

## **Interference**

by James Lynn Smith

Growth and expansion are easy for an entity that's highly advanced. My command of our troops is unquestionably superior to that of the natives in our milieu. They stay in their little cellular homes and hardly ever expand their activities. Canals supply sustenance throughout their communities, but such backward, ineffectual creatures cannot make good use of it. On my orders, however, the troops have expanded their accommodations beyond miniscule habitats and rerouted, rebuilt, and enlarged channels into flowing arteries of resources by which we advance our cause. They grow with impunity because of their advanced abilities in both converting natives and producing new progeny with our disciplined creed. Yes, it's almost as though they have mastered self-cloning. Progress, by my definition, is focused daring-do, expansion, and consumption of resources for only one goal: to become dominant in overwhelming numbers and exercise power over all systems in the entire realm.

Yes, we have challenges. There are agents promoting insidious, native concepts that exist among my troops, p53 throwback engrams I call them. They attempt to re-indoctrinate troops. If that doesn't work, they can kill. Other villains come in with the resource stream. They are natural born killers and often make a serious dent, but our "cloning" goes forward at such a rate that we dominate the scene.

Another factor to our advantage is intelligence. I hear what the collective body of natives is thinking and hearing, for I am able to read their primitive thoughts. And whatever library of information is stored among them is accessible

because I am located intimately close to what serves as their intelligence community.

In fact, there is some activity in the realm at this moment. It appears related to our presence. No doubt some outdated attempts to vanquish us are being planned. I'm not afraid of the petty, futile measures they may employ. Time and again, we—I— have proven superior. Even if they were to prove surprisingly strong, there are sacrificial agents I can send out, each equipped to explode into their remote communities with death and promote new life under my dominion only.

On occasions, the collective noise of native thoughts is entertaining. With proper focus, I can sense particular entities in communication. It's amusing to note how the *many* appears to coalesce into a single individual at any one time.

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“Why do you have to go, Mom?”

Marie looked at her daughter. “It won't be long, honey. Be a good girl while Aunt Grace looks after you. She's come a long way and would feel bad if you didn't treat her nice.”

“But I don't want to just be with her. Can you come back tomorrow?”

“She'll be away longer than that, Judy,” a male voice said. “But Mom is going to be better soon. Remember how bad she's felt for such a long time? You don't want that to continue, do you? You're five years old now. A big girl doesn't want to keep people from getting better.”

“I don't want her to hurt, but can't the doctors come here?”

“They have to be in a place where there are instruments to help her. Now what are you going to say?”

The child gave her mother a big sloppy kiss. “I want them to make you well, Mom. I love you.” She watched as her father helped Marie stand, and, supporting

her for balance, walked with her out the front door to the car.

Once in the car, Marie glanced back and saw Judy looking out the window as they drove away. *I'm hoping I'll come back, dear. I don't want to leave you either.*

Time at the hospital went slowly in the waiting room, but rapidly once the doctors arrived and Marie was taken to an inner area. Her pulse increased while she was undressed and then clad in skimpy hospital attire. Nurses came in asking what her name was, what was her surgery, and assuring her that Drs. Haney and Pope were competent and optimistic. She was then placed on a gurney and covered with a light blanket. The anesthesiologist inserted an IV and injected a light dose into the tube to calm Marie.

A peaceful feeling came across her and she dozed, but, paradoxically, she dreamed she was in a ditch with other people, watching an army of alien soldiers with advanced weapons encroaching on them. *How can we possibly survive this? I won't be able to see my Judy or Bill again. She felt extreme sadness. Where is he?* "Where?" she uttered.

"I'm here, Marie," Bill said. They let me come back here for a short while. Is the pain returning again?"

"Not yet, they gave me something to..." She felt her lips and tongue numbing. "Hardly can tal..."

"It's okay, just relax. I'll be here until they take you in."

Despite his assurance, Marie noticed worry lines on his forehead. *This is not going to be easy for either of us. Can I recover from the surgery itself, much less the—*

"Okay, Mrs. Steele, time to go in," an orderly said.

*Steele? Oh...that's me.* Marie was slightly confused and felt her gurney moving, bumping into objects as it was manipulated between doors.

She was moved onto an operating table surrounded by a dizzying array of surgical equipment, magnifying scopes, blue sheets, and a light so bright it hurt her eyes. The anesthesiologist appeared again and inserted an additional dose into the IV. Marie felt an uncomfortable frame with blunt end screws attached to her head. She began having double vision. The last thing she remembered was a room full of blue surgical gowns, moving closer.

\*

I've lost the connection. Never mind, these rambling communications have little significance. I hardly ever understand them completely because the natives process so slowly that one thought piles onto another. All this unintelligible complexity is not the result of sophisticated mentality; it results from a lack of determined focus on ultimate survival.

Something is going on, a noise, something pushing. All my troops feel it too. Wait, I'm getting more from the same connection now.

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"Mrs. Steele, can you hear me? We're bringing you back because we need you to tell us your response when we stimulate various parts of your cortex around the tumor. Does this do anything?"

"I...feel pressure. Like a weight on me. Now something tastes sweet."

"That's good, Marie." The voice then directed away from her. "Is the laser ready? Okay, apply retractors please. Now gently lift the proximal edge of the mass. I'm bringing up my ocular magnification...Procedure's going well. Soon this bad boy's going into the bucket. Still tasting sweet, Marie? Up here we just smell a little burning."

\*

I have interference here. Something's terribly wrong. My troops report being attacked. But can a conqueror fail?—What? Our nutrient canals cut off and

cauterized? Severed proximity to native cells? It doesn't make sense. The intelligence resource is now inaccessible and I don't think I can ...I don't think ...don't...think...

\*

“Marie, this is Dr. Haney. We're going to have the anesthesiologist put you back under now while we do a closing repair. I think it went quite well.”

The last words she heard before sleep were those between her doctors.

“It would be weird,” said Dr. Pope, “if tumors had consciousness. They *are* brain matter, you know.”

Haney's brow raised. “You really want to get metaphysical? If they're sentient beings, they're a hellish variety. More than likely just a bunch of cells with defective p53 genes growing at top speed, like an invasion of enemy troops. I say good riddance.”

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