Dr. Robinson made the final incision into the body with his scalpel, and then looked down at the table with a slight grimace.

Sighing, he put the blade down on the table, next to the other surgical instruments. Taking off his mask, he looked over, with weary eyes, at the nurse standing off to one side.

“There’s nothing more that can be done here. Please sew the wound up and move the patient into the recovery area for observation”, he instructed in a tired voice. He took off his latex gloves, disposing of them into the container near the surgical table.

“Yes, Dr. Robinson”, the nurse said with a nod, and scampered over to get the surgical thread. He could hear her humming to herself as she followed out his instructions. Some old show tune? It sounded like something from Broadway, though he was having trouble placing it. It had an element of familiarity to it, though, and it made him think of home.

He felt a twinge of homesickness go through him, as he thought of the home that he had left behind. The life that he had left behind, to come out to this god-forsaken place. For not the first time, he second-guessed his decision, wondering if he had made the right choice after all. It was a thought that ran through his mind constantly, sometimes without end.

Dr. Robinson sighed, and moved away from the surgical area, stepping outside. Leaving the dark interior of the medical tent, his eyes squinted in the mid-afternoon sun. He wasn’t used to the brightness after being inside for hours, tending to patients.

Six months ago, he had agreed to take the position as chief medical officer here in the Congo. An epidemic had begun wiping out entire villages in the region, and he had been desperately needed. He had been given a few days to think it over.

It had taken only 48 hours for him to say yes, and then he had been flown immediately out on the first plane to Africa.

His team had worked hard and tirelessly, putting their blood, sweat, and tears into it, to no avail. Despite their best efforts, the epidemic had gotten worse, raging out of control and extinguishing countless lives. They had followed every procedure, everything they knew to contain an epidemic. Yet nothing seemed to be working.

It certainly wasn’t that he was incompetent, or a novice in the medical field. He was a highly skilled M.D., one of the best in the field, and his skills with a scalpel were the stuff of legend. He had excelled with top honors in medical school, and had been the first in his class. He had solved cases that had left other doctors completely baffled. There had been high hopes when he was given the post in this part of Africa, and his superiors had held absolute faith in him.

Even so, despite their belief in his abilities, his skills could only go so far. Faced with such insurmountable odds, there was only so much even he could do. Every day, more and more cases appeared, and the bodies continued to pile up. The mass graves were beginning to run out of room.

He walked back to his residence, his feet feeling like leaden weights. His weariness was beginning to take its toll on him. He opened the front door and trudged inside, sitting down with a heavy thud.

He groaned to himself, and reached for the bottle that was always right within reach. Dr. Robinson took another swig from it, and then, seeing it was nearly empty, threw it across the room with a grunt of anger.

The bottle hit the wall with a thud, surprisingly not shattering. It then rolled under his cot, to vanish with its other companions from days and weeks past.

He rubbed his tired eyes with his fingers, and lay back, lost in thought. Thinking about *why,* exactly, he had ever agreed to come out to this rotten place. He slipped his shoes off his feet, tossing them onto the floor, and then lay back again, closing his eyes. For not the first time. he tried to wish away his current surroundings with the power of his mind.

He had come out to the Congo under the guise of altruistic intentions. To help the needy, stop the suffering. To be the one to save lives, and bring an end to the epidemic that had devastated an entire region.

But this had only been the rationale he told his peers and the press. It was part of making himself look good, after all. The brave Dr. Stanley Robinson, traveling out to the middle of the goddamned Congo to save African lives from a horrible epidemic!

Yes, this was the reason he had given. But it wasn't exactly the complete truth, if he was being honest with himself.

Truth be told, he had agreed to take the position only to advance his career, and achieve some fame back home. Sure, he had already achieved a certain level of notoriety for his skills back in New York, but he desired more. He wanted the accolades and the awards. He wanted the recognition from his peers for being a miracle worker, and conquering a terrible disease.

It was a different kind of fame that he was looking for, in that humid, hot green hell of the Congo.

Not solely to be famous as a highly skilled doctor.

No, he wanted recognition that he had defeated the disease, and, in doing so, dealt a defeat to Death Itself.

That thought had filled his mind when his superiors back in New York had first told him of the offer. It had started off small, germinating as a minor idea in his mind. Then it had increased with each passing day, until the concept had come to consume him.

