

Daimones

Vol.1 of The Daimones Trilogy

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Now available:

Once Humans, Vol.2 of The Daimones Trilogy

The Rise of the Phoenix, Vol.3 of The Daimones Trilogy

About the Author

Massimo Marino comes from a scientist background: He spent years at CERN, in Switzerland, and at the Lawrence Berkeley Lab, in California, followed by lead positions with Apple, Inc., and the World Economic Forum.

Massimo currently lives in France and crosses the border with Switzerland multiple times daily.

The first volume of the trilogy, "Daimones", is the recipient of the 2012 PRG Award Reviewers' Choice in Science Fiction, and the Seal of Excellence in Quality Writing from the Awesome Indies (awesomeindies.net) and the indiePENdents.org association.

In September 2013 "Daimones" won the Hall of Fame - Best in Science Fiction Award, Quality Reads UK Book Club.

With the release of volume 2, "Once Humans", the books received the 2013 PRG Reviewer's Choice Award Best in Science Fiction Series, and shortlisted an Finalist in Science Fiction at the 2014 Readers' Favorite International Book Awards

The second volume, "Once Humans", starts seven years after the events narrated in "Daimones". The Communities led by the Selected are about to thrive and peace and security reigns on Eridu...not for long.

"The Rise of the Phoenix" narrates the events that resulted in the dystopian galactic society ruled by the new transgenic humans.

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ON THE GODS AND THE WORLD

“These things never happened, but they are always.”

Sallustius

“Deorum naturae neque factae sunt; quae enim semper sunt, numquam fiunt: semper vero sunt.

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Prologue

Warnings

“Large numbers of animals have mysteriously died recently, from the thousands of birds found dead in two southern U.S. states to 100,000 dead fish in Arkansas. TIME takes a look at other mass animal deaths, the mystery of many of which is still unsolved.” Read more:

‘Over the first weekend of the new year 2011, thousands of red-winged blackbirds fell dead from the sky. Two days later, some 500 blackbirds dropped dead in Louisiana.’

‘March 2011: Approx. 1,200 penguins were found dead on a remote beach in southern Chile.’

‘April 2011: Millions of sardines washed ashore nearby. In addition, thousands of the rare Andean flamingo abandoned their nests in the north of Chile, leaving their 2,000 chicks to die in their shells. Even worse, no one could say concretely why these animals had died.’

‘April 2011: According to Francisco Nique, president of the Association of Fishermen of Puerto Eten, in the span of 10 or 12 days, 1,200 dead pelicans along 160 kilometers have been found between Punta Negra, in Piura, and San Jose creek in Lambayeque. *Perú 21 press.*’

‘October 2011: Thousands of dead waterfowl wash ashore at Wasaga Beach, Canada. *The Star.*’

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‘January 2012: Dead herring mystery for Norway; locals left scratching their heads after twenty tons of the dead creatures are found on beaches in Nordreisa. *The Guardian.*’

‘May 2012: 60,000—100,000 dead fish found in three creeks in Maryland USA. *Baltimore Sun.*’

‘May 2012: Thousands of Mozambique Tilapia found dead since last week, experts blame pollutants in the river. Ironically, Mozambique Tilapia is considered as one of the most resilient species of fish, known to withstand unfriendly environmental conditions. *Pune Mirror.*’

‘May 2012: At least 2,300 dead birds were found along beaches between Cartagena and Playa de Santo Domingo, Chile. *CNN International.*’

‘May 2012: The Peruvian government reported 5,000 birds, mostly pelicans, and nearly 900 dolphins have died off the country's northern coast, possibly due to rising temperatures in Pacific waters. Scientists scrambled to pin down what caused such a massive toll. *AFP.*’



Strange deaths had caused alarm among naturalists and environmentalists in all nations. Birds fell dead from the sky, fish washed up on shores and rivers across the whole planet, but people had other things to care and worry about. Mainstream media focused on economic crises, financial scandals, huge losses from banks, sovereign states at risk of defaulting in the Euro zone, the Arab spring, and the global war on terror.

Why the interest in bird and fish deaths: don't they die every day? Such news was almost whispered as unimportant,

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or used as filler for a column on some inner page. Local TV channels sometimes reported the facts though as a strange and abrupt twist of the normal course of natural events: interesting—for a second—but nothing to see, move on.

Whoever tried to talk seriously about the animal deaths—trying to discover a pattern—was treated as a weirdo, a delusional simpleton seeing conspiracy around every corner. People reacted to the deaths with raised shoulders, regarding the unexplained quirk about the natural world as worth no more. Some even accused naturalists of trying to profit from the quiriness to grab more funds for their research and projects.

Regardless, thousands of dead birds and tons of fishes had been found floating ashore, belly up, without any apparent reason. “The sky is not falling,” people said. Indeed it was not the sky that was falling, only previously live and healthy winged animals. Yet too many fell...well, they were just birds, weren't they?

