

D A W N
The Planet

A Science Fiction Novel

by

Sam Goldenberg

Sam Goldenberg
120 Trelawn Avenue
Oakville, Ontario L6J 4R2
905 337 0743
sgoldenberg@cogeco.ca

CHAPTER 1

Frequently, Monty ate lunch at his desk, sometimes with members of his staff, sometimes alone. On this particular day, he would soon regret not following his usual practice.

Like every other day, he awoke at 6, went to the kitchen, set up the coffee machine, let the dog out into the back garden, and brought in the newspaper. He took his coffee and the business section to the patio. The rising sun pushed through the leafy trees and promised another glorious June day. There was a subdued rumble from the highway some five miles away that passed Oakville on its way to Toronto.

He tried to concentrate on the paper but his mind slipped back to the previous evening and the Board Meeting of PDG Corporation, the company he worked for. He had been promoted from Director to Vice-President Human Resources and appointed a member of the Management Committee of the Corporation. He had to control his euphoria as the Chairman of the Board congratulated him and spoke highly of his achievements in the three years since he joined the company.

“Montgomery Dore, I’m very proud of you and very proud to be your wife,” Vivian said very formally when Monty came home with the news. Then, hugging and kissing him, she added: “But tell your President not to hold any meetings tomorrow night. The kids are planning a birthday party for you.”

At exactly 6:30, he returned to the bedroom. By this time, Vivian was up. She smiled at him. “Happy birthday, my executive darling.”

“Thanks, but who wants to be reminded that his youth is evaporating?”

She looked at him fondly. “For a 39 year old, you’re in perfect shape, except for this.” She patted his belly which bulged slightly. “You have to start your exercises again.”

“I liked last night’s exercises,” he said, kissing her. Vivian was almost as tall as he, long dark hair framing fine facial features, still slim despite bearing two children.

“You did OK for an older man,” she teased. She loved his strong, square face crowned with tousled hair that never seemed to comb properly, the set of his lips, and the deep blue eyes protected by dark brows.

She went to wake the children. He could hear eight-year old Tommy grudgingly crawling out of bed. Marcia, his ten year old daughter, was more amenable and needed little urging to wake up. She came into their bedroom as he was lacing up his shoes.

“Happy birthday, daddy. Many happy returns of the day.”

He hugged and kissed her. “Thank you for such nice birthday wishes.”

By 7:30, they were finished breakfast. Vivian dropped Monty off at the Oakville commuter station in time to catch the 7:45 to Toronto. She then drove the children to their school for the 8 o’clock assembly.

Monty walked the ten minutes from Union Station to the PDG office building on Yonge Street. He pushed through the door marked Human Resources, greeted the employees who were already at their desks, stopped to talk to some of them, and said good morning to Kelly, his administrative assistant.

They went over the key emails that had to be answered and discussed his schedule for the day. They read the email announcing his promotion and Kelly congratulated him effusively.

A little later, there was a rustle outside his office. A smiling Kelly popped her head in. “Monty — may we still call you by your first name — some members of your staff would like a word.”

They crowded in, clearly elated by his success and enjoying as well the elevation of the Human Resources Department.

“Mr. Dore,” a gently mocking voice piped up, “may we still barge into your office whenever we want or must we now make an appointment?”

He smiled at the owner of the voice. He had recently hired Alicia Vines to head up his compensation section. She was in her late twenties, a head shorter than Monty, a trim athletic figure with curly brown hair that fell to her shoulders, a pert nose, generous lips, and luminous sparkly eyes which now shone with unabashed admiration. He had felt an instant liking for her, and he could sense that she liked him too.

He teased back. “The others may barge in anytime they want. You have to make an appointment.”

Just a joke, he thought, but maybe not a bad idea to control her access to him. For the first time in his married life, he felt attracted to another woman. He enjoyed flirting with her, but so far it was a game of words, of clever repartees. He had to back off, to keep a distance. The relationship had to stay boss and subordinate, it could go no further.

At noon, Kelly stood in his doorway. “Monty, Syd Clark would like to meet with you. Says it’s important. I suggested lunch. Is that ok? Shall I bring in sandwiches?”