Finally, he had known that he had little choice in the matter. He had signed the agreement, and been on the first plane to Africa only two days later.

And within a week, he had found himself regretting his decision, and wishing he had never even heard of the blasted Congo in all his life.

He groaned again, laying back on his bed, covering his face with his hands. He wished that he was still working at the hospital in New York. He wished that he was still performing miracles in the operating room. His face on the cover of every professional magazine in the medical field. Having easy and reliable access to indoor plumbing and air conditioning. Not having to check his boots for snakes every time he went to put them on. Not wasting his time being out…*here.*

Not out here in the jungle with these uneducated….*people.*

Dr. Robinson felt contempt surge through his body as he thought of the natives, and their ignorant ways.

He felt a deep disdain, bordering on condemnation, as he thought of their primitive superstitions. He thought of how they had explained away the epidemic as being the result of witchcraft. They had blamed evil spirits! Evil spirits!

Hell, the fools had never even heard of germ theory, or even knew what a virus was! That was what had enabled the disease to spread so far and so rapidly.

They hadn't been concerned about practicing the proper medical protocols to limit the spread of the virus. There had been only a handful who had taken the time to learn the information being presented to them.

Instead, they had been more concerned about finding out which of their neighbors were witches, and casting the poor souls out of the village.

That is, if they didn't simply stone them to death.

He saw the way that people lived here, and judged them for it. The extreme poverty, the poor living conditions. He felt superior to them, and couldn't understand why they chose to live this way. Why not embrace the modern lifestyle being offered to them? Why cling to such self-destructive ways? It made no sense to him, and he knew that it never would.

Dr. Robinson closed his eyes, knowing that he was on call. He needed to rest, as he could be called back to operate or treat a patient at any time. He hoped for at least a few hours of sleep before the work would have to start all over again. He felt weary thinking about it.

He started to drift off, sleep overtaking him in a drowsy fog. The same thought crossed his mind again, as it had every day since his arrival.

It would be so easy for him to admit defeat. He simply had to ask for a transfer back to New York, and he would leave this nightmarish hellhole behind him for good. It would simply take one word from him, back to his superiors, and he could be on a plane going home by the following day. The jungle would be nothing more than a green outline beneath him, before finally vanishing beneath the cloud cover. It would fade into just another bad memory. One of many for him.

He wished that he had the strength to go through with something like that. But he knew, in his heart, that his ego would never let him. It would never let him admit to failure, to slink home with his tail between his legs. Not while the epidemic continued to rage out of control.

To go home, and throw in the proverbial towel, would be a stain on his career that he could never live down. And to have that happen to him because of the primitives that he was being forced to treat? The thought was intolerable to him.

He could never do that, not in a million years.

His feelings had become clouded the longer that he had been stuck there. Recently, he had began to institute a policy of strict quarantine. Even if his patients were not yet beyond hope, he would direct them to be placed in the quarantine ward, isolated from their families. Hell, even the healthy ones were beginning to be quarantined as well, even if they hadn't shown a single symptom of the disease. He would simply direct them to be kept at home, under penalty if they came out for any non-essential reason.

He had already started quarantining entire families, keeping them beyond locked doors. It wouldn't be long before he would give the order to begin quarantining entire villages, letting the disease cut a swath through the local population. It would burn itself out and go back into dormancy.

It might even get to the point that a quarantine of the entire region would become necessary. If that happened, he would be sure to be long gone before then.

It would be just as well, anyway. The constant civil warfare, the strife, the corruption: the entire region had already been sick long before the beginning of the epidemic.

Perhaps quarantine WAS the best solution after all. Contain the people, keep them isolated and under control, so they can't spread their ways to the rest of the outside world. The idea was slowly digging its way deeper into his mind, like an insidious parasite.

After all, as the doctor himself was so often quick to proclaim, "If someone is sick, you don't pay them a social visit. You quarantine them!"

And so, things continued along this way for a while.

That is, until that one fateful night, when the doctor went for a walk, and the UFO landed.

It had been a cool evening, and he had been walking out by himself in a nearby field. He had needed the fresh air. It had been a particularly trying day, and his thoughts were wandering. He had just been casually looking up at the night sky, enjoying the crystal clear view of the stars.

