighting back. He liquidated his assets and bought a cabin in the woods. Under it he built a bomb shelter, big enough to house forty or more people. Then he began making trips, bringing the essentials, freeze dried foods with long shelf life, water, water purifier, first aid supplies, a couple generators that ran on solar power. A couple of guns, bows and arrows, there wasn't really anything missing. Maybe he was wrong? Maybe this was first contact, and they would find humans friendly and someone they wanted to join forces with. Nope, no, there just wasn't any indications that lead to that happy ending story. He shook his head as he sat at his desk watching the big screen TV. The reality of all hit him, he was sitting in his underground bunker, alone, watching first contact live on TV. This was surreal.

To access his secret lair, the door was hidden under the floor of an old cabin it was in a nice remote location. He took a moment and checked his cameras on his property, again. Not a single soul around. His little home away from home was safe. Live coverage of the what the networks were calling it "First Contact". God, he hoped he was wrong.

He had left his black box sitting on his kitchen counter in his home back in the city. The network provided a count down counter in the bottom corner of the TV screen. 14 minutes. The news woman was smiling and holding up a "Welcome to Earth" sign. People were out in the streets like it was New Year's Eve. Some were wearing their alien outfits, men in black outfits, dressed up, and most of them waving flags, signs and cheering. It was a day for the history books.

He watched sipping his scotch, 4 minutes left. Such a momentous occasion. They were going to go live to the UN, where world leaders gathered to greet their new friends. He shook his head. They all had just given their speeches and patting each other on the backs, welcoming our new friends. Two minutes left.

He paused to check his cameras once again. Safe. He was hidden safe away from all the crowds and civilization. Turning back to the TV broadcasting, 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1. A hush fell over the crowds as they continued to look up at the skies that were filled with alien spaceships. No one dared to breathe too heavy.

A hot beam of green light came out of the ships and people were incinerated on the spot. Skin flying off the reporter's face then snow. Not really snow, it looked like snow, but it was human ashes. The signal was lost. His eyes went wide as he choked on his scotch. What the hell! Swallowing hard, he checked other channels. Nothing. He turned the radio on and heard "They are not friendly! Get what you can and run! Save yourself. Rosie, get to the basement with the kids now! I repeat they are not friendly!" the station went to static. He tried another station; it took a bit but found one. A soft whisper, "I don't know what's happening, I heard they opened fire, and they have desecrated all our major cities. Our space guests are not here to make friends; they aren't taking prisoners either. I don't know why they are doing this." The person spoke with a shaky voice choking back tears. "I don't have anyone left. All my friends and family were in the cities. I'm reporting here, from my basement, I started this radio station two years ago. I think this is my final show. If you are out there and can still hear me. I hope you find a safe place to hide. I hope you make it out of this alive. Stay away from the cities! God Speed. Thank you for your support. This is Kat, signing off."

He tried a few more but all the lines were down, or the stations were down. He wanted to go out and check the skies but decided to stay where he was. He checked the cameras; he had outside and in the distant he could watch as the ships moved around slowly zapping areas. Exterminating humans, like they were called in for pest control. A couple crafts flew overhead. He was safe in his bomb shelter which was heat sensor proof. They couldn't see him down here, even if they used x-ray vision.

He watched the screens a while longer then got up. If they only listened. He knew this was coming. He got up and began pacing around, hot tears burning the back of his eyes. This was it. War on humans, aliens verse humans. Aliens were winning. It was a lot to take it. Then he realized he was really hoping he was wrong about the whole thing. Most of the human race was gone. Gone, just like that.

The ones that were left, how do we fight back? Could we even fight back. There had to be others out there like him in their bunkers, freaking out as well. Maybe he should have invited others to hide out with him. Too late now. He sank to the floor as he realized that there wasn't anyone coming to save him because they were all dead. Only a few crazy people like himself out there, scattered around the globe, hiding in their shelters. Sitting on the floor he held his face in his hands and cried. Weeping for his family, friends and coworkers who wouldn't listen to him. Weeping for the reality that he was alone, sitting on the floor of his bunker crying like a baby as aliens exterminated most of the human race topside. Was he really going to fight them? How?