Syd Clark was a highly rated PDG salesman and identified for management development. He was in his mid-twenty’s, tall and slim with a thin bony face. He had an infectious smile, an extroverted personality and radiated youthful energy and confidence.

Monty's lunch was often a sandwich at his desk but on this day, he felt like going out. He could see Syd standing just outside the office. "No, thanks. It's too beautiful to stay inside. Syd, let's you and I take a walk and pick something up along the way." They went down in the crowded elevator and stepped out into the lobby.

The lobby was busy with office workers streaming out of the elevators. Many were standing around, meeting with friends and fellow workers, and deciding which one of the fast food restaurants they would patronize that day. The sound of chatter and laughter filled the large lobby.

Monty saw Alicia talking to the Security Guard at the reception desk. He tried to walk around her but she stopped him.

"I need to talk to you. Syd, just give us a moment." Syd stepped aside.

Monty took her arm and pulled her away from the Security desk. "Sure. What about?"

"About why I have to make an appointment to see you."

He laughed. "Alicia, I was trying to be funny."

"I know you were. But I feel there's something more."

He had come to recognize in their short association that she was very sensitive to nuances of tone and body language. He couldn't tell her the whole truth, but perhaps a portion of the truth would satisfy her.

"I'm always amazed at your ability to read minds. Yes, there was more to my remark, but not something you need worry about. Alicia, you're fun to deal with, you're clever and terribly competent. I enjoy working with you and, as a result, I've been giving you and your projects too much attention relative to the others. For the sake of

departmental teamwork, everyone has to feel that he or she has equal support. I feel that my partiality was noticed and resented. If there was an agenda to my remark, that's it. But I was being funny. You can continue to barge in anytime you want, but I might kick you out more often."

Alicia had a worried look on her face. "Monty, should I look for another job? You've just told me to back off and take my turn in the pecking order."

"Alicia, don't go looking for a job just yet. I've got Syd waiting. We'll find some time this afternoon to talk about it."

The seriousness of their conversation was masked by the general hubbub in the office building lobby. Perhaps, because of the volume of conversation and laughter, no one at first noticed the dull roar that began to rumble through the lobby. Soon the roar became so loud that the crowd fell silent. Some bolted into the interior of the building, others stood rooted in fear and uncertainty. Alicia grabbed Monty's arm, shouting, "What's going on?" Before he had a chance to reply, he watched in horror as the street wall of the lobby disintegrated, and the debris rotated in a giant whorl of dizzying lines. In the middle of the whorl, a hole appeared and gradually widened, revealing a tunnel.

There was movement in the tunnel and strange looking creatures charged into the lobby, led by a giant of a black man clad in grey sleeveless overalls. The creatures were tall, dark coloured, with stalk-like bodies surmounted by a large, flattened head like an open umbrella. Behind them, Monty saw several other creatures, yellow in colour, with stalk-like bodies widening at the top into a broad leaf-like head. All seemed to be two-armed and two-legged.

The dark-coloured creatures shot into the stupefied crowd and, grasping an individual under each arm, ran back into the tunnel. Monty heard Alicia scream and then he too was clamped under the arm of a creature, and struggling as best he could, found himself inexorably dragged towards the tunnel.

Two policemen, hearing the commotion, raced out of the Lobby Coffee Shop, drawing their guns. Monty tried to shout a warning as the black giant came up behind them, lifted them bodily off the ground, and smashed their heads together

Then the creatures were gone and the roar subsided. There was bedlam in the lobby as the survivors gave way to hysteria, shouting and screaming as they raced out into the street. Within minutes, dozens of police and ambulances arrived, followed shortly by the media.

Vivian car-pooled with two other women to transport the children for lunch and after school. Today was not her turn. After a short stint of housework, she was able to devote a solid three hours to her pro bono legal work before the children arrived for lunch.

She served them peanut butter and banana sandwiches washed down with milk and gave each an apple for recess. The car-pool driver arrived, and as Vivian watched the children climb into the minivan, she caught a news flash on the radio. All she heard was that something had happened at the PDG Corporation.