We had enough reasons to wonder what killed them, clear signs that something was seriously wrong. Initial investigations showed evidence of unnatural events, damage in the breast tissue, blood clots in the body cavities, and much internal bleeding. All major organs though were normal.

In some cases, acute physical trauma led to hemorrhage and death with no sign of any chronic or infectious diseases. Thousands of animals of the same species suffering a traumatic end all together—all of a sudden—around the world with no apparent cause or link. Concerted investigations should have started but nobody pushed for those. Instead, county veterinarians scrambled to provide

plausible explanations. Results from preliminary testing had been released to the news by the Livestock and Poultry Commission's Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. They showed birds, which fell by the thousands, dead from internal collapse—whatever that meant. No explanations were given as to what caused the massive traumas and why.

The Internet covered the deaths with genuine interest to look for causes. Threads and blogs were filled with plots calling for plans between the Zionists, Fascists, Falun Gong supporters, and aliens from planet Zark. Conspiracy theories soon killed all discussions and, in a sense, also prevented genuine forensic work to be conducted: What serious scientist craves association with lunatics wearing tin-foil caps?

Some officials started to release the first explanation at hand. They speculated on causes for the bird deaths ranging from fireworks, the weather, noxious fumes, chemtrails sprayed by airliners, or 'sonic booms.' Anything that could be used to put the stories to rest, and quickly. Some believed the birds might have been frightened to death by the blasts or killed by the scores in traffic accidents.

"We received information from local residents last night. Our main theory is that birds got scared because of the fireworks. Thus, they landed on the road, but couldn't fly away due to the stress and were hit by a car," one official explained to 'The Local', Sweden's online news in English. The Sveriges Radio Skaraborg also reported the news and stated the birds had been found dead on the streets in Falköping, southeast of Skövde.

He added the animals likely had difficulty orienting themselves in the dark. That in itself would be news. No one

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talked much about the fishes, like the two million dead in Chesapeake Bay or the dead drums washed ashore along twenty miles of the Arkansas River.

People had more important issues to deal with; the world faced a period of great uncertainty and huge changes affecting everyone at every level. Global terrorism stopped us from seeing what was happening. In those months people were thinking of other things. Everyone wondered whether they'd be next in the vicious round of terrorist bombings and retaliations affecting every country in the world.

Who cared if some wild animals were dying when members of your own family might not come home that night? Humanity had missed its only vital clue. The link was there. We were the sapient species on earth, clever enough to connect the dots, no matter how far apart they were. We should have done our job. Connect them. We were too busy, too preoccupied with other facts to ask ourselves: What the hell is happening?

Nature's red flags went unnoticed and animals—scores of them—kept dying. We kept living our own lives...

The Purge

The Last Day

Nothing prepared us for the last day. I arrived at work as usual, after leaving my daughter at school. A too bright Monday morning and sunny for early February. The weather had been mild during the weekend, much warmer than it should for the season.

My wife, Mary, complained about the warmth, worried this would be no good for plants and the garden.

“See all the buds? Everything is waking up. They will burn when it’ll freeze again.”

Indeed, those days felt like early spring. I liked that.

The whole winter had been harsh with average temperatures way below freezing. To leave home and take my little princess to school on my way to work was an exercise of will—even more so when my day started at 6:15 a.m. and it was still dark outside.

“I go to bed and it’s dark. I get up, dark...yet again! You know how it bothers me,” I told Mary every time she asked, “What’s going on, sweet pea? You’re pensive.” She still called me that even though it had been years since we were high school sweethearts and I’d played quarterback for our school team.

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Thank the Lord, she never said it in public. No one protects a “sweet pea” quarterback or fights to catch his passes! And let’s not even think about the harassment from teammates.

Mary had just turned sixteen when we first met. Something of young lovers remained between us, even after thirty-two years, a twelve-year-old daughter, and life in three countries. We had an easy way to keep count of the time the two of us had spent together: ten years of dating, ten of marriage and then our first and only child. Total number of years? Twenty, plus our daughter’s age.

When I got to work, I waited as usual for the gate to open. The gate was a solid slab of metal and it stood next to the guard house, a bulky construction with thick tinted windows and dark concrete walls. Sliding slowly on its rails, the mechanism paused long enough for me to drive through, reminding me this place was not meant for everyone.

I could never tell whether anyone was seated in the guard house or not. The first times I passed that gate I wondered if I needed to wave good morning to some invisible man. Now I simply drove through, conscious of my right to cross the thin threshold separating those inside from the rest of the world.

I had to cross another barrier before entering, had to swipe my badge and be greeted by the welcoming green light. I went down the ramp slowly, giving the gate below time to open, enough to let me pass without having to wait. With the years, my timing had become impeccable. In the underground garage, my place, Number 98, was in the last row so I had enough time to realize something obstructed my place. I slammed on the brakes and raised my hand to hit

the steering wheel in exasperation. Two wood crates sat in the middle of my slot.