He had to admit, despite hating this place, he had never seen the night sky as clearly as he could see it here. Certainly not back in New York City, for sure. It had been one of the few pleasant things that he had experienced during his time here.

He had been looking up at the sky, when he had observed one star in particular, that shone brighter than the others. It had captivated his attention like no other.

Then, as he continued to watch, it had started to *descend*.

Dr. Robinson watched in open-mouthed awe as the star came ever closer to his position. Closer and closer, it came.

Finally, the object was hovering near him, and he learned the startling truth: it wasn't a star, but a *spaceship*.

A real life spaceship of some kind, right in front of him!

The ship was a medium-sized metallic craft, covered in bright flashing lights. It emitted a low humming sound, that reverberated in the air. It was disc-shaped, with a small antennae on the top,

protruding from a dome of some kind. He watched as four large metallic legs descended from the bottom of the craft, preparing it to land.

Dr. Robinson ran and hid in some bushes nearby, watching as the craft landed on the ground with a soft thud. A door slowly opened in its side, with a ramp descending from the craft. A bright light emitted from within, and four strange objects emerged from the open doorway. They floated in the air for a moment, and then slowly descended to hover a few feet above the ground.

He gawked, his mouth hanging open in surprise, as he observed the objects, recognizing intelligence in their movements. He suddenly realized that they were the occupants of the strange craft.

He couldn't believe it! They were real-life aliens from another world!

They were amorphous in shape, appearing like floating blobs of matter. There were no visible features, no limbs or facial qualities to be seen. The beings were reddish-gray in color, and pulsed with a luminescent inner light. The light seemed to radiate in no discernible pattern. They moved slowly, but purposefully, hovering around the outside of their craft.

They did not seem to have noticed the doctor, who was still observing them from his nearby hiding spot.

He watched as two of them floated near each other, their lights pulsing quicker. There was a high pitched whistling sound that rose and fell in a steady rhythm. It took Dr. Robinson a few seconds before he realized that they were communicating with each other, using some completely new form of language. It seemed to be comprised mainly of whistles and lights patterns, so different than anything found on Earth.

This continued for several more moments, then the two beings broke off and floated in separate directions.

Silently, Dr. Robinson cursed himself for not bringing a camera. He had left his phone back in his residence, not wanting to be disturbed during his walk. The reception was terrible in this area, anyway. If only he had some way to document the incredible sight before him!

Dollar signs flashed in his eyes again, as he imagined obtaining the first documented proof of extraterrestrial life. He would sell it to the newspapers, and to the scientific community.

Forget becoming famous for stopping the epidemic: his name would go down in the textbooks for the single greatest discovery in human history!

Resolving to make contact with the strange visitors, he stepped out from his hiding spot. He gave a friendly wave and said, in a welcoming tone, "Hello, friends! Greetings from the planet Earth!"

Yes, it was a corny thing for him to say, in retrospect, but it was all that he could think of at that moment. He would think of something better to tell the media when he got back home. Some historic line, that would be studied and quoted in American schools hundreds of years from now.

His voice rang out in the still night air. The second that he said his greeting, the entities froze in place. Their pulsing inner lights completely stilled. They made no further movements, hovering there silently. It was like they were in a movie, and somebody had hit the "pause" button.

Then one of the beings turned a bright red. Its light shone a bright crimson, and it began to hover and float in the man's direction. As it did, the other entities retreated inside their strange craft. The humming sound began to get even louder.

He repeated his greeting again, taking another step forward. As he did, he felt himself bump into something.

He stood there for a second, baffled, as there was nothing visible in front of him. There was a strange force blocking him, like an invisible wall, that had appeared out of nowhere. It was nothing that he could completely pinpoint, and yet something was there, preventing him from advancing further. He put his hands up to feel the invisible barrier, and then he heard a voice. It was inside his head, speaking to him in disconnected fragments.

"*Landed….to make repairs…don't progress…leaving soon…please….you stay…leaving soon…afraid of danger….primitives….*"

He heard the message repeat itself in his head again. He was surprised for a moment, but realized that it had to be some form of telepathy. He put his hands down after hearing the words, and stood there for a moment, turning the message over in his mind.

These beings were afraid? For their technological advantage, and their obvious psychic abilities, they were afraid? They felt that they were in danger? From whom?