She turned on the TV to the CBC news channel and watched in growing anxiety as reports of the lobby attack talked about dozens of employees kidnapped by strange creatures, possibly extra-terrestrial aliens. Survivors said the roar which preceded the attack reminded them of the sound of an approaching jetliner, others that it was exactly

the noise a tornado makes. Witnesses on the street reported a funnel cloud like a long sleeve descended out of the sky and blanketed the lower wall of the building.

She switched from channel to channel but all reported the same news. As the afternoon wore on, the reports became more definitive. Surveillance tapes were aired and showed the creatures charging out of the tunnel and attacking the employees.

Vivian kept calling Monty's office as well as his cell phone. A foreboding grew in her as there was no reply, and Monty did not call her. By mid-afternoon, the media reported that 27 employees were confirmed missing and presumed kidnapped, that no names would be published until families had been informed.

The children returned from school asking whether she had heard anything from daddy regarding the strange thing that had happened at his office. She tried to reassure them that daddy would soon be home and explain everything. To calm her quaking fears, she rationalized that Monty was too busy talking to families, and therefore could not call home. She was debating whether to go to the station when the front doorbell rang. The children ran to open the door. She saw the two policemen standing there and knew immediately that Montgomery Dore was one of the victims and wouldn't be coming home.

CHAPTER 2

Writhing and twisting, Monty tried to break free but was held fast against the body of his captor. The arm that held him had splayed out at the tip into dozens of finger like tendrils that wrapped securely around his arms and legs. In the gloom of the tunnel, he could just make out other creatures, all running, each carrying one or two captives. He caught a glimpse of the person in his captor's other arm and knew it was Alicia.

“What the hell's going on?” he screamed, his cry banished by the roar in the tunnel. For a long moment, terror pushed aside his anger and indignation. For Christ sake, what was happening to him? Why him? Where did these monsters come from? Somehow he managed to get an arm free and began banging away at the stalk body, but it didn't seem to have any impact on the creature.

Soon he saw lights up ahead and could make out a large cylindrical vehicle. As he came closer, he could see there were two of them in line with huge rocket engines. A door lifted off the side of the first vehicle and the creatures flung their captives in. As Alicia fell into the vehicle, she grabbed a tendril of the creature and angrily bit into it. The creature reacted sharply, pulled its arm away, and flayed her with its tendrils, forcing her well back. As the creature attacked Alicia, it dropped Monty who lunged hard at the stalk body, caught the creature by surprise, and knocked it down. The black man came up behind him, lifted him bodily, and threw him deep inside the vehicle. The remaining captives were thrown in, the black man entered along with half a dozen of the creatures, and the door swung down and closed. The roar of the tunnel diminished, replaced by the sobs and cries of the captives.

Monty had hit the floor of the vehicle hard. He lay there gasping, dimly aware of the screaming around him. He felt himself lifted and forced into a seat. Dazed and angry, he threw himself at the strange beings, shouting, "Fight them. There aren't that many of them." Some of the captives joined him, but they were quickly beaten back by the whip-like tendrils and the large truncheons that the creatures swung. A vicious blow caught Monty in the shins and knocked him down. He was grabbed by the throat and flung back into a seat, where he lay trying to regain his breathing.

"Shut up all of you!" the black man shouted, "Find your seats and be quick about it, or there'll be more broken heads. Tie yourself in. The ship is about to leave."

Monty looked around. Whatever they were in had a large cabin with dozens of seats and no windows. The creatures were slightly taller than the human who accompanied them. Their bodies resembled trunks of trees with large, bulbous heads. Their colouring was splotchy and lined but overall dark. They carried truncheons the size of baseball bats. A door opened at the front of the cabin, and one of the yellow coloured creatures came in. It was the same size as the others, but its head was narrow and leaf-like and was surmounted by a gold-coloured crown. Beyond the yellow creature, Monty could just make out what appeared to be dials and instruments. The yellow creature turned and closed the door.

Alicia took a seat beside Monty. The creatures pushed others towards the seats. The black man checked that their seat belts were fastened.

His lips bleeding and cracked, his throat hoarse from the near throttling, pain setting in all over his body, Monty shouted at the black man: "What the hell is this all about? We demand to be released."

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