The parking also served as a reception area for the Publications Department. Slots in the middle section had been eliminated to give room to the storage areas where all deliveries received by the Pub's colleagues were collected and where confidential publications were packaged for shipment. No one thought that arrangement to be efficient and sustainable. At times, I had to wait for small crate lifters to operate. A short wait but frustrating when colleagues waited for me at a meeting. Complaints to Human Resources and Logistics & Operations had so far produced no results. And now this.

I stepped out of the car to check for any of the storage workers but no one was around.

The crates were empty. They weren't particularly heavy. I only had to slide them a short distance, zero risk of injuries or other silly things like tearing my trousers or jacket.

Although I didn't train anymore, my body still enjoyed the results of those past years of football practice—semi-professional level—and the task took only a few seconds: no sweat. I parked. Weird. Things like that were not supposed to happen; the workers had a list of unoccupied places which they could use.

With my badge in hand, I walked toward the third security point to cross. I swiped it and entered the monthly code on the keyboard. Invisible eyes witnessed and recorded the entry. The transparent bullet-proof glass doors opened and let me in to the buffer zone, a concrete walled box with a painted red little square on the floor.

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The procedure required to stand still on the red mark without moving while something or someone evaluated my credentials. I hated this last step. After all the security steps I'd gone through so far, hadn't I proven my identity, my right to be allowed into the premises? I almost questioned the invisible guard about those crates in my parking place but I hesitated. This was something to sort out with the Hospitality Team instead. They look after logistics and other annoying stuff.

Besides, if I moved or wiggled too much while standing on the little red square, the glass door behind would open and I'd have to go through the whole procedure again, suffer a lecture from the guard and waste even more time, *his* time. I stood as still as I could...and waited.

It took a few seconds more than usual and I thought to complain when finally I heard the welcoming beep; the opaque entrance glass doors slid aside and I walked in.

From the parking level entry, one accessed a hallway dotted with settees aligned along its gray walls. In front, a huge glass wall spanned the whole height of the building and showed a magnificent view of Lake Lemano and the mansions of rich Swiss and foreigners wealthy enough to enjoy the scenery from their large estates.

After a last glance at the glorious day unfolding outside, I started down the stairs to reach my desk one level below. The entire organization believed in full visibility so, to foster collaboration and communication among personnel, it had no offices...just open spaces and vast halls filled with large desks.

No cubicles, a la North American style, but shared spaces in between with desks arranged in islands of four

separated by panels with a transparent top-third. Though you couldn't look at what your colleagues were doing, you had a clear view to establish eye contact; everyone sat in sight of everyone else. Hard to say whether this architect's dream resulted in any real increase of communications between teams. I still have my doubts.

Entering the hall, I peeked to see whether my highest-ranked collaborator and friend, Rose, had gotten in already. We had an established tradition between us: the morning cappuccino.

"Hi, Rose. How's it going?"

"As usual. The guys from Microsoft say they should be able to finish in time."

"Good, good start for the day. Cappuccino?"

I led and defined the effort for a major collaboration platform of the highest security. It included all possible technical bells and whistles, video conferencing, and social networking to support all the initiatives running worldwide with our constituents.

Highly confidential matters were discussed on our system, especially on the encrypted video conferences and we enforced an absolute *off the records* policy. Journalists and others, I am sure, would have loved to eavesdrop on what we heard those days, particularly Arab League's discussions with the Americans.

Everything we did to support and enhance the platform was required *yesterday* and costs or efforts were never a factor. High pressure constantly, criticisms always abundant, congratulations scarce. The kind of demanding task and thankless job any sane person would avoid. How in the world I ended up in that trap is still an open question.

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Anyway, as the only director who had been able to *herd the cats*, we had released a working platform in spite of everything and within the agreed timeline. Not exactly Big Brother, but Orwell would be proud of us.

A few desks away, I spotted the American consultant. Hired and imposed on the team to speed up the project and *automagically* solve all scenarios. He looked at his emails, showing no interest in our conversation or our whereabouts. The guy only knew one thing well and kept selling that as an IT panacea: A framework—and not among the best ones—to create websites. He advocated the solution as the ultimate silver bullet.

It proved no good for us; rather it had been the source of problems and discussions during many of the past months. Much time and money miserably wasted. Yet, somehow, he had secured the ears of our upper echelon bosses. Despite the lack of promised working prototypes, and even failing all tests and missing deadlines, he'd succeeded in imposing his view. A spin doctor, cum laude. Could not happen at a for-profit organization where pennies were counted.

“To a hammer, every problem is a nail,” we joked on the team but we called him ‘the screwdriver’. We were confronted with stubborn nails and we needed a sledgehammer. Screwdrivers do not understand nails, so he wanted us to cut a slot on the head of every nail. Makes sense? Of course not. He kept neglecting crucial details about the project, things like ‘nails have no threads’. We judged his solutions and vision as simplistic. There were other forces at play so our judgment didn't matter at all.

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