Based on what the being had said about "primitives", he felt sure that they were referring to the local natives. Who or what else could it have meant?

If they were afraid of the natives, then the doctor certainly couldn't blame them. All the superstition and conflict so prevalent in this region, it would make anybody afraid. If there wasn't a civil war breaking out, then it was a witchcraft scare, an epidemic, or something else. He could understand the fear on the part of the Visitors. How they must feel on seeing such completely insane behavior.

"Yes, that must be it!", he said out loud to himself. They were afraid because they had suffered the bad fortune of needing to land in the Congo! They were afraid of what might happen to themselves.

Well, he was a logical, rational-thinking man from the West. From good old New York City, no less! Why, if he could communicate with the Visitors, then he could make them understand. They would understand that he wasn't like the rest of the people here. He could speak with them, get them to stay. He could make his historic discovery! He would become world famous, and wealthy beyond his imagination! The dollar signs were flashing in his eyes again.

He raised his hand up again, and moved it forward, feeling for the invisible barrier. He couldn't feel it now, as it seemed to have vanished. He smiled, thinking that the being had sensed his goodwill and trusted him. He stepped forward again, moving toward the floating blob that still hovered only a few feet away.

"Hello friend, my name is…."

It was all he had time to say, before the invisible force came back again. This time, it struck him hard, lifting him up in the air and sending him flying backwards several feet.

He landed in the bushes with a loud thud. The world seemed to have exploded around him. His whole body hurt. He lay there, stunned, his head ringing, his body crumpled in the foliage.

He could feel blood trickling down from his nose as he lay there with his eyes closed, his mind whirling. It was a struggle to get his bearings. He felt like he had been hit by a truck. He tried to prop himself up on one arm, falling down several times, his joints on fire.

He finally managed to get himself sitting up slightly, his head pounding. It felt like a thousand conga drums had all taken residence inside his skull. He opened his eyes slowly, his vision blurred. He could see the floating blob moving back towards the craft's entryway, its inner lights pulsing in their normal rhythm. It seemed to have accomplished its mission, and was re-boarding the ship.

The creature was about to re-enter the ship when Dr. Robinson managed to croak out a single word. A singular question that he directed towards the thing from another world.

"Why?….", he inquired in a hoarse groan.

The being stopped in its path, right outside the door to the ship. Its inner light changed colors again. Not the same bright crimson red as before, but a odd navy-bluish color, with tinges of white mixed in. It hovered there for a moment, and then the images came pouring into Dr. Robinson's head.

He saw horrible things in his mind. Images of warfare, of genocide, and of death. The Second War World, and The Holocaust. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The napalm bombings of Vietnam, and the little Vietnamese children running around with their bodies on fire.

He saw mass shootings in the schools of America. He saw terrorist attacks in New York, and drone bombings in Pakistan.

He saw Neo-Nazis at a rally in Kentucky. He saw policemen gunning down civilians in the streets. He saw the destruction of the environment, and the burning of the Amazon.

He saw civil war and conflict. He saw crime and corruption. He saw extreme poverty and homelessness. He saw all these things, and much, much more.

The images ran through his mind, on an endless loop. It filled him with horror, and he shrieked in agony.

As the entity turned and entered back into the ship, the hatch closing with a click, he saw one final image. One hauntingly clear image. It was an image that filled him with a sickening realization.

He saw an image of the Earth itself, high up in space, as the astronauts must have seen when they first walked on the Moon. He saw the Earth, and then he saw the metallic craft surrounding it, taking care to stay out of sight. They were always there, though. They were always observing, and watching. They made sure that humanity never ventured too far beyond its orbit, and never brought its conflict and chaos further into the galaxy.

He saw the giant metal structure positioned out of sight behind Pluto. He saw that it projected a force field around the solar system, keeping its inhabitants contained. It kept them confined to their own system, with their backwards ways and pointless conflicts. He saw the structure, and his own earlier words came back to fill his mind, and at last, he realized and understood.

He knew, at last, who the real primitives were, and who was really under quarantine, and why.

At last, he understood, and he felt a sickening feeling in his stomach as he did.

With one last high pitched whistle, the spaceship floated back up into the air. Then, within seconds, it had vanished out of sight, to disappear back up among the